

TITLE:

(Im)Politeness and interactions in Dialogic Literary Gatherings

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Abstract

This article examines the interactions that occur in Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLG), a cultural activity in which low literate adults read and debate classic literature. To respect the principle of egalitarian dialogue, participants agree on how to communicate and reflect on their communicative patterns. We analyse the actual interactional behaviour of participants and the pragmatic traits that evidence how this principle is implemented by identifying dialogic and power interactions in connection to (Im)politeness. This study shows the influence of the situated genre (DLG) over status in the prevalence of politeness and how the participants use polite mitigation strategies that favour dialogue in the conversation, regardless of the participants' position.

Keywords: *Dialogic Literary Gatherings; politeness; interactions.*

1. Introduction

This study addresses the analysis of Dialogic Literary Gatherings (hereinafter DLG) from a pragmatic perspective. DLG is a cultural activity that involves the reading and discussion of classical literature among non-academic adults on the basis of the principle of egalitarian dialogue, which ensures that every contribution is valued and considered, regardless of the position occupied by the speaker. Prior studies have focused on the theoretical basis underlying DLG, that is, the theory of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), and on the analysis of the interactions that occur in DLG in different contexts by distinguishing between dialogic and power relations (Pulido and Zepa, 2010). However, DLG have never been analysed from a pragmatic perspective. This work aims at filling this gap by showing pragmatic features that point to how egalitarian dialogue occurs in DLG. Specifically, this study focuses on politeness and impoliteness because these comprise one of the principles or forces that guide conversation (Lavandera, 1988; Leech, 1983).

Therefore, four DLG (approx. 320 minutes) were recorded in a School for Adults in Barcelona (Spain). The data analysis combines the two aforementioned perspectives; therefore, the dialogic and power relations are examined given (im)politeness.

2. Dialogic Literary Gathering and interactions

2.1. Dialogic Literary Gatherings

Dialogic Literary Gatherings were created in Barcelona in a context of mobilisation for universal access to culture and education, which was led by disadvantaged social groups after the end of the Franco dictatorship in Spain (see Flecha, 2000, for the beginning of DLG).

DLG have distinctive features that turn them into a specific genre of literary gatherings. DLG are always based on the reading of classic works of literature, and the participants are people who lack higher education, who have no previous experience in literary studies and who participate in a context of mutual respect and freedom of speech. Moreover, DLG are rooted in the theory of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), which implies a breakdown of the hierarchical conception of learning (expert vs. students); this establishes a relation of expected horizontality. In a DLG, the expert's interpretation (e.g., the moderator or a guest) does not prevail over the others' interpretations; instead, every contribution is valid and appreciated by the group to the extent that it contributes to providing distinct nuances that stem from personal reflections and experiences. As observed in the analysis, this stance involves certain implications in the interactional behaviour of the attendees, who include both the participants and the moderator.

2.2. Dialogic and power relations and interactions

According to the dialogue between Searle and Soler (2004), we distinguish between dialogic and power relations and interactions. In dialogic relations, speakers seek a sincere agreement with the intention to achieve an understanding among them. Thus, language is communicatively used within this intention. However, power relations are based on the imposition of an argument, which discredits the other's views and/or exerts coercion. The distinction between dialogic and power relations derives from Habermas' distinction between power claims and validity claims of a social action (Habermas, 1981). However, Habermas did not consider the fact that in any situation of communication, even when the speaker holds validity claims (i.e., intention of truth or rightness), there are always power interactions that operate as a result of the social structure, cultural capital, and gender relations (Soler and Flecha, 2010). For instance, in a DLG, there are power interactions between the participants (low literate) and the moderator (who has a university degree) or between those participants who have already read many books and those who are new to the gathering. Nevertheless, dialogic relations prevail in a particular context, which generates politeness strategies that counteract these power interactions.

The communicative context in DLG has its own idiosyncrasy because participants search for an understanding, not for an agreement. Therefore, disagreement is accepted, provided it occurs within the framework of egalitarian

dialogue (Pulido and Zepa, 2010: 302); this implies that every contribution is considered and valued according to the validity of the arguments rather than to the social status or the position of power.

3. (Im)politeness in DLG: relevant factors and strategies

The social phenomenon of politeness has been addressed using both a traditional approach (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Culpeper, 1996; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983) and a modern approach (Eelen, 2001; Garcés-Conejos, 2013; Haugh, 2013; Watts, 2003, 2005). The former focuses on the speaker production and distinguishes (im)polite strategies and mechanisms; in contrast, for the latter, the degree of (im)politeness depends on how these are perceived, that is, on the evaluations that hearers express in ongoing interaction. Additionally, other scholars have set out to integrate each other's conjectures (e.g., the frame-based theory by Terkourafi, 2005).

Providing this brief overview, our analysis regarding interactions and (im)politeness is based on a syncretic view that is derived from the contributions of different theories and studies.

3.1. Factors of politeness

Some authors have explained the factors of politeness in relation to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, that is, "a set of dispositions to act in certain ways

that generates cognitive and bodily practices in the individual” (Watts, 2003: 149) and therefore determines a speaker’s production and a hearer’s evaluation of an utterance. In accordance with this concept, Watts (2005: 68) argues that the suitable choice is a matter of interpreting “the social distance and dominance relations valid for the stretch of social activity (...) and the type of speech event they produce”, which suggests that politeness (which he calls “politic behaviour”) is linked to socialisation or social background.

However, in our study, we argue that socialisation is not always a relevant factor in polite behaviour and that dominance relations can be suspended or less influential in certain dialogic situations. In a DLG, social variables such as gender, age, academic degree, cultural background and social class do not play a central role in the communicative competence of the participants; furthermore, the common ground of assumptions or the dominance factors linked to a particular group are not relevant. While these social dynamics do not disappear, the organisation and structure of the DLG, which is based on respect for the principle of egalitarian dialogue, makes participants more open to argumentation and to accepting the views of others. Actually, the DLG can be understood as specific “situated genre” (Fairclough, 2003) that develops a particular frame of interaction¹ based on argumentation, mutual understanding

¹ According to Linell (1998: 83), an interaction frame is connected with “expectations, entitlements and obligations with respect to possible many attributions and actions”. Ensink

and building on others' ideas. Accordingly, the most determinant features for favouring politeness are here the type of social activity, the communicative dimension of the speech event and the shared set of expectations in relation to the possibility of dialogue.

From a conversational viewpoint, the DLG is characterised by turn-taking that is organised by a moderator who is in charge of opening and closing the discussion, organising the order of intervention and negotiating the topics under discussion. The egalitarian dialogue entails the typical norms of the polite behaviour in different contexts, such as not interrupting or requesting a turn, but goes further by referring to an attitude and a behaviour that implies a disintegration of power relations. Although there are certain power interactions (i.e., the higher status of the teacher or a more experienced reader in relation to low literate participants), there is no hierarchy among the participants' intervention in the dialogue because all arguments should be equally listened to and valued in the conversation. The procedural rules in DLG involve:

- Using argumentation to share viewpoint
- Being respectful to every person's argument, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, level of education or cultural background.

(2003: 7), on her behalf, notes that the interaction frame is on the basis of our behaviour in different social situations and different kind of activities (cfr. Ensink, 2003: 7).

- Avoiding imposing one's personal opinion, particularly when someone has a higher position or status.
- Avoiding judgement on others or describing other people's comments as better or worse.
- Providing priority to those who speak less.
- Limiting the teacher's or moderator's participation.

Consequently, the rules in DLG involve a set of expectations related to attitudes and behaviour of participants in the interaction. In a certain manner, we can consider that there is in DLG what Fraser and Nolen (1981) have defined as a conversational contract exists among participants, which means that there is a common understanding of an initial set of rights and obligations that will determine the limits of the interaction. Consequently, "to be polite is to abide the rules of the conversational relationship. A speaker becomes impolite just in case where he violates one or more of the contractual terms" (Fraser and Nolen, 1981:96). As a situated genre based on tacit rules of egalitarian dialogue, the DLG sets parameters of what is to be polite or impolite in the conversation. Therefore, we agree with Garcés-Conejos (2013) that we must study politeness in relation to genres because these contain rules and expectations regarding how to act, provide a framework to comprehend and produce discourse, and show the interactional relations.

Finally, it is important to notice that the rules and expectations are understandable when participants produce and understand discourse with a particular predisposition, which is, at the same time, built on their own experiences and dialogues within the DLG. This becomes the cognitive part of the communicative act. This process is linked to Van Dijk's idea of context,² which is understood as the "participants' mental models of communicative situation" (Van Dijk, 2006: 170). The cognitive (mental) category allows us explain the transformative potential of DLG in participants, which may lead from the development of common communicative frames to personal transformations.

3.2. (Im)polite strategies and mechanisms

Below, we briefly expose the theoretical basis and sequence of our analysis. Although this includes impolite means, we specifically focus on polite strategies because they are more frequent in DLG.

Brown and Levinson (1978) propose an analysis of politeness. The researchers explain the relations among speakers beginning with the Gricean

² According Van Dijk (2006), contexts are subjective constructs and are retained in Episodic Memory; however, they also have features in common (schema) that allow communication among participants.

co-operative principle's rationale and Goffman's (1967) concept of *face*³. Thus, if a speaker wants to be efficient and achieve his/her intention, he/she will attempt to save the hearer's "face" and reduce the risk of the *face threatening action* (FTA). Similar to Goffman, the researchers argue that "face" includes both a positive face, which is the want to be approved of, and a negative face, which is the want to have freedom of action and unimpeded attention (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 129). Thus, every polarity is related to positive and negative politeness. Both forms of politeness attempt to minimise the effects of a FTA using several strategies, which are manifested in different expressions. In accordance with these ideas, Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2008, 2011) establishes politeness to the contrary pole: impoliteness, which "involves communicative behaviour intending to cause the face loss of a target or perceived by the target to be so" (Culpeper, 2008: 36). In this case, the result achieved through various strategies is the breakdown of social equilibrium.

Considering the negative and positive (im)politeness strategies and verbal mechanisms that may appear in DLG, we propose a schema of strategies and means, which is the starting point of our analysis, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1.

Strategies and means of (im)politeness in DLG

³ In recent years, there have been new insights regarding the "face" concept. Spencer-Oatey (2007), for instance, notes that face is a multi-faced phenomenon that should be studied beyond the notions of a positive and a negative face by considering a relational perspective.

Dialogic relation	Dialogic relation	Power relation
Positive politeness ⁴	Negative politeness	(Negative) impoliteness
(claim common ground)	(do not coerce hearer)	(coerce hearer)
a. trust relationship: using nicknames, jokes, compliments, flatteries, encourage hearer participation, collaborative speech	a. mitigate opinion (bushes, hedges and shields) ⁵ : vagueness introducers, consultative devices, epistemic commitment modulating devices, subjectivisers/epistemic certainty restricting devices, and generic person	a. reject or discredit opinion: questioning the information or whether the knowledge is adequate, expressing indifference
(claim reciprocity)		
b. strengthen agreement	b. minimise the disagreement or the imposition: concessive structures, incomplete sentences, negative questions	b. impose opinion: categorical and conclusive talk through intensifiers markers or other means
	c. minimise the imposition: justifications, modal verbs, interrogative sentences	

In our analysis, positive and negative politeness is, in general, more linked to dialogic relations (accounting for power and dialogue interactions), whereas impoliteness is connected to power interactions and power relations.

⁴ For positive politeness, Kerbrat-Orechioni (1996) proposes a new category of acts: Face Flattering Acts (FFA), which are not repairing acts but acts that enhance the addressee's face such as a compliment or thanks.

⁵ The devices of negative politeness are based on Caffi (2007). However, Fraser (2010: 29) notes that "some hedging results in making the utterance more polite, whereas some hedging does not, and some politeness does not result from hedging".

Nevertheless, as we discuss in the conclusions, polite means could also be used strategically to impose an opinion or to discredit the other.

3.3. Disagreement in DLG

In contrast to Brown and Levinson's conception, we deem disagreement as not being impolite in DLG because it occurs in a particular genre and frame (Fraser, 2010; Sifianou, 2012). In DLG, expressing disagreement does not necessarily imply FTA (which could be damaging the hearer's face); instead it means the possibility to provide freely an opinion within a frame marked by rules of egalitarian dialogue. . In fact, when disagreeing, participants feel that it is important to show respect to others' opinions and therefore mitigate one's own opinion as strategy to show politeness. Sifianou (2012: 1556) advises that disagreement is an intrinsic feature in many daily settings and many institutional interactions, such as academic seminars, political debates or television talk shows. In academic settings, for instance, disagreement is simultaneously matched with fomenting mitigation (Fraser, 2010: 33). In fact, when the disagreement is not mitigated and is rude, this FTA causes annoyance or irritation but does not actually harm the hearer's face because there is no infringement of sociality rights (Spencer-Oatey, 2002). That is exactly what occurs among participants in DLG, in which an impolite disagreement implies a

transgression of egalitarian dialogue and a polite disagreement uses the awareness of face and sociality rights. Thus, we agree with Spencer-Oatey (2002) regarding the distinction of two motivational sources in the rapport management of a meeting: a) face, which is associated with personal/social value, “is concerned with people’s sense of worth, credibility, dignity, honour, reputation, competence”, and b) sociality rights, which is related to personal/social entitlements, “reflect people’s concerns over fairness, consideration, social inclusion/exclusion” (Spencer-Oatey, 2002: 14). These motivations are the source of the (im)politeness strategies that prevail in DLG.

4. Methodology and data collection

The data used are drawn from a set of four DLG sessions that lasted a total of 320 minutes and were recorded exclusively for this study. These sessions occurred between May and October 2014 in a School for Adults located in Barcelona. The participants were working class men and women with no university studies, who belong to the population that has migrated to Catalonia from less industrialised areas of Spain since the 1960s seeking economic prosperity; therefore, their mother tongue language is Spanish. During the sessions recorded, men and women discussed certain chapters of the following classic literature readings: *La metamorfosis* by Kafka, *La Regenta* by Clarín,

Nada by Carmen Laforet and *Campos de Castilla*, by Antonio Machado. While there exist different DLG that are conducted in Catalan or in English, depending on the purpose or preference of the participants, the DLG analysed in this study were conducted in Spanish.

This research has been developed based on the communicative methodology of research (Gómez et al. 2011), which pursues the transformation of situations of inequality and exclusion by means of communication and language. Thus, participants are involved during the different stages of the research. The communicative approach aims not only to advance knowledge in the field but also to improve the social reality of those people whose interactions are investigated. This methodology, which is characterised by building a bridge between society and expert knowledge, contrasts the methodology of a great deal of sociolinguistic research, in which the linguistic, pragmatic or discourse differences among speakers with different status or studies are analysed and established without challenging the social relations underlying the communication practices. These works, in our opinion, contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities insofar as they classify speakers according to their verbal behaviour and do not attempt to transform the reality of the social groups investigated.

5. Analysis

Our analysis of the communicative relations that occur in the Dialogic Literary Gatherings has allowed us to observe the prevalence of the expressions of politeness compared to the expressions of impoliteness. The starting point of our analysis was the proposed schema of (im)polite strategies and mechanisms shown in Section 3.2. Additionally, we considered hearer evaluations, particularly to determine whether the hypothetical impoliteness strategies are assessed as truly impolite by the others. Furthermore, although the main focus of our analysis was the communicative acts between participants in the DLG, the pragmatic role of the moderators has also been explored. In the following sections, we present and discuss our study of (im)politeness means and strategies.

5.1. Positive politeness: Building dialogue counting on everyone

The speech analysed explains the existence of a general atmosphere of mutual respect and cordiality between the participants. In general, the respect for other people's opinions is attested in many participants' comments, such as the following:

Excerpt 1

P: he aprendido un montón / sobre todo por lo que escucho ¿no? (...)
*además es una tertulia en la que se respeta mucho / que hay mucho
respeto a todas las opiniones ¿no? / que todo el mundo opina lo que quiere
yyy me parece estupendo eso ¿no?*

P: I have learnt a lot / especially from listening right? (...) *also, this is a gathering in which there is great respect / there is great respect for all opinions, right? / everyone says what they want, and I think that's fantastic, isn't it?* (DLG1)

The fact that the DLG is a particular situated genre based on certain procedural tacit rules that are already accepted by participants (turn-taking, active listening, and respect for plurality), favours dialogue. Participants follow the moderator's instructions regarding turn-taking, although short silences occasionally occur before the turn assignation. Certainly, episodes of simultaneous speech have been identified; however, it is primarily collaborative, and there are few interruptions. Collaborative speech usually takes the form of the speakers' allusions to what others have said, which shows an acknowledgement of others' contributions. In these references, the original utterance can be reformulated, as in the following example (Excerpt 2):

Excerpt 2: Acknowledgements of others' contributions

P: *tal como dices tú los recuerdos siempre están ahí porque son imborrables*

P: *as you say, memories are always there because they are indelible*
(DLG1)

Usually, the utterance is substituted by demonstratives or linguistic preforms. In the following example (Excerpt 3), someone else's discourse is referred to by

a relative clause (in Spanish) with a demonstrative (“what Óscar says”), which is viewed favourably (“I find it interesting”):

Excerpt 3: Use of demonstratives and linguistic preforms

P: *me parece interesante esto que dice Óscar* porque es verdad / parece que hoy en día no tengamos derecho a tener sentimientos o que tengamos que ocultarlos
P: *I find what Óscar says interesting* because it's true / it seems that currently we have no right to have feelings or should hide them (DLG2)

In addition, participants tend to express their agreement or approval regarding the others' opinions, which does not prevent them from adding different comments or suggestions later:

Excerpt 4: Strengthening Agreement

P: *yo pienso también que es una crítica en general que nos está dando*
P: *I also think that it is general criticism that is being made* (DLG2)

Collaborative speech also appears as a means of encouraging others' participation. Turns of collaborative speech among participants, in which a participant helps another develop an argument in an atmosphere of trust, are common, as shown in the following example:

Excerpt 5: Collaborative speech

P1: en concreto la tertulia es muy muy edificante o...

P2: *enriquecedora*

P1: enriquecedora / porque estos libros yo no yo seguramente no los hubiera comprado o cogido para leerlos yo en solitario conmigo misma

P1: in particular, the gathering is very, very edifying or...

P2: *enriching*

P1: enriching / because these books, I wouldn't, I probably wouldn't have bought or borrowed them to read them alone on my own (DLG1)

Regarding the role of the moderator, he/she is in charge of encouraging participants who speak minimally to express their opinions more. This encouragement is interpreted by participants as a display of interest and trust in them, which favours participation:

Excerpt 6: Encouraging participation

M: *¿hay algún comentario por aquí? / estáis calladas ¿no os sugiere nada?*

P: bueno sí lo que pasa es que volvemos a lo mismo ¿no? / a mí no me queda claro por qué actúan así / no sé, no entiendo, no entiendo las razones para actuar así (()) esa es la conclusión que saco yo

M: *Are there any comments here? / You are quiet, doesn't this tell you anything?*

P: well, yes, what happens is that we come back to the same thing, right? / It is not clear to me why they act like that / I don't know. I don't understand. I do not understand why they act like this (()); that is the conclusion I draw myself (DLG1)

5.2. Negative politeness: Strategies for coping with disagreement

Interactions in DLG are particularly marked by negative politeness strategies (i.e., mitigation or minimising disagreement) as an attempt to respect the principle of egalitarian dialogue, that is, the establishment of a relationship among participants, which intends to be as horizontal as possible. This dynamic is supported by the moderator's concern to guarantee respect for every opinion. Thus, the moderator assumes a deontic responsibility (Haugh, 2013) regarding the rights and obligations of the participants.

To encourage dialogue, participants express their reflections and interpretations as possible options because they show respect for other approaches and suggestions. In fact, participants mitigate both their personal opinions and potential disagreements. The mitigation is conducted through *hedges*, *bushes* and (to a lesser extent) *shields*; these tend to be used jointly. Table 2 summarises the most frequently used forms of mitigation:

Table 2

Mitigation strategies

Hedges:

— thinking and opinion verbs in the first-person singular: *pienso, me parece creo, supongo, entiendo, veo, encuentro* (*I think, It seems to me, I believe, I suppose, I understand, I see, I find*)

— subjectivisers: *para mí, yo, en mi opinión, a mí parecer* (*to me, myself, in my opinion, in my view*)

— constructions and adverbs of probability: *a lo mejor, igual, quizás, seguramente, es posible que* (*maybe, perhaps, probably, likely*)

—consultative devices such as interactive markers: *¿no? ¿eh? ¿verdad?* (*right? huh?, really?*)

— conditional mood

– hesitation devices: *no sé (I don't know)*

Bushes:

approximators: *de alguna manera, un poco, algo así, más o menos, y eso, y todo (in some way, a bit, something like that, more or less, and all that stuff, and so on)*

Shields: second-person singular with general meaning

Often, participants may use a large number of mitigation strategies to soften his/her personal perspective. Excerpt 7 is an example of these types of interactions. In this case, a participant verbalises her opinion regarding the behaviour of a character in the literary work *Nada*:

Excerpt 7: Use of hedges, bushes and shields

P: la hija lo que quiere es vengarse de la madre *a mi parecer* [hedge - subjectiviser] / *y quería decir* [condicional tense] *un poco* [hedge concerning completeness] que lo de Gloria con el cuñado tampoco *me pienso* [hedge, meaning verb] que está enamorado de / pero si tiene un marido que *te pega y te maltrata* [shield, second person] *y todo* [bush, omission signal] // pues si hay otra persona que está cerca / *igual* [hedge, less epistemic commitment] podía ella pensar que a ver si podía el otro / le podría dar *un poco de* [bush indicating reduction] apoyo o *alguna cosa* [bush, approximator] / que *a lo mejor* [hedge, less epistemic commitment] no era enamoramiento *¿no?* [hedge, consultative device] / más bien tenía *un poco de* [bush indicating reduction] ampararse *un poco o alguna cosa* [bush, approximator] / *pienso yo* [hedge, meaning verb] porque claro con esas palizas que le pegaba cualquier persona que tuviera cerca que te diera *un poco de* [bush indicating reduction] apoyo / *no sé* [hedge, hesitation device] no *me parece que* [hedge, meaning verb] estuviera enamorada de él.

P: What the daughter wants is revenge on the mother *in my opinion* [hedge - subjectiviser]. / and / *meant* [conditional mood] *a bit* [hedge Concerning to completeness] that Gloria's issue with her brother-in-law nor / *think* [hedge, meaning verb] who she is in love with, / but if you have a husband who beats *you* and mistreats *you* [shield, second person] *and all* [bush, omission signal], // so if there is another person around / *maybe* [hedge, less epistemic commitment] she could think, see if the other could / could give her *some* [bush indicating reduction] support or *something* [bush, approximator]; / that *maybe* [hedge, less epistemic commitment] was not love, right? [hedge, consultative device] / it was *more like* [bush indicating reduction] looking for a bit of support or *something* [bush, approximator], / I *think* [hedge, meaning verb] because, of course, after being beaten like that by him, anyone close who gives you *some* [bush indicating reduction] support, / I *don't know* [hedge, hesitation device], *it doesn't seem to me* that [hedge, meaning verb] she was in love with him (DLG1)

As previously observed, within this particular situated genre, speakers consider that most opinions are compatible, while at the same time they are aware of the existence of different interpretations and worldviews. Therefore, although personal opinion is shown, other perspectives should be accepted. To mitigate the disagreement, speakers mainly resort to the following devices: concessive clauses (*más bien / rather*), justifying clauses (*pero es que / but*) and the usual mechanisms of mitigation of opinion (*más o menos / more or less*), as shown in the following examples:

Excerpt 8: Concessive clauses

P: yo creo *más bien* que es un cantooo a la esperanza

P: I think it is *rather* a tribute to hope (DLG2)

Excerpt 9: Justifying clauses

P: a ver yo era más o menos lo que ha dicho ella pero es que yo entiendo que no era una cuestión de egoísmo / era una cuestión de subsistencia no había seguridad social no había ayudas sociales no había nada

P: see, it was more or less what she said, but I understand that it was not a matter of selfishness; / it was a matter of survival, there was no social security no social assistance, there was nothing (DLG4)

Regarding the role of the moderator, mitigation strategies are also frequently used as a means to ensure respect for the principles of procedure without resorting to authority or power. In the example (Excerpt 10), the moderator provides an instruction that explains the manner of organising the turn-taking and using polite set expressions (“please” at the beginning and “thanks” at the end).

Excerpt 10: Mitigation of instructions through justifications

M: levantad la mano / *por favor* / si queréis comentar

P: sí hombre muchas cosas

M: bueno pero a ver ya sé que hay muchas cosas pero *levantar la mano al principio para que podamos organizarlo porque así es más fácil // gracias //*

M: raise your hand / *please* / if you want to comment

P: oh, man, many things

M: well, but see, I know there are many things, but *raise your hand in the beginning so that we can organise it (this) because that way is easier; // thanks //* (DLG3)

In Excerpt 11, the moderator mitigates the recommendation of making the turns shorter, including his (“let’s do”, that is “hagamos”, using the first-person plural in Spanish, using diminutives, “a little bit shorter”); he justifies the advice:

Excerpt 11: Mitigation through justification

M: *hagamos las intervenciones un poquito más cortitas porque como hoy tenemos poco tiempo a ver si podemos participar todos / y después hacemoos / la valoración*

M: *let's do the interventions a little bit shorter because we don't have much time today, and this way we all can participate, / and later we will do / the assessment (DLG1)*

Another common mitigation strategy is to request participants' approval. In the following turn (Excerpt 12), the moderator explains the schedule for this DLG session, and at the end, he requests approval from participants ("Is this fine with you?"), which minimises the indication regarding how they will proceed.

Excerpt 12: Request for approval

M: *hoy vamos a hacer varias cosas / primero vamos a hacer a una rotación para ver lo que nos está pareciendo la Metamorfosis el libro / después haremos los párrafos que tengamos yy al final vamos a elegir libro para que lo podamos ir comprando y teniéndolo ¿no? / ¿estáis de acuerdo con esteee?*

M: *we are doing a few things today. / First, let's do a round to see what we think about Metamorphosis, the book so far. / Afterwards, we'll go over the paragraphs that we have, and at the end, we will choose a book so we can start buying it and having it ok? / Is this fine with you? (DLG4)*

The requests for approval are understood by participants as authentic questions, not as a mere polite set of expressions; in fact, these questions produce immediate answers, are accepted if they are reasonable, and construct an atmosphere of mutual cooperation and trust that allow participants to express initiatives and proposals. In the following sequence (Excerpt 13), a

participant complains because he/she has not commented on the important news from the literary world (the death of Gabriel García Márquez); the moderator mitigates the suggestion by agreeing with the proposal and postponing it:

Excerpt 13: Mitigation through agreement and postponement

(4) M: sí ahora ¿quieres valorar el curso lo que hemos leído?

P: sí yo he estado muy a gusto / entonces lo que he leído me ha gustado mucho y lo he aprovechado mucho / pero /// encuentro a faltar una cosa / que no se ha comentado nada deee de este de

M: ahora explicaré / de García Márquez

P: eh de Márquez / de García Marquez

M: ahora explicaremos una cosita al final

M: ok, now, do you want to comment on the course and what we have read?

P: Yes I've been very happy, / so what I've read I liked it very much, and I have benefited a lot, / but /// I'm missing something / that nothing has been said about, about this, about

M: Now, I will explain / about Garcia Marquez

P: huh about Marquez / about Garcia Marquez

M: we will explain a little something at the end (DLG1)

Additionally, on many occasions, the moderator uses generalisation, particularly with the first-person plural, as a mechanism of attenuation. In the following excerpt, the moderator uses a generalisation (“we know”) to remind a participant to be very respectful of others’ opinions after having said “I do

respect her opinion / but...” in a tone of annoyance. Therefore, with this reminder, the moderator minimises the disagreement between participants and maintains the atmosphere of respect for differences:

Excerpt 14: Mitigation through the use of generalisation

P: bueno yo lo quee / yo respeto su opinión / pero yo por lo que he vivido

M: *ya sabemos que aquí hay diferentes opiniones*

P: claro y es respetable

P: Well, what I, / I do respect her opinion, / but in my experience

M: *we know there are different opinions here*

P: of course, and it must be respected (DLG1)

5.3. Impoliteness: Power Interactions that are addressed within the group

In the DLG, we identified some “less dialogic” interactions that could not be catalogued as power interactions because impolite devices were not used. When they do occur, power interactions are linked to impoliteness; they consist of imposing one’s own opinion, rejecting others or discrediting the participant’s face.

In fact, during the four sessions recorded, one potential power interaction was identified. In the following dialogue, a participant vehemently rejects a previous opinion based on strong life experiences that impede her from installing distance from the topic under discussion. During her speech, this participant uses intensifiers (the idiom “pull something back” or superlatives

such as “durísimo”, “really tough”), categorical expressions (“that’s all”) and emphatic pronunciation in certain words (“VERY”, “not AT ALL”):

Excerpt 15: Use of intensifiers and categorical speech

P: a ver esto es MUY bonito de decir pero lo tienes que vivir ¿vale? / vive un Alzheimer y eso no es (()) ¿entiendes? / las cosas o sea el miedo está innato y a veces una persona tiene la- razonando la mejor voluntad del mundo para hacer una cosa para ayudar y para lo que sea / pero a la hora de la verdad el miedo la *tira para atrás* / hay cosas que son como sencillas pero cuando esa situación llega a un extremo la cosa es *durísima* pero muy dura y muy difícil de llevar / porque no es entrar un ratito y salirte / son veinticuatro horas del día todos los días del año / y eso es *durísimo* (...) y hay cosas que no son *NADA* agradables y que te dicen por ejemplo pues que te ayuden por la mañana / se limpia y se acabó / es que eso no es así (...) o sea hay cosas que para uno poderlas razonar bien las tiene que

P: see, this is VERY nice to say, but you have to experience it ok? / You live an Alzheimer, and it is not like that (()), you understand? / these things, I mean fear is innate, and sometimes one person has the- reasoning the best will in the world to do something to help and whatever, / but in regard to it, fear *pulls them back*. / There are things that are simple, but when this situation goes to the extreme, things are *really tough* very hard and very difficult to bear / because it will not stay for a while and then go away. / It is twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, / and that's *really tough* (...) and some things are not pleasant *AT ALL*, and people tell you for instance to get some help in the morning, / just clean it and that’s all. / However, it doesn’t work like that (...). I mean, there are things that in order to argue them well you need to

After these words, the moderator admonishes her (“bueno aquí no se trata de juzgar a nadie” / well, we are not here to judge anyone) because he

perceives that the previous participant may feel dishonoured and the tacit rule of avoiding judgement is actually broken. The speaker did not recognise such dishonour in her discourse (“yo no juzgo a nadie, lo entiendo” / I’m not judging anyone, I understand); however, she insists that the situation is very difficult, with slight mitigating intention, after admonishment.

In fact, this power interaction does not appear to be produced with the purpose of discrediting a participant; instead, the speaker vents the negative feelings caused by difficult personal experiences. The result from this interaction is two-fold: on the one hand, there is a disapproval of the thesis held by another participant; on the other hand, the face of the participant who wants to impose her opinion is harmed when she violates the rules of egalitarian dialogue, which leads to the disapproval of the other participants. Thus, within the DLG’s frame, the dialogic interactions prevail, and the power interactions become more damaging for the speaker’s face than for the hearer’s face, whose opinion had been questioned.

6. Conclusions

In this research, the dialogic and power relations occurring in DLG are analysed in terms of (im)politeness. The analysis points to the prevalence of politeness strategies (both positive and negative) above impolite strategies, both among participants and between them and the moderator of the activity. Positive and negative politeness diminish the effects of power interactions and thus contribute to developing and generalising dialogic relationships in the group.

In this case, the specific genre (DLG), and the related rules of egalitarian dialogue, become more influential than any social status distance or prior dominance relationship, by favouring participants’ exchange of opinions and views without resorting to authority or imposition. The examples analysed

clearly show that disagreement in DLG is experienced by participants as an element of communication, not as a confrontation or discredit, which is addressed among the group. The relations among participants are predominantly dialogic, with some presence of power interactions that are mitigated by the moderator and by the entire group's attitude, according to the DLG's tacit rules of egalitarian dialogue. In dialogic conversation, participants use both positive and negative politeness. Regarding positive politeness, the main strategies are the recognition of the others' contributions through allusions, the collaborative speech and the reinforcement of agreements. Concerning negative politeness, the mitigation of the opinion, which is expressed by means of *hedges*, *bushes* and *shields*, are the predominant strategies. As shown in the examples, participants also mitigate the disagreement by crediting others' opinions.

Furthermore, in our data, the moderator plays a key role in assuring the parameters of the situated genre are met. On the one hand, the moderator encourages participation of all; on the other hand, he/she equally includes all participants' opinions and exerts relative control, which is linked to a high presence of negative politeness to assure relations are dialogic. For instance, he/she tends to mitigate instructions by requesting approval and, accordingly, justifying how he/she is proceeding.

Finally, our analysis suggests that the very conditions of a specific 'situated genre' such as DLG, which includes agreed rules of egalitarian dialogue as the basis for communication, generates a pragmatic approach among the participants that favours the establishment of dialogic relations based on politeness. Thus, our findings differ from prior studies that had focused on the performance of social status and dominance. We have shown that in a dialogically organised context such as DLG, the most influential factor of

(im)politeness is actually the situated genre, rather than the cultural capital or other social variables. The principle of egalitarian dialogue in the DLG becomes a communicative frame of mutual respect and understanding equally assumed by all.

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