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Greeting and leave-taking in Texas: perception of politeness norms by
Mexican-Americans across sociolinguistic divides

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Greeting and leave-taking in Texas: perception of politeness norms by Mexican-Americans across sociolinguistic divides

by

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Abstract

Greeting and leave-taking in Texas: perception of politeness norms by Mexican-Americans across sociolinguistic divides

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The present study sheds light on how 16 Mexican-Americans residing in Texas perceive and follow politeness norms (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fraser, 1990; Terkourafi, 2005) related to greetings and leave-takings in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Data from online questionnaires identify a significant difference in perceived level of social expectation (i.e. politeness) for employing the speech acts with Spanish- versus non-Spanish speakers. The data support previous research in identifying a sense of solidarity among Mexican-American extended families, but go further in suggesting that this bond extends to other Spanish-speaking acquaintances. Better understanding of these norms should facilitate inter-cultural exchanges between linguistic in- and out-group members.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past half century, researchers have identified multiple functions of greetings and leave-takings (Austin, 1962; Goffman, 1971; Searle, 1971) and documented considerable cross-cultural variation in their usage (e.g. Blum-Kulka, 1987; Hickey, 1991; Sifanou, 1992; Thomas, 1994). Little has been done, however, to illuminate how bilingual and bicultural individuals in regions of cultural and linguistic contact employ these particular speech acts. Do such speakers perceive a difference in the acts across languages and socio-cultural boundaries? If so, do they vary when and how they employ the acts? As Goffman (1971) points out, greetings and leave-takings serve partly to maintain social relationships. Failure to deliver an expected greeting or leave-taking could, thus, have dire impact on the development and maintenance of relationships both within and across sociolinguistic groups. Imagine, for example, that you do not receive an expected greeting at a party with friends: Do you perceive it as insignificant, or as suggesting that your friend or the group in some way disapprove of you? Does it depend on the cultural context or on what language is being spoken? Further, does the absence of an expected greeting impact how you proceed, both in the moment and in the relationship? In addition to its role in relationship maintenance, greeting and parting behavior is conventionalized (Firth, 1972), and as such, is associated with politeness (Laver, 1981). Unexpected or 'inappropriate' usage can be perceived as impolite and result in negative sentiments between interlocutors, regardless of whether or not they were previously acquainted. This includes interactions with strangers on the street, and therefore, has potential to impact society at large. Given the consequences of

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'inappropriate' usage, it is crucial to investigate greeting and leave-taking dynamics in bilingual, bicultural communities. In doing so, we gain critical insight into the social values operating therein. We are able to hypothesize regarding the roles of language and culture in guiding inter-cultural interactions and relationships at a basic, everyday, yet highly consequential, level.

This study addresses the current knowledge gap by assessing the perception of Spanish-English bilingual and bicultural individuals regarding appropriate usage of greetings and leave-takings across sociolinguistic boundaries. Specifically, it evaluates the social expectations that bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas link to use of greetings and leave-takings in three different social settings. Likert-scale ratings indicate that participants assign greater social expectation for using both acts in Spanish-speaking over non-Spanish-speaking environments; in short, they seem to consider the *absence* of the acts somewhat rude with Spanish-speakers but somewhat socially acceptable with non-Spanish-speakers. The data point to a significant difference along linguistic and cultural lines and indicate that subjects' perception of and conformance to these distinct greeting and leave-taking norms persist across multiple generations and are consistent across language dominance groups.

BACKGROUND

The analysis herein considers the potentially multiple and simultaneous functions of greetings and leave-takings, as captured by Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory. Austin claimed that all utterances convey meaning and perform specific acts (Huang 2007), which can be classified as locutionary, illocutionary or perlocutionary. Within the framework, a locutionary act involves the production of a well-formed meaningful utterance that entails a conventional meaning; an illocutionary act refers to the *intended* meaning behind the speaker's utterance; and the perlocutionary act captures the effect the utterance may have on the addressee (whether intentional or not). Through this categorization Austin established the relevance of conventional versus intended meaning and drew attention to the influences and effects speech acts can exert on interlocutors. Speech Act Theory demonstrates the potential disconnect between surface (literal) and underlying (intended) meaning, as demonstrated in the following greetings:

(1) a. How are you?
     b. What's up?
     c. Good morning.

The examples in (1) do not necessarily convey the literal meanings encapsulated by the utterances. The speaker in (1a) may or may not care to know how the hearer is doing; the speaker in (1b) likely does not intend to ask if there is something overhead; and the speaker in (1c) may have no concern whether the hearer enjoys the morning. While the interpretation is dependent on the context, each of these utterances could serve as the equivalent of a simple "hello." But what significance does that "hello" carry for

both speaker and interlocutor, especially in a bilingual, bicultural speech community? In other words, what are the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, or the speaker's intended meaning and its effect on the addressee?

GREETINGS AND LEAVE-TAKINGS AND POLITENESS

According to Searle's (1971) typology of speech acts, greetings and leave-takings fall under the category of expressives. As such, they show the psychological state of the speaker (Huang, 2007), are "used to express certain feelings toward the hearer", and "should not be taken literally" (Li, 2010, p. 57). Goffman (1971) suggests that greetings and leave-takings serve both to signal accessibility between interlocutors and to maintain their relationship across interactions. This account presupposes that interlocutors are already acquainted with one another and therefore fails to describe interactions between strangers. Because greeting and parting behavior is conventionalized and follows certain routines (Firth, 1972), it motivates analysis under the umbrella of politeness (Laver, 1981). Ide (2009) remarks on the importance of being able to carry out these routines within a given speech community, contending that greeting rituals convey "norms and expectations of how language is used" (p. 18) and also reflect the localized values of the community. This social-norm view of politeness (see Fraser, 1990), or 'discernment politeness' as proposed for some non-Western cultures (Dimitrova-Galaczi, 2005), predicts that the absence of an expected greeting or farewell would be perceived as socially inappropriate (herein equated to impolite), and that the same would hold true if either speech act fell short of a qualitative standard. This would apply to interactions between strangers within the speech community as well. The notion of politeness as

social appropriateness is a "global way of approaching politeness" (Dimitrova-Galaczi, 2005, p. 3), often referred to as 'politeness 1' or 'first-order politeness' in the literature. It is useful here in uncovering differences in politeness norms *as perceived by speakers*, as it represents a commonsense conceptualization of the term (Dimitrova-Galaczi, 2005). Schneider (2012) demonstrates the widespread use of the term 'appropriate' and its derivatives with respect to politeness. He emphasizes the value in investigating speaker perception of what is or is not socially appropriate using experimental methods such as the questionnaire utilized in this study.

Such an approach allows for insight into norms governing why and, of particular interest here*, when* speakers use greetings and leave-takings within a given speech community. What more, it can illuminate variation in these norms in bilingual, bicultural speech communities whose boundaries are neither fixed nor well-defined and where interactions across sociolinguistic divides are frequent. This notion of a dynamic, over-arching speech community, in which a speaker may need to shift fluidly between languages, dialects, styles, and perceived politeness norms in daily life, is particularly relevant along the U.S.-Mexico border, where studies of acculturation can effectively inform linguistic investigation. I adopt Hazuda et al's (1998) definition of acculturation as "a multidimensional process, resulting from intergroup contact, in which individuals whose primary learning has been in one culture (e.g., the Mexican or Mexican American culture) take over characteristic ways of living (attitudes, values, and behavior) from another culture (e.g., mainstream, non-Hispanic white culture)" (p. 690). The present study targets a contiguous section of the border region with high linguistic and cultural

contact spanning multiple generations—Texas—while asking: Do speakers perceive different norms across sociolinguistic boundaries that govern *when* a greeting or leave-taking is socially expected? If so, the study presumes that speakers either choose to follow these norms or perceive a risk of offending their interlocutors. Speaker judgments regarding socially appropriate usage of the speech acts shed light on these considerations, while the construct of face (Brown & Levinson, 1987) offers insight into *how* politeness norms are encoded in individual greeting and leave-taking tokens across the distinct sociolinguistic settings. According to Huang (2007), the face-saving view of politeness (e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1987) is the most influential and comprehensive model. It is frequently utilized in the literature as a base for examining and comparing greetings and leave-takings (e.g. García, 2006; Li, 2009, 2010). It falls under the category of 'politeness 2' or 'second-order politeness', and represents a more "theoretical and pragmatic concept" (Dimitrova-Galaczi, 2005, p. 5). Brown and Levinson (1987) follow Goffman (1967) in identifying face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). It is often likened to self-esteem or self-image, and can be lost, maintained, or enhanced. Within the construct lie both 'positive' and 'negative' face. Positive face represents an individual's desire to be approved by others, while negative face represents an individual's right to freedom of action. Brown and Levinson submit that positive politeness is an attempt to express solidarity with others in order to preserve their positive face. To do so, a speaker searches for common ground with the hearer and aims to address the hearer's wants. Similarly, Brown and Levinson note that negative politeness embodies an attempt to maintain the negative face of others, whereby a

speaker strives to show deference for the hearer, employing strategies such as indirectness, hedges, and apologies.

Goffman (1967) recognizes that greetings and leave-takings (in part) serve to mitigate the temporally-limited display of *solidarity* between interlocutors. His observation demonstrates the applicability of the face-saving model to the speech acts by affirming the importance of positive politeness or face (i.e. expression of solidarity) between speakers. This applies both to greetings, as in (2a), and farewells, as in (2b):

(2)   a.   Hey, it's great to see you! I've missed you.
        b.   I hate to leave you, but I really need to get to work.

The greeting in (2a) displays positive politeness by expressing the speaker's desire to interact with the interlocutor; it includes a positive comment and reassurance that the speaker enjoys the interlocutor's company. Similarly, the farewell in (2b) articulates the speaker's reluctance to end the show of solidarity and utilizes an excuse to further mitigate the potential face-threat; had this speaker chosen to leave without saying goodbye, the interlocutor might have taken it as a threat to positive face. García (2006) expands the face-saving model's reach to include negative politeness by way of a poignant question: "Do people prefer to have their positive face acknowledged (flowery greetings, effusive thanks, for example) or is it more polite to respect negative face in the community (not calling attention to someone, leaving them alone, for example)?" (p. 129). This question also brings a dilemma to light: the *presence* of a greeting could presumably be considered a threat to negative face, while the *absence* of the greeting could be perceived as a threat to positive face. The present study utilizes speaker

judgments and metalinguistic commentary to address this dilemma. García (2006) makes

another important observation that has direct bearing on the present study:

> A friendly greeting to a complete stranger might be viewed positively or negatively, depending upon the local norms of the town. And the notion of speech community must be understood as well. In some cases certain norms may hold for the block or the neighborhood, and different norms may obtain outside of it. (p. 129)

Garcia's comments convey a social-norm (or discernment) view of politeness, but

beg for deeper insight into the generalizability of politeness both across and *within*

cultures. The post-modern view of politeness attempts to address this concern by

focusing on contextualized exchanges between speaker pairs (see Terkourafi, 2005). An

inherent limitation of the post-modern view, however, is that it prohibits generalizations,

even within a culture. To overcome this constraint, Terkourafi (2005) offers a modified

frame-based view that allows for generalizations based on a bottom-up analysis of large

corpora of conversational data. Koike (2012) shows the utility of a frame-based approach

in analyzing pragmatic co-constructions. The present study borrows from this frame-

based view in acknowledging the central role of interlocutors in co-constructing

politeness during the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings. It departs from

Terkourafi (2005), however, in that it does not analyze a large corpus of data, and instead

makes some proposals drawn from subject questionnaire responses.

CULTURAL VARIATION

This study remains sensitive to cultural variation, as research has shown that the

values associated with the different kinds of face vary across cultures, as do strategies for

preserving face. For example, researchers (e.g. Hickey, 1991; Sifanou, 1992) have

observed that the British English culture is more negative-face oriented, while the Greek and Spanish cultures are more positive-face oriented. In other societies, like Igbo, members are more concerned with the collective self-image of the group than that of individual (Nwoye, 1989, 1992). The Igbo example complicates evaluation of face as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), in that the latter model does not account for collective face. Li (2009) raises the same concern in relation to Chinese society, which, he states, places an emphasis on mutual care (i.e. concern for others' welfare) alongside positive face, but not on negative face. Matsumoto (1998) highlights a similar lack of importance tied to negative face in Japanese society. In terms of greeting and leave-taking norms, such a conceptualization of face may influence whether the speech acts are expected to be delivered to each individual in a group setting. For example, Thomas (1994) observes that the Maori and other Polynesian groups place high social value on newcomers being *individually* greeted at events. Whether the gathering is formal or informal, the norm calls for a newcomer to be personally welcomed into the group. The host may directly greet each guest at formal events, or a newcomer may be introduced to each person at informal events. If individuals who subscribe to these norms do not receive the expected greeting, they may perceive it as a sign of exclusion (i.e. a threat to positive face). This is perhaps another example of a 'collective' spirit overriding negative face-related concerns, similar to the Igbo, Chinese, and Japanese examples above. The sense of unity embodied by Mexican-American families motivates investigation of the role of 'collective' spirit within Mexican-American culture as well. Keefe, Padilla & Carlos (1979) characterize Mexican-American families "as a large and cohesive kin

group embracing both lineal and collateral relatives (Clark 1959; Madsen 1964a; Rubel 1966)," noting that "[t]ies beyond the nuclear family are strong and extensive" (p.144). Such description prompts investigation into the importance of demonstrating solidarity with extended family members via speech acts such as greetings and leave-takings.

Just as the conceptualizations of politeness and face vary across cultures, so do the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings themselves. While greetings such as 'Hello', 'How are you?', or 'Good morning' are commonplace in the United States, Li (2010) points out that more typical greetings in China include 'Have you eaten?', 'Where are you going?' or 'What are you busy with?'. Li further draws attention to the crucial role of the specific social context, noting that most Chinese would find it marked (i.e. abnormally formal) to use the greeting 'Good morning' among family members. Li's attention to family versus non-family context is particularly relevant for the present study, which compares participant greetings and leave-takings with family members and non-family members.

In carrying out the present investigation, it is crucial to recognize the potential for variability in language usage norms within any large and heterogeneous group of speakers (García, 2006), in this case bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas. For example, Placencia (2008) demonstrates that the use of both greetings and leave-takings as norms of opening and closing conversation varies across speakers in Ecuador. Analyzing two geographically distinct groups of Ecuadorians, she observed a substantial difference in rate of occurrence of each speech act across groups. One group of residents of Quito included a greeting in 92.6% of the observed exchanges, while the other group

of respondents of Manta supplied a greeting in only 17.5% of the observed instances. Similarly, the same groups stated a farewell in 82.3% and 8.7% of the exchanges respectively. The present study assesses the perceptions of residents from different parts of Texas while considering whether any geographic trends present. Also of note in Placencia's study, the observations come exclusively from corner store interactions between customer-vendor interlocutor pairings. As the setting itself may be a factor governing use of these speech acts, Placencia's study can draw no firm conclusions regarding norms between residents of Quito or Manta in other contexts (e.g. informal, familiar, in- vs. out-group). Likewise, the present study constrains its scope to informal settings, while acknowledging limited generalizability to other domains.

The present study analyzes the perception of bilingual Mexican-American residents of Texas regarding greeting and leave-taking usage in three informal settings. Centrally, it assesses the sense of social expectation or obligation (as expressed in perceived politeness) that is associated with the use of greetings and leave-takings with extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, and non-Spanish-speaking friends. Due to the "closeness and importance of the family" in Hispanic communities, as observed by García (1981), this study investigates whether overt greetings and leave-takings hold high value and are expected by in-group members in social situations, and whether lack of such speech acts in these contexts is perceived in a negative light and considered socially inappropriate or rude. Given that research (e.g. Hazuda, Stern & Haffner, 1988) has shown that Mexican-Americans maintain certain cultural norms despite acculturation to English, this study also compares perception of greeting and leave-taking norms across

Spanish- and English-dominant language groups. Additionally, the study investigates whether norms associated with family members extend to informal settings with Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking friends. In this sense, it aims to target participants' sense of 'in-group' identity with respect to politeness norms encoded in greeting and leave-taking usage. This line of inquiry generates the following research questions:

1)   Do bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas consider the use of greetings and leave-takings a social obligation in informal settings? That is, do they expect the speech acts to be delivered directly to each individual?

2)   Is there a difference according to language dominance (English vs. Spanish) of bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas in the level of social obligation they associate with use of greetings and leave-takings in informal settings?

3)   Does the level of social obligation bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas associate with greetings and leave-takings vary across informal settings with the social groups of extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, and non-Spanish-speaking friends?

Based on literature identifying strong familial ties and the importance of solidarity among Mexican-Americans (e.g., García, 1981; Keefe, Padilla & Carlos, 1979), and research demonstrating a sense of 'collective' face or spirit in multiple speech communities (e.g., Li, 2009; Matsumoto, 1998; Nwoye, 1989, 1992), which may be encoded in greeting and leave-taking norms (Thomas, 1994), I propose the following research hypotheses:

1)   Bilingual Mexican-Americans residing in Texas consider the use of greetings and leave-takings a social obligation in informal settings. Greetings and leave-takings are expected to be delivered directly to each individual.

2)   The level of social obligation bilingual Mexican-Americans attribute to greetings and leave-takings is consistent regardless of the speakers' language dominance.

3)   The level of social obligation attributed to greetings and leave-takings varies according to social context, as follows, from highest to lowest: extended family, Spanish-speaking friends, non-Spanish-speaking friends.

PRESENT STUDY

METHODOLOGY

In order to seek answers to these research questions, a small study on the perceptions of 16 Mexican-American residing in Texas was carried out as described below.

Participants

The participants in the study were 16 bilingual Mexican-American residents of Texas—10 females and 6 males. They were first- or second-hand acquaintances of the researcher ranging in age from 27 to 68 years old, with a median age of 37 (mean: 39, standard deviation: 9). Participants were divided into two groups to address research question 2 regarding the role of language dominance: Group 1 comprised 8 individuals who claimed to speak mostly or only Spanish with their parents, while Group 2 consisted of 8 individuals who claimed to speak mostly or only English with their parents. In effect, this division served to identify any correlation between English-Spanish language usage and the targeted politeness perceptions. Originally, groups were to be drawn along generational lines, but the sample did not yield a sufficiently even distribution to allow for meaningful analysis (See Table 1). Nonetheless, no generation-wise patterns presented in the current data set. Note that here *first generation* serves to identify subjects who were born in Mexico and later migrated to the U.S. A larger sample may warrant modification according to age of participant arrival in this country.

Table 1. Participant breakdown by generation

Generation	Number of Participants
First	2
Second	3
Third	5
Fourth +	6

Questionnaire

In order to assess the targeted participant perceptions presented in the research questions, subjects received an online questionnaire that required completion of select demographic information as well as responses to 25 research-related items. The questionnaire was composed in English and Spanish to ensure adequate understanding across the language proficiency range of the sample group. The demographic information was used to categorize participants into the two aforementioned language groups (the between-subjects independent variable). The research-related items sought judgments from participants regarding greeting and leave-taking usage in three social settings: (1) a cookout with extended family, (2) a party with 20 Spanish-speaking friends, and (3) a party with 20 non-Spanish-speaking friends. Eighteen of these items required participants to respond on a five-point Likert scale, six of the items solicited tokens of greetings and leave-takings, and one item asked participants to explain any similarities or differences in their responses across the social settings. The 18 Likert-scale items represented the same six statements applied to each of the social settings. The first statement was: "You are socially expected to greet each person individually." Participants were asked to rate this statement as they perceived it to apply in each social setting, on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, as follows: 1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat

agree, 5 = completely agree. In addition, participants were asked to explain any difference in their ratings across the three social settings. Participants classified the remaining five statements as being either: completely rude, somewhat rude, neutral, somewhat acceptable, or completely acceptable. These statements, which expressed different greeting and leave-taking options, appear in Table 3 in the Results and Discussion Section. For the purpose of quantitative analysis of these items, *neutral* was designated as the baseline and given a value of zero. Statements classified as acceptable were given positive values (*somewhat acceptable = 1, completely acceptable = 2*), while statements classified as rude were assigned negative values (*somewhat rude = -1, completely rude = -2*). Based on this valuation, the more socially acceptable an item, the higher its value, with an upper limit of 2; the less socially acceptable an item, the lower its value, with a lower limit of -2. Collectively, these Likert-scale ratings provided a quantitative means for addressing the research questions.

The final six items, which required participants to supply token greetings and leave-takings, comprised the same two questions applied across the three social settings: "How might you greet/say goodbye to an individual [in this setting]?" The resulting tokens, paired with participant metalinguistic commentary, permitted qualitative analysis of greeting and leave-taking usage across the settings.

Part 1. Presence versus Absence of Greetings and Leave-takings in Three Social Settings

Subjects were asked to respond to each of the statements in Table 2 on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = completely agree). The mean ratings appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived expectation of greeting in three social settings

Scenario	Statement	Mean Ratings		
		Group 1 (Span)	Group 2 (Eng)	Combined
1	At a cookout with your extended family, you are socially expected to greet each person INDIVIDUALLY.	4.00	4.63	4.13
2	At a party with 20 Spanish-speaking friends, you are socially expected to greet each person INDIVIDUALLY.	3.63	3.50	3.56
3	At a party with 20 NON-Spanish speaking friends, you are socially expected to greet each person INDIVIDUALLY.	2.38	2.88	2.63

As can be seen in Table 2, both language groups reported perceiving the highest social obligation in settings with extended family members, followed by Spanish-speaking friends, and finally, non-Spanish-speaking friends. A difference across language groups (Group 1 = speak Spanish with parents; Group 2 = speak English with parents) did present, but appeared to be minimal. The data were analyzed using a repeated-measures ANOVA and yielded the following results:

- There was a significant main effect for *social setting* (the within-subjects independent variable): $F_{(2,14)} = 16.147$, $p < .001$

- There was no effect for *language group* (the between-subjects independent variable): $F_{(1,14)} = .368$, $p = $ n.s

The plot in Figure 1 below displays the main effect for social setting. Language groups are denoted by *Span* (Group 1) and *Eng* (Group 2):

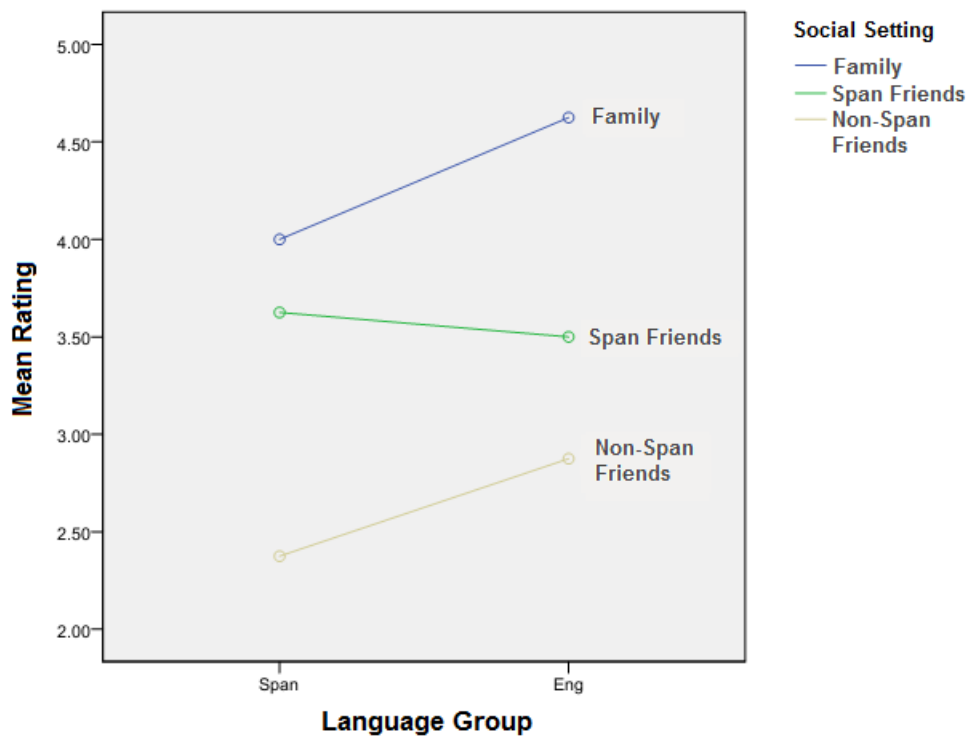Figure 1. Mean perceived expectation of individual greetings in three social settings

Figure 1 suggests that the main effect for social setting is significant between all three independent variables. To test this effect for statistical significance, post-hoc paired-samples t-tests were used to evaluate differences between (1) family and Spanish-speaking friends, and (2) Spanish-speaking friends and non-Spanish-speaking friends.

The results did indeed indicate a significant difference between the groups by social setting in each instance: (1) t = 3.22 (15), p < .003; and (2) t = 3.17(15), p < .003.

The mean ratings motivated deeper investigation, however, as they fell below *'completely agree'* in all three settings. While participants did report a significantly different level of social expectation for greeting individuals in each setting, they did not report feeling entirely obligated to greet each person individually in any of the settings.

To gain deeper insight into participant judgment of how greetings and leave-takings are expected to be used in each of the settings, participants were asked to rate five statements regarding selective use of the speech acts. The statements and corresponding mean ratings appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean politeness ratings by speech act across three social settings

Statement	Family	Spanish-speaking Friends	Non-Spanish-speaking Friends
1) You greet only people you have close relationships with.	-.688	-.438	.563
2) You greet only the entire group as a whole.	-.688	-.500	1.250
3) You say goodbye only to people you have close relationships with.	-.569	-.438	.500
4) You say goodbye only to the entire group as a whole.	-.250	-.125	.750
5) You leave quietly without saying goodbye.	-1.375	-1.250	-.500

As Table 3 shows, for two of the three social settings—*Family* and *Spanish-speaking Friends*—the mean rating for all statements fell below the neutral baseline (i.e. they fell on the side of being rude). Interestingly, for the third social setting—*Non-Spanish-speaking Friends*—all but statement 5 yielded a positive mean rating (i.e. were evaluated as being socially acceptable to varying degrees). A separate repeated-measures

ANOVA was run for each statement (1-5) across the three social settings. Each showed a main effect for social setting, but no effect for language group. The following plot of statement 1 (Figure 2) is fairly representative of (1-5):

Figure 2. Mean politeness ratings for statement 1 across three social settings
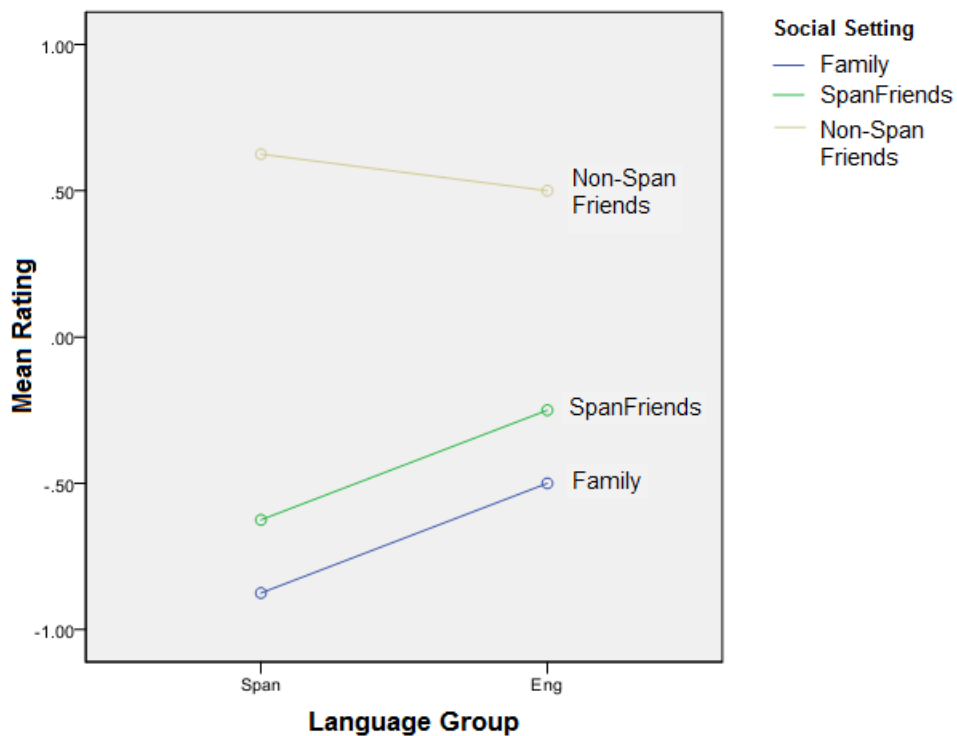

It was apparent from the plots that the main effect for social setting was centered on the third group, *Non-Spanish-speaking friends*. Therefore, post hoc paired-samples t-tests were conducted across the following groups to isolate the significant difference: (1) *Family* vs. *Spanish-speaking friends*; (2) *Spanish-speaking friends* vs. *Non-Spanish-speaking friends*.

The t-tests for (1) *Family* vs. *Spanish-speaking friends* yielded no significant differences for any of the statements (1-5). The tests for (2) *Spanish-speaking friends* vs. *Non-Spanish-speaking friends*, however, revealed significant differences for each of the statements (1-5), as follows:

1) $t = -3.46$ (14), $p = .002$
2) $t = -4.70$ (14), $p = .001$
3) $t = -2.80$ (14), $p = .006$
4) $t = -4.34$ (14), $p = .001$
5) $t = -2.42$ (14), $p = .02$

The mean politeness ratings assigned to statements 1-5 are shown graphically below in Figure 3, which compares *Spanish-speaking friends* to *non-Spanish-speaking friends*.

Figure 3. Mean ratings by statement with Spanish-speaking vs. non-Spanish-speaking friends
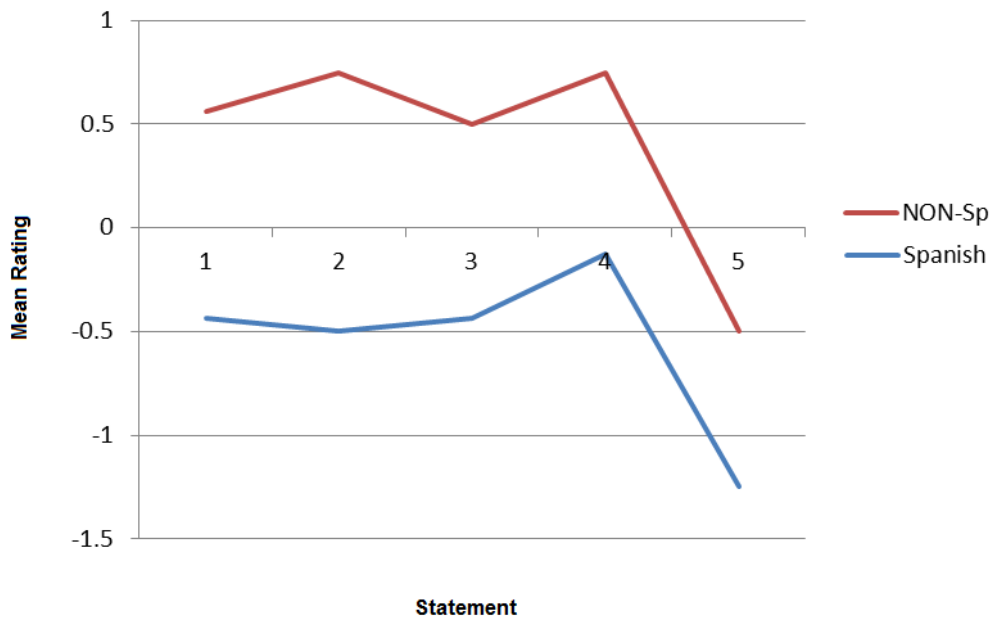
As evident in Figure 3, statements 1-4 were considered socially acceptable to some degree in the setting of *non-Spanish-speaking friends*. Statement 5 (leaving quietly without saying goodbye) was not, but along with 1-4 it was relatively more acceptable to do so than in the context of *Spanish-speaking friends*. All acts, 1-5, fell on the side of being rude in the latter setting. An analysis of the acts represented by statements 1-4 shows little difference in assigned politeness values. All four involve a greeting or leave-taking of some sort, either confined to limited individuals or to the group as a whole. They fall short of direct delivery to each attendee. Statement 5, however, describes the omission of a leave-taking: *'You leave quietly without saying goodbye'*. It was rated substantially lower than the other acts. I interpret this finding as a perception that the act carries a relatively higher threat to the attendees' positive face. Given that in both domains the interlocutors are friendly acquaintances, I do not find the judgment surprising. Following Goffman's (1967) observations, a farewell in this scenario may serve to explain or mitigate the end of the participants' present display of solidarity. Despite the fact that interlocutors presumably share similar status and authority, the level of face-threat remains high because the farewell serves to maintain the relationship. Taking this nuance into account, Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving model predicts that the bald-on omission of the farewell *when there is a high risk to face* would not be socially acceptable. The participants' judgments and metalinguistic commentary support this view. Future research might investigate whether an individual's departure without any form of a farewell is perceived as a threat to solidarity on an individual level

or on a group level (i.e., would the act be perceived by given individuals as directed at them in particular or at the group as a whole?).

The quantitative results present a particularly intriguing finding: certain politeness values (social norms) tied to the Mexican-American family setting appear to extend to friends, but only within the Spanish-speaking domain. This result is further supported by the following participant comments:

(3)   If you come from a Hispanic background you are expected to acknowledge everyone even you don't know them. Non-Hispanics usually don't care if you acknowledge them or not. (female, 42, Spanish language group)

(4)   If you are at a party with mostly Hispanics, you are expected to greet them individually because of our culture. We are taught that not doing so is a sign of bad manners. I am married to a white American guy and his family is not used to greeting people individually. (female, 37, Spanish language group)

(5)   I was taught growing up that greeting everyone at a family gathering was a sign of respect and hospitality, and if you didn't greet everyone it was considered rude. I believe it was part of our culture. I was also expected to tell everyone bye when we were leaving. I wouldn't do it at a non-family gathering with all or mostly other ethnicities. I don't think they would understand the reason for greeting everyone, they may think we're running for office. (female, 38, English language group)

The pattern is consistent across the two language groups (and four generations of participants) in the present study in terms of Likert-scale ratings. The natural question is whether this result is an in-group solidarity phenomenon tied to Hispanic socio-cultural

values or to the Spanish language. The comments in (3)-(5) suggest alignment along cultural lines; however, the following comments hint that language may play a role:

(6)   For the 3rd scenario - most of my friends who are non-Spanish-speaking don't usually greet each other - it's very rare. (female, 35, Spanish language group)

(7)   At home growing up we always individually greeted each other, my parents and close family showed and raised me that way, it's just the way it's always been. If you don't greet a certain person it shows everyone you are either upset or uncomfortable with that person. When I'm around non-Spanish-speakers just a "hello" from afar will do and that is also because that's how I've seen them do it. It has a lot to do with your comfort level also. (female, 27, Spanish language group)

The comments in (6) and (7) seem to draw a distinction along linguistic lines. They also suggest a notion of in- and out-group. Note the deictic pronoun '*them*' to refer to non-Spanish speakers in (7). Similarly, note the subject's reference to **'***our* culture**'** in both (4) and (5), and the comment '*I don't think* **they** *would understand*' in reference to other ethnicities in (5). These examples also show that individuals are aware of norms, as in (6) '*it's very rare*', and (7) '*it's just the way it's always been.*' Example (7) raises two additional considerations: it highlights potential for individual differences ('*it has a lot to do with your comfort level also*'), and identifies the perception of threat to positive face while acknowledging the sense of group ('*it shows everyone you are either upset or uncomfortable with that person.*') The last comment hints at the notion of collective face observed by researchers in other speech communities (e.g. Li, 2009; Matsumoto, 1998; Nwoye, 1989, 1992). Regardless of the cultural or language-based orientation, the in-

/out-group distinction here is clear, as it was in the quantitative analysis. The division is further supported in the comments below.

(8)   I think it may be perceived as rude to not greet someone in the Spanish bunch. (male, 37, English language group)

(9)   The Spanish heritage definitely expects a personal social greeting. At non-Spanish parties a person stays with the person they came with. (male, 44, English language group)

Statements (8) and (9) suggest that each subject is aware of a norm dictating expectations of more or less interaction depending on the social group, with (9) pointing to perception of a more individualistic norm in the non-Spanish group: '*a person stays with the person they came with*'. This finding prompts a return to Garcia's (2006) question regarding norms related to preference for positive vs. negative face. It appears that this participant perceives an *expectation* among Spanish speakers to have their positive face acknowledged via a personal greeting; however, the same participant alludes to a different norm among non-Spanish speakers in which negative face should be respected and a greeting is not expected.

That this Mexican-American subject perceives a greater expectation for positive politeness among linguistic or cultural in-group members may not be surprising; positive politeness may be a primary means of displaying solidarity or unity. Research on acculturation has shown that Mexican-Americans tend to maintain a strong sense of family unity across generations, regardless of level of acculturation (e.g. Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin & Pérez-Stable, 1987) and despite characteristic language loss by

the third generation (Pew, 2009). Considering the generation-wise language loss supported in the literature, the consistency in ratings across generations in this study could be interpreted as an indication of the primary role of culture over language. However, due to an apparent range in Spanish proficiency within given generations of subjects, along with contrasting meta-comments, the distinction cannot be made with confidence. It would be a crucial point of clarification for a follow-up study, which would benefit from a proficiency questionnaire and additional participants evenly spread across generations. I point out that a post-study conversation with two participants revealed that arriving to a party and *hearing Spanish* would trigger in them an in-group social-norm or frame. They claimed this contextual factor would play a bigger role than a shared cultural frame. Regardless, the finding does suggest that there is a general sense among these Mexican-Americans in Texas of in-group identity that goes beyond the extended family and maintains (at least some) of its social norms distinct from those of out-group members. The lack of significant differences in the quantitative analysis across language groups regarding the inclusion of Spanish-speaking friends as in-group members profoundly suggests the relationship may be shielded from acculturation in a similar fashion to family. In other words, speakers may maintain certain Mexican or Mexican-American cultural norms for expressing solidarity (e.g. via positive politeness in greetings and leave-takings) with Spanish-speaking acquaintances, rather than adopting greeting and leave-taking rituals they perceive as Anglo. Mexican-Americans have been shown to rely more on family and less on friends for emotional support than do Anglos (Keefe et al., 1979). While the present study in no way focuses on emotional support, it

does suggest a pervasive sense of in-group solidarity among Mexican-Americans that *includes* Spanish-speaking friends. Perhaps the broader in-group solidarity expressed by the Mexican-Americans in this study suggests a hybrid of Mexican-American and Anglo norms. This explanation is admittedly speculative, but certainly warrants further consideration. This study has provided evidence that bilingual Mexican-Americans recognize and ascribe to certain in- and out-group greeting and leave-taking routines based on a perception of different politeness norms across sociolinguistic groups. It motivates further research into their practice of shifting between these two norms, both linguistically and non-verbally, and in determining whether other personal perceptions (e.g. feelings of inclusion, depth of relationship) attached to the speech acts shift accordingly or remain fixed to one norm or the other. Insight into the latter could have central bearing on relationship dynamics between Mexican-Americans and in- versus out-group members.

Part 2: Types of Greetings and Leave-takings

In addition to providing judgments regarding appropriate greeting and leave-taking usage across the three social settings, participants provided an example of a greeting and leave-taking they might use in each environment. This procedure allowed for a qualitative assessment of how the speech acts compare across the domains. The tokens were analyzed and classified into sub-types and according to the face-saving strategies they represented (Table 4). This classification was based in part on observations made by Coppock (2005) and Schegloff and Sacks (1973). I discuss these strategies and sub-types individually here, with examples.

Questions regarding the interlocutor's status, which were offered exclusively in greetings, appeared to express positive politeness through a show of solidarity and interest in the hearer. Common tokens, such as '*How have you been?', 'How are things?', 'Cómo has estado?' (How have you been?),* and *'What's new?'* fit Goffman's (1967) characterization of greetings as a method of showing that the relationship is still intact from the previous encounter. They are indications that the speaker cares about the hearer and thus show positive politeness. These types of greetings were balanced in number across the three social settings and were the second most commonly found type.

Positive comments, which are demonstrations of positive politeness, included compliments such as '*You look great!'*, and well-wishes such as '*Take care'*. Most often in this study, positive comments could be evaluated as affirmations that the speaker *is*, in the case of greetings, or *was*, in the case of leave-takings, happy to see the hearer. Such tokens included: '*So good to see you!', 'Me dio gusto saludarte' (It was great to say hi to you)*, and *'Thanks for the invite'.* Positive comments were the most abundant type of greeting and leave-taking (combined) and were fairly evenly distributed across the two speech acts. This finding may suggest that they are either the most formulaic or are considered the most effective in demonstrating solidarity.

Personalization of the greeting or leave-taking (e.g. uttering the hearer's name, making remarks specific to the hearer as an individual) is a tactic for accentuating solidarity and closeness. Coppock (2005) notes that personalization mitigates the threat that a speech act might be seen as overly conventionalized and insincere. This tactic was used by three of the sixteen subjects in each of the social settings in the form of a

vocative during both greeting and farewell. An additional subject indicated a preference to tailor greetings to extended family members:

(10)   If I know specifics about family or job, I would ask. I am always aware about how long I should stick around bullshitting, because I do not want to be rude. So I stick around and pretend I care for just as long as not to be rude. (male, 37, English language group)

Tellingly, this subject admitted that he employs the strategy of personalization to appear polite, regardless of whether or not his actions or words are genuine. He explicitly signaled his awareness of a politeness norm that assigns value to time spent with and interest shown in a hearer during a greeting.

Physical contact was mentioned in some of the token greetings and leave-takings in each of the three social settings, but was more common with family (nine instances) and Spanish-speaking friends (seven instances), as compared to non-Spanish-speaking friends (four instances). The contact took the form of a hug, handshake, or kiss on the cheek. Only one instance of a kiss on the cheek was mentioned for non-Spanish speaking friends.

Excuses were uncommon in all settings (four in total) and were confined to leave-takings. One subject showed preference for an explicit excuse: '*we should/need to get going, adding excuses like having to work early the next day or have things to do at home'.* Another subject was more vague: '*ya me tengo que ir' (I have to go already).* Based on Goffman's (1967) observation that greetings and leave-takings may be used to address circumstances that keep participants from interacting or serve to end their show of solidarity, one might expect more excuses than were found here. Perhaps other shows

of solidarity such as positive comments carry more weight or are employed to avoid any negative connotation or implication of fault associated with excuses. An excuse can also be employed in such a way as to address the hearer's negative face (e.g. *'I know you're busy, so I should get going'*). No such instances were found in this study, however.

There was only one instance of a greeting that directly addressed *negative face*: *'En que le puedo ayudar?' (How can I help you?).* This utterance was offered in the context of the participant greeting a family member, delivered by a guest to her host. I interpret it as a show of deference for the hearer in the form of an offer to help remove any imposition the hearer may have been experiencing. Given the strong sense of solidarity among Mexican-American families cited in the literature, this tactic may not be surprising, especially if the addressee is highly regarded, an elder perhaps. There would be an inherently high face risk for the participants and, as such, Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy would predict stronger redressive action for a direct speech act, i.e. use of negative politeness.

Reference to a future meeting of interlocutors was included in roughly one-third of all leave-takings. It was balanced across the social settings, with six instances in each. Tokens include: *'Let's visit again soon', 'Hasta pronto' (Until soon),* and *'thanks for the invite, can't wait for the next one'.* The last example shows how the strategies or types of leave-takings discussed here can be used in tandem. By thanking the hearer, the speaker supports the hearer's positive face; simultaneously, the speaker mitigates the threat to the continued show of solidarity by looking forward to the hearer's next visit. A combination of sub-types was used in 33 of the participant tokens: six of those included three sub-

types, the rest combined two. Fifteen of the combinations were used with family, while nine were used with both friend settings. This finding supports the observation in the literature of the importance of family unity (e.g. Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin & Pérez-Stable, 1987). The most commonly combined strategies in greetings were positive comments and questions (e.g. '*Hello, so good to see you. How have you been?*'), while in leave-takings, they were positive comments and references to future meetings (e.g. '*Nos vemos pronto, me dio gusto saludarte*' ('See you soon, it was nice to see you'). There were only seven tokens that did not represent any of the strategies listed in Table 4. They consisted of single word greetings such as *'hello'* and bald on-record farewells such as *'I'm leaving', and 'adios'.* The scarcity of such tokens along with the relatively high number of 'combined' tokens suggests a norm that calls for some form of positive politeness corresponding to the types and strategies analyzed.

Table 4. Greeting and leave-taking sub-types and strategies

	Type	Family	Spanish-speaking	Non-Spanish	TOTAL
Greetings	Question	13	9	12	34
	Positive Comment	7	4	2	13
	Personalization	3	2	2	7
	Physical Contact	2	2	2	6
	Negative Face	1	0	0	1
	Excuse	0	0	0	0
	Future Meeting	0	0	0	0
	Greetings Total	**26**	**17**	**18**	**61**
Leave-takings	Question	0	0	0	0
	Positive Comment	10	6	10	26
	Personalization	1	1	1	3
	Physical Contact	7	5	2	14
	Negative Face	0	0	0	0
	Excuse	1	2	1	4
	Future Meeting	6	6	6	18
	Leave-takings Total	**25**	**20**	**20**	**65**
	OVERALL TOTAL	**51**	**37**	**38**	**126**

In summary, there was only a minor qualitative difference in the types of token greetings and leave-takings provided across the settings. This pattern may be an artifact of the questionnaire methodology, which elicits out-of-context tokens of what participants *might* say in each of the settings. Notably, however, the use of combined types or strategies was considerably more consistent in the extended family setting, suggesting a norm that required relatively higher face work or politeness with that group. This seems logical considering the importance of family unity cited in the literature (e.g. García, 1981; Keefe et al., 1979; Sabogal et al., 1987). Despite the relative familiarity between participants in this group, it appears that a cultural norm calls for an overt expression of this unity. Additionally, use of physical contact was more frequently reported in the family and Spanish-speaking friend scenarios (and the type of contact was more uniform) than in the non-Spanish-speaking scenario. Again, this pattern may point to a broader cultural norm that includes Hispanics or Spanish speakers in one group and assigns non-Hispanics or non-Spanish speakers to another. Whether the division lies along cultural or linguistic lines remains unclear.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has identified phenomena that may have bearing on current theories dealing with both acculturation and the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings. First, it has supported the sense of solidarity among Mexican-American extended families cited in the literature, as well as the tendency for solidarity to persist across multiple generations. In addition, the study suggests that certain interactions with Spanish-speaking friends may similarly be shielded from acculturation to a dominant society. At the very least, it offers evidence that certain politeness norms—those associated with presence vs. absence of greetings and leave-takings—are maintained across language-dominance groups and are applied to both family and Spanish-speaking friends. While participants' perception of social obligation for using individual greetings varied across all three social settings, their assessment of five specific scenarios of greeting and leave-taking usage revealed an intriguing pattern. There was no significant difference in perception of social acceptability across the *family* and *Spanish-speaking friend* settings; there was, however, a significant difference between these two and the *non-Spanish speaking friend* group. This finding, supported by participant comments, suggests a broader (beyond family) in-group delineation along cultural or linguistic lines. It lays fertile ground for follow-up research seeking to isolate the factors that govern in-group identity and associated behaviors. Linguistically-speaking, these observations also suggest the speech acts of greetings and leave-takings may be an integral part of the culture as a method of expressing in-group solidarity to the extent that they show little variation and change. Notably, however, participants demonstrated a greater use of

33

combined politeness strategies in their greetings and leave-takings with extended family members. This tendency may suggest that speakers perceive it as somewhat more important to express solidarity with family members. The token greetings also indicate a general preference for positive politeness in greetings and leave-takings, which falls in line with claims in the literature.

Returning to the research hypotheses, data from this study support Hypothesis 1 in part, indicating that bilingual Mexican-Americans in Texas consider the use of greetings and leave-takings a social obligation, *but only in the first two informal social settings*. Participants expected the acts to be delivered directly to each individual in these settings; in the context of *non-Spanish-speaking friends*, on the other hand, they considered the absence of the speech acts somewhat acceptable. The study also supports Hypothesis 2, showing no correlation between participant language group and level of social obligation attributed to greetings and leave-takings. As noted above, the lack of an even distribution of participants across generations precluded a direct cross-generational comparison. These findings, instead, yield generalizations along lines of participant-reported language use. They show that, whether participants reported speaking primarily English or Spanish with their parents, there was no significant difference in their expectations in norms across the social settings. Finally, the results supported Hypothesis 3, showing that the level of social obligation attributed to greetings and leave-takings varies according to social context, as follows, from highest to lowest: *extended family*, *Spanish-speaking friends*, and *non-Spanish-speaking friends*. However, it is worth

emphasizing that the difference between the first two settings was shown to be insignificant in the majority of participant responses.

Through use of participant self-reports, this study provides telling insights into the perception of two groups of Hispanics regarding greeting and leave-taking norms across sociolinguistic boundaries. Primarily, it demonstrates a difference in social expectation for employing the speech acts across three settings. The study aligns with Schneider (2012) in demonstrating the utility of experimental methods in uncovering these perceived norms. Participant ratings, experimental discourse production, and meta-linguistic commentary allow access to perceived norms that might not reveal themselves in naturalistic data. Namely, they account for the notion that one does not always do as one *thinks one should* do. Nonetheless, this experiment also sets the stage for complementary research into how this speech community uses greetings and leave-takings in these settings in natural interactions. A conversation analysis methodology (e.g. Gumperz, 1978) might allow for insight into the specific types and strategies of greeting and leave-taking speakers use in real-life interactions.

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