

Measuring language usage in hospitality situations

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ABSTRACT: In this study, language usage in hospitality situations is measured. To this end, a corpus of utterances taken from a Colombian Spanish novel is quantitatively analysed. As a starting point of the analysis, it is illustrated that different modes of address (*T* and *V*) are used in hospitality situations, since they affect an interlocutor's positive face. Likewise, different types of verb moods seem to be relevant to hospitality situations, as they influence the negative face of speakers. Furthermore, whether linguistic forms enhance or threaten the interlocutor's positive and negative face is determined by the type of social relationship between the speakers and the communicative situation in which they are used. Moreover, it is assumed that hospitality situations can be defined as interactions between non-relatives that are non-conflictive in nature. Based on this assumption, the quantitative analysis indicates that in hospitality situations *V* is more likely to be used than *T*, whereas in non-hospitality situations *T* is more likely to be used than *V*. In contrast, hospitality situations do not necessarily differ from non-hospitality situations in the use of verb moods. Together, these findings serve to illustrate how the use of language may shape hospitality experiences. They suggest that hospitality may be related to different linguistic systems interacting with the context. Hospitality professionals working in a field that is highly dependent on a smooth host-guest interaction could especially benefit from these findings. Furthermore, from an academic point of view, these findings may function as a starting point to further investigate the relation between the use of language and the experience of hospitality.

KEYWORDS: communicative situation, linguistic forms, modes of address, politeness, social relationship, speech acts, verb moods

Introduction

In many languages, invitations are typically performed in the imperative mood, as in (1):

(1) Please come [IMPERAT] in, Sir (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 101)

Although the force of the imperative mood is softened by "Please" and the respect term "Sir", traditionally, the imperative mood is related to giving orders, and, as such, seems to imply a rather hostile act. In line with this example, an explorative study of hospitality speech patterns in Colombian Spanish indicates that different linguistic forms, varying from very polite to apparently extremely impolite, are involved in performing speech acts (cf. Searle, 1979) that are typically performed in hospitality situations, such as greetings and invitations (Schreurs, 2017). These findings were related to the concept of a speaker's *face* (Brown & Levinson, 1987) — that is, the public self-image all speakers are thought to have, and from which two basic needs follow in communication.

On one hand, it is argued that speakers need to feel appreciated by others. This desire has been coined as *positive face* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The use of polite address terms, such as "Sir" in the invitation in (1), may enhance a speaker's positive face. On the other hand, speakers supposedly want

their actions to be unimpeded by others. This desire has been defined as *negative face* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers may choose one or another verb form to redress the threat to the interlocutor's negative face. Compare, for example, the example in (1) with the invitation in (2):

(2) Why don't you come in?

The invitation performed in (2) is dressed up as a negative question. It does not require an answer (cf. "Because I'm in a hurry"), but is used to propose an activity to the interlocutor (Matte Bon, 1995). In contrast to the invitation in (1), the invitation in (2) has certain linguistic characteristics to give the interlocutor the feeling of freedom of action. Without further ado, the speaker in (2) is just asking a question, and it is up to the interlocutor whether or not to take it as the invitation implied by it.

Most importantly, the social necessity to attend to both positive and negative face is considered to be a universal phenomenon in human communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987). If face is a common notion that can be lost and enhanced, speakers will generally cooperate in order to maintain face. Therefore, they carefully choose the linguistic forms to enhance positive face and to redress the threats to negative face. Whether linguistic forms enhance or threaten the interlocutor's positive and negative face is determined by contextual factors

such as the type of social relationship between the speakers and the communicative situation in which they are used. For example, to call a stranger a "bastard" in order to be hospitable is quite unthinkable, whereas in intimate social relationships the use of a term of abuse (cf. *gordito* "fatso" between conjugal partners) may be taken as a sign of appreciation (Fitch, 1998).

Hence, a critical examination of the role of language seems to be appropriate when studying hospitality. Although it has been argued that verbal social interactions have greatly influenced hospitality experiences (Robinson & Lynch, 2007a), from a linguistic perspective, the study of hospitality has been surprisingly limited to date (Robinson & Lynch, 2007b). There is not much literature on language and hospitality, and what there is often focused on language ability or training (cf. Yuan, Houston, & Cai, 2006; Esfehiani & Walters, 2018; Ghany & Latif, 2012; Luka, 2018; for an overview of existing literature on hospitality in relation to language, see also Schreurs, 2019).

In order to address this gap, and drawing on the results presented in Schreurs (2017), in this study it will be argued that the interaction between the meaning of the linguistic forms and the enhancement of positive and negative face could be particularly relevant to communication in hospitality situations. More specifically, specific modes of address (informal *T* and formal *V*) may be used, since these affect an interlocutor's positive face. Likewise, different verb moods (indicative, subjunctive, and imperative mood) seem to be relevant here, as they clearly affect the negative face of speakers. In order to investigate this, the use of modes of address and verb moods in daily hospitality situations will be quantitatively analysed. In daily life, hospitality concerns the encounter between strangers, neighbours, and friends, that is to say, between "people who are not regular members of a household" (Telfer, 2001, p. 39) in the home sphere.

Method

Schreurs (2017) offers an initial impression of the linguistic forms that are used in hospitality situations in the novel *La marquesa de Yolombó* [The marchioness of Yolombó] (Carrasquilla, [1928] 1974) and of the contextual factors that determine how they are interpreted. Two contextual factors are identified: (1) whether the communicative situation is conflictive or not; and (2) whether the conversation is between relatives or between non-relatives. For instance, *T* commonly expresses solidarity in colloquial speech, yet indicates power in conflictive situations (cf. Brown & Gilman, 1968). Similarly, *V* generally indicates respect, however, between relatives it could also express distance. This leads to the expectation that speakers will strategically choose the linguistic forms to construct speech acts depending on the specific circumstances of the conversation. In agreement with the definition of hospitality provided by Telfer (2001), it is assumed here that hospitality situations are most likely to occur in non-conflictive situations between non-relatives.

Description of corpus

To provide independent evidence on how hospitality is linguistically manifested, a corpus of utterances drawn from dialogues in the novel *La marquesa de Yolombó* "The marchioness of Yolombó" (Carrasquilla, [1928] 1974) was created. The novel describes life in a little village in Colombia at the end of the colonial period. The story revolves around the

protagonist Bárbara Caballero, who breaks from the traditional role of the woman around the home. In a society ruled by men and *machismo*, the exploration of gold mines, an activity typical for the region in which the story takes place, makes her very rich. She becomes famous for her exceptional lifestyle, her money, her aversion to the common practice of slavery and also for the title of marchioness, which was given to her by the king of Spain as a reward for her dedication and loyalty to the Spanish court. Unfortunately, her success leads to her misfortune, as she is betrayed by her brand new husband, who turns out to be a criminal with his eye on her fortune.

This particular novel was chosen because it offers 1 473 utterances that contain a variety of different linguistic forms, such as two modes of address and three types of verb moods, whereas in contemporary English it is most common to only use one mode of address ("you" followed by a second person singular verb conjugation for both the formal and the informal mode of address) and two types of verb moods (the indicative and imperative mood). Each utterance included in the corpus was classified according to mode of address (*T* or *V*) and verb mood (indicative, subjunctive, or imperative). Also, the social relationship between the speakers (relatives or non-relatives) was defined, and the kind of communicative situation (conflictive or non-conflictive) in which the utterance was embedded was determined.

Measures

Communicative situations

Utterances in the novel were coded as belonging to either a conflictive or a non-conflictive situation. Encounters and pleasant conversations, including banter, were coded as non-conflictive situations. Discussions and quarrels were coded as conflictive situations. The extracts below illustrate how a pleasant conversation between neighbours (cf. 3a) turns into a discussion (cf. 3b), and finally results in a quarrel (cf. 3c). Antonina (high-class) is visiting her neighbours Naciencena and Rosendo (middle-class) and their household employee Procesa (lower-class). They are talking about a party organised by Antonina's aunt, the marchioness of Yolombó, to celebrate the swearing in of King Carlos IV:

- (3a) *¡Eh, misiá Antoninita! ¿Vusté por qué no fue al refresco? No voy a reuniones, cuando no está aquí Cancio. Contá a ver qué viste, Procesa, y sentáte en el baúl. ¡María Santa, Ñor Don Rosendo! Nian yo saberé decile. Esu-es la cosa pa más linda que se habrá visto en este sitio...*
 "Hey, Miss Antoninita! Why didn't you go for drinks?"
 "I don't go to meetings when Cancio [her husband] is not at home."
 "Tell us what you've seen, Procesa, and sit down on the trunk."
 "Holy Mary, Don Rosendo! Words couldn't describe it. It was the most beautiful thing that was ever seen in this place..." (Carrasquilla, [1928] 1974, p. 377; own translation)

The pleasant conversation in (3a) turns into a discussion when Naciencena starts gossiping about Antonina's aunt. In (3b), Antonina demands her neighbour speak up:

(3b) — *¿Qué es lo que dice, Naciencena? — estalla Doña Antonina —. Hágame el favor de repetir, porque no le entiendo.*

— *¡Eh, Antoninita! ¡Se viene a hacer de las nuevas, usted, que no les tapa nada!...*

— *Pues, si no me explica, no sé lo que quiere decir.*

"What are you saying, Naciencena?" Mrs. Antonina bursts out. "Please, do me the favour of repeating it, because I don't understand you."

"Hey, Antoninita! You're of the new kind, you don't cover up anything from them!..."

"Well, if you don't explain it to me, I don't know what you mean." (Carrasquilla, [1928] 1974, p. 379; own translation)

Apparently, the explanation then provided by Naciencena does not please Antonina, which is reflected in the extract in (3c) in which Antonina insults and attacks her:

(3c) — *¡La materia corrompida la tendréis vos y toda tu ralea, zamba atrevida y lengüilarga— barbota frenética, y, lanzándose como un tigre, la levanta de la greña, le ajusta una tanda de sopapos y la despatarra en la tarima—. ¡Es pa que aprendás a respetar las señoras, mugrosa tolerada!* "You and all your kind of people are the corrupted dirty ones, insolent gossip half-breed," she furiously grumbles, and leaping like a tiger, she lifts her up by her tangled hair, she punches her several times and throws her on the floor. "This will make you learn to respect true ladies, you filthy animal!" (Carrasquilla, [1928] 1974, p. 379; own translation)

Based on this categorisation, 7% of the utterances belonged to conflictive situations ($n = 98$) and 93% to non-conflictive situations ($n = 1375$).

Social relationships

Utterances were categorised either as uttered between relatives or as uttered between non-relatives. The social relationships between family members, namely conjugal partners, (grand) parents and (grand)children, parents-in-law and children-in-law, siblings, siblings-in-law, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, and cousins were coded as belonging to the category of relatives. All other social relationships, namely between inhabitants, inhabitants and the mayor of Yolombó, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, strangers, employers and employees, bosses and servants, godparents and godchildren were coded as belonging to the category of non-relatives. Based on this categorisation, 41% ($n = 607$) of the utterances were uttered between relatives, and 59% ($n = 866$) between non-relatives.

Modes of address

The mode of address of all utterances was categorised as either *T* or *V*. Second person singular verb conjugations were coded as representing the informal mode of address (*T*). In total, there were 673 counts (46%) of *T* in the corpus. Similarly, third person singular verb conjugations denoting a second person singular subject were coded as representing the formal mode of address (*V*). There were 800 counts (54%) of *V* in the corpus. It appeared that the distribution of modes of address in the corpus was quite equally divided between *T* and *V*, which implied that mode of address needed a more detailed analysis.

Verb moods

Finally, the verb mood of all utterances was determined. Three different verb moods were distinguished: indicative, subjunctive, and imperative. In total, there were 768 counts (52%) of indicative mood and 134 counts (9%) of subjunctive mood verb conjugations. In addition, there were 571 counts (39%) of verb conjugations in imperative mood. Not surprisingly, it appeared that the subjunctive mood, representing only 9% of the cases, was less frequently used in the corpus, since it is a marked form of the verb. Yet, also in the case of verb mood, the total number of cases was enough to proceed to the quantitative analysis. Table 1 displays the frequencies of all study variables.

Results

To explore how the use of modes of address and verb moods differed across the levels of the two identified contextual factors (communicative situation and social relationship), a series of logistic regression analyses was performed. Tables 2 and 3 show the results.

Modes of address

It was explored how and to what extent the type of communicative situation (conflictive or non-conflictive) and the social relationship between speakers (relatives or non-relatives) separately and jointly determine the use of mode of address (*T* or *V*). In addition, it was more specifically tested whether hospitality situations (defined as non-conflictive interactions between non-relatives) differ from non-hospitality situations (all other situations) in the use of mode of address. To do so, a binary logistic regression analysis was performed. This type of regression analysis is particularly suited when the dependent variable is categorical and dichotomous (Field, 2009), which is the case in this model (mode of address has two categories: *T* and *V*).

To this end, the separate effects ("main effects") of the two independent variables (communicative situation and social relationship) were estimated as well as their combined effect ("interaction effect") on mode of address (Table 2).

To ease interpretation, the main elements (Table 2) will be explained, starting with *B* and $\text{Exp}(B)$. Because the dependent variable in a logistic regression analysis is categorical, and the analysis therefore models logarithmic instead of linear effects, the exponent of the regression weight *B* ($\text{Exp}(B)$, also known as the odds ratio) indicates the strength of each effect. In our analysis, $\text{Exp}(B)$ is the likelihood that *V* is used instead of *T* (given that *V* is coded as 1 and *T* as 0) across different levels of communicative situation and social relationship. To illustrate, if

TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics of the study variables

Study variable	Category	<i>n</i> (% of total)
Communicative situation	Conflictive	98 (7%)
	Non-conflictive	1375 (93%)
Social relationship	Relative	607 (41%)
	Non-relative	866 (59%)
Mode of address	<i>T</i>	673 (46%)
	<i>V</i>	800 (54%)
Verb mood	Indicative	768 (52%)
	Subjunctive	134 (9%)
	Imperative	571 (39%)

TABLE 2: Logistic regression of mode of address on communicative situation and social relationship

Parameter	B (SE)	Wald χ^2 (1)	p	Exp(B)
Constant	-0.47 (0.26)	3.40	0.07	0.63
Communicative situation (0 = conflictive; 1 = non-conflictive)	0.01 (0.27)	0.00	0.97	1.01
Social relationship (0 = relatives; 1 = non-relatives)	0.29 (0.43)	0.44	0.51	1.33
Communicative situation \times social relationship	0.84 (0.45)	3.48	0.06	2.30
Overall model statistics				
-2Log likelihood	1 923.44			
Nagelkerke R^2	0.09			

Mode of address is coded such that 0 = T and 1 = V

TABLE 3: Multinomial logistic regression analysis of verb mood on communicative situation and social relationship

Parameter	Imperative			Subjunctive		
	B (SE)	Wald χ^2 (1)	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald χ^2 (1)	Exp(B)
Constant	0.34 (0.26)	1.65ns		-1.61 (0.49)	10.79**	
Communicative situation (0 = conflictive; 1 = non-conflictive)	-0.73 (0.28)	6.86**	0.48	-0.18 (0.51)	0.13ns	0.83
Social relationship (0 = relatives; 1 = non-relatives)	-0.53 (0.45)	1.42ns	0.59	-0.53 (0.89)	0.35ns	0.59
Communicative situation \times Social relationship	0.63 (0.46)	1.87ns	1.89	0.61 (0.92)	0.45ns	1.84
Overall model statistics						
-2Log likelihood	39.78					
Nagelkerke R^2	0.01					

Exp(B) of the main effect of communicative situation equals 1, this means that conflictive and non-conflictive situations do not differ in their likelihood that T and V are used. If Exp(B) for this effect is higher than 1, the probability that V is used instead of T is higher in non-conflictive situations than in conflictive situations (given that non-conflictive situations are coded as 1 and conflictive situations as 0). If Exp(B) is lower than 1, the probability that V is used instead of T is lower in non-conflictive situations than in conflictive situations (again, given that non-conflictive situations are coded as 1 and conflictive situations as 0). Finally, the Wald statistic indicates the significance of all estimated effects.

It appeared that there was no main effect of communicative situation on mode of address, Wald χ^2 (1) = 0.00, p = 0.97, indicating that T and V were as likely to be used in conflictive as in non-conflictive situations. Similarly, there was no main effect of social relationship on mode of address, Wald χ^2 (1) = 0.44, p = 0.51, indicating that T and V were as likely to be used among relatives as among non-relatives. However, these effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction effect (Figure 1) of communicative situation and social relationship on mode of address, Wald χ^2 (1) = 3.48, p = 0.06.

The left vertical axis depicts the probability of V occurring, whereas the right vertical axis depicts the probability of T occurring. Fitting with the fact that speakers either use T or V, these probabilities are inversely related to each other, such that the higher the probability of V, the lower the probability of T, and vice versa. It appears that among relatives, regardless of whether the situation was conflictive or not, T was more likely to be used (61% of the utterances) than V (39% of the utterances). Among non-relatives, however, T was more likely to be used in conflictive situations (54% of the utterances) than V (46% of the utterances), while V was more often used in non-conflictive situations (66% of the utterances) than T (34% of the utterances).

From this analysis, it is concluded that in hospitality situations (if defined as interactions between non-relatives that are non-conflictive in nature) V is more likely to be used than T,

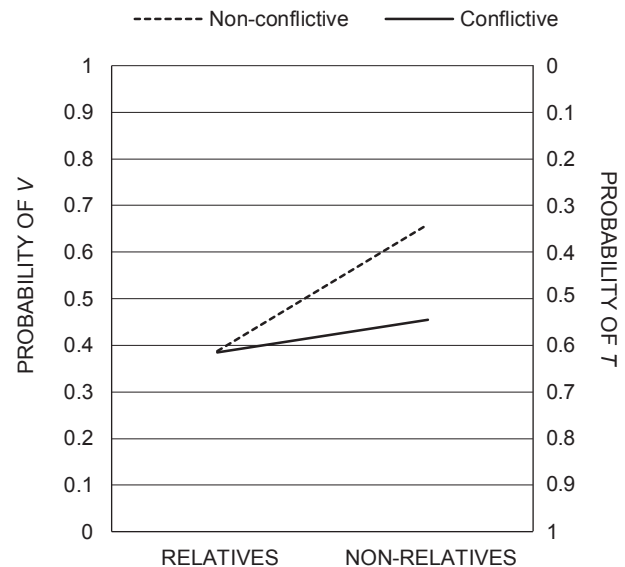


FIGURE 1: Mode of address as a function of social relationship and communicative situation

whereas in non-hospitality situations (all other combinations of communicative situation and social relationship) T is more likely to be used than V. Thus, in hospitality situations, speakers tend to use a polite instead of an informal mode of address, such as *usted* "you" versus *tú* "you" in Spanish, or *u* "you" versus *jij* "you" in Dutch.

Verb moods

It was furthermore investigated how and to what extent the type of communicative situation (conflictive or non-conflictive) and the social relationship between speakers (relatives or non-relatives) determine the use of verb moods (indicative, imperative, and

subjunctive). In addition, it was specifically tested whether hospitality situations (defined as non-conflictive interactions between non-relatives) differ from non-hospitality situations (all other situations) in the use of verb moods. Therefore, a multi-nominal logistic regression analysis was performed (Table 3). This type of regression analysis is particularly suited when the dependent variable has more than two categories (Field, 2009), which is the case in this model (verb mood has three categories: indicative, subjunctive, and imperative). Because the most commonly used verb mood is the indicative, this was chosen as reference category. This means that the use of subjunctives and imperatives relative to indicatives was compared.

The only significant result that was found concerned the main effect of the communicative situation on the use of imperative mood conjugations relative to indicative mood conjugations, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 6.86, p < 0.01$. This indicates that when leaving out subjunctive mood conjugations, in conflictive situations the imperative mood (54%) is used more often than the indicative mood (46%). The reverse is true for non-conflictive situations in which the indicative mood (58%) is used more often than the imperative mood (42%). As reflected in the absence of a significant interaction effect between communicative situation and social relationship, this effect is similar for relatives and non-relatives. Figure 2 visualises this pattern of results. The left vertical axis depicts the probability of the imperative mood occurring, whereas the right vertical axis depicts the probability of the indicative mood occurring. Note that when leaving the subjunctive mood out of consideration, these probabilities are inversely related to each other, such that the higher the probability of the imperative mood, the lower the probability of the indicative mood, and vice versa.

From this analysis, it is concluded that hospitality situations (defined as interactions between non-relatives that are non-conflictive in nature) do not necessarily differ from non-hospitality situations in the use of verb moods. Thus, in hospitality situations, speakers do not tend to use a specific verb mood over another, such as an invitation in imperative mood

(cf. example [1]) as opposed to an invitation dressed up as a negative question with the indicative mood (cf. example [2]).

Discussion

This study aimed to measure language usage in hospitality situations. To this end, it was first assumed that situations in which hospitality strategies are more likely to be applied can be defined as interactions between non-relatives that are non-conflictive in nature. Then, a series of quantitative analyses was performed. These analyses showed that the formal form of address *V* is more likely to be used than the informal form *T* in hospitality situations. In contrast, no evidence was found that hospitality situations differ from non-hospitality situations in the use of verb moods.

On one hand, the results have to be interpreted with caution, since there may be other factors that influence the outcome, such as the differentiation between types of social relationships other than between relatives and non-relatives. Moreover, the findings cannot be generalised to the Spanish-speaking community in real life, since the findings are based on an early twentieth-century Colombian Spanish novel.

On the other hand, these findings are in line with a recent study on the tasks in the domain of a hotel receptionist's job in an English-speaking environment (Malicka, Gilabert Guerrero, & Norris, 2019). Specific focus is on the relationship between the kind of tasks done in this domain, and the language usage that is associated with these tasks. According to the informants that took part in this study, specifically in hospitality (business) situations successful communication depends on politeness. Malicka et al. (2019) report on a reception desk employee telling a new colleague how to politely ask for the guest's credit card, see the request in (4):

(4) Could I have your credit card, please? (Malicka et al., 2019, p. 89)

Thus, the reception desk employee in (4) uses an interrogative sentence structure, followed by "please". Knowing how to be friendly and polite may very well be seen as part of the hospitality strategy. It is considered to be more important than having a proper knowledge of context-related vocabulary of a foreign language, which is very well expressed by a non-native English speaking employee:

Knowing technical vocabulary [e.g. technical vocabulary related to the malfunctioning of a device (Malicka et al., 2019)] is not the most important thing...if you don't know a word, there is another word that says more or less the same...maybe you can be polite without being a very good speaker of English (Malicka et al., 2019, p. 89).

In this light, it is not surprising that the quantitative analyses have shown that *V* forms (the polite form of the verb) are more likely to be used in hospitality situations than *T* forms (the informal form of the verb).

While this may be true, in the same study by Malicka et al. (2019) it was also observed that not all interactions between reception desk employees and guests could be characterised as being polite. Especially with regard to the check-in procedure, in which the reception desk employee needs to ask the guest several questions, imperative utterances as in (5), or utterances openly expressing the receptionist's need as in (6) were not uncommon:

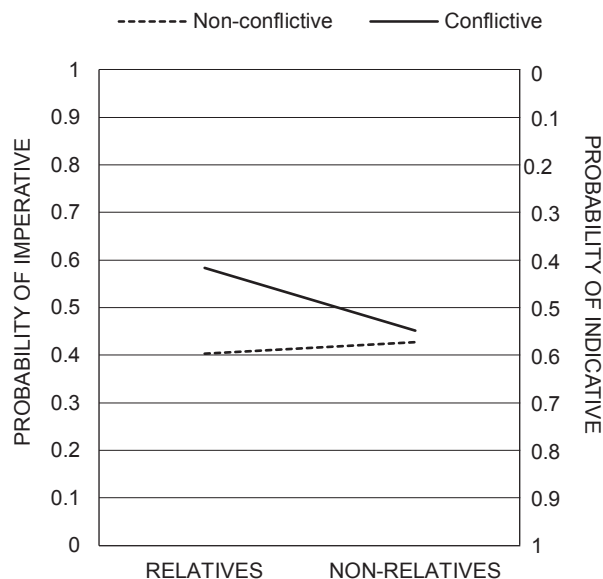


FIGURE 2: Verb mood as a function of social relationship and communicative situation (imperative versus indicative)

(5) Come here (Malicka et al., 2019, p. 89)

(6) I need your passport (Malicka et al., 2019, p. 89)

The examples in (5) and (6) reveal that, although the reception desk employees mentioned being polite as one of the most important aspect in the interaction with guests, in practice, these interactions were sometimes quite direct, showing deficiencies in politeness (cf. Malicka et al., 2019). Clearly, it could be argued that the lack of politeness expressed in (5) and (6) may be due to a lack of either English speaking skills or of experience with the check-in procedure. Yet, other speech acts that are typically related to hospitality situations, such as invitations, are commonly performed using direct sentence structures, such as imperative mood conjugations (compare example [1]). Indeed, no evidence was found in the quantitative analyses that hospitality situations differ from non-hospitality situations in the use of verb moods.

Together, these findings serve to illustrate how the use of language may shape hospitality experiences. They suggest that hospitality may be related to different linguistic systems interacting with the context. Supporting the results of the qualitative study presented in Schreurs (2017), it is concluded that hospitality and language seem to be inextricably entwined, yet so far it remains difficult to (intuitively) relate a specific verb mood to hospitality situations, such as has been the case with modes of address (viz. V forms). Therefore, future research could be conducted to give a theoretical explanation of the empirical patterns presented in this article. Specifically, the issue of how it is possible that invitations — expressions of hospitality — have an imperative force as part of their meaning, but do not function as idiomatic orders — in contrast to invitations rather hostile acts — needs to be further examined to gain a better understanding of language usage in hospitality situations.

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