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Intercultural Communication in a globalized world: the case of Spanish

Rosina Márquez Reiter (University of Surrey) and Raquel Hidalgo Downing (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

In this chapter we offer a précis of research conducted on intercultural communication in Spanish and present an analysis of the construction of interculturality between speakers of Spanish in contemporary contexts resulting from globalisation. We start by reviewing the studies conducted on the topic from a contrastive pragmatics angle as cross-cultural findings have often been used to predict the prospective intercultural contact between members of different Spanish lingua-cultures. We then turn our attention to constructivist studies of encounters between speakers of different Spanish-speaking backgrounds in transnational settings. Their differences may reside in their ethnolinguistic identities, the varieties of Spanish they speak and their access to resources, among others. What these speakers have in common is the fact that they have had limited contact with one another in the past despite speaking the same basic language: Spanish. The discussion of such encounters is illustrated by previously unexamined instances of interculturality in communicative settings such as transnational service encounters, interactions in contexts of voluntary migration, multilingual settings and tourism.

Key words: interculturality, cross-cultural communication, diversity, endorsement of sameness and difference

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication in Spanish, as in many other languages, has primarily received attention in educational settings, especially in the language classroom where issues of cultural misunderstanding have been generally attributed to insufficient pragmatic competence in a foreign or second language (see, for example, Thomas, 1983, cf. Heath 1983; Michaels & Collins, 1984). In this sense, intercultural communication has been generally associated to intercultural competence and questions of language learning and teaching, with an emphasis on research on the use of English as a foreign language (see, for example Byram, 2003; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat et al., 2003; Kramsch, 2014, Kramsch & Uryu, 2011, Risager, 2006).

Questions of intercultural communication beyond the language classroom have received significantly less attention and have been tangentially approached by scholars working on Spanish cross-cultural pragmatics, language contact and, more recently, by those interested in transnational contexts resulting from globalisation where speakers from different Spanish-speaking cultural backgrounds are brought together (e.g. call centres, ethnic migrant businesses). That intercultural communication beyond the educational sphere has been relatively neglected by pragmaticists may respond to the fact that communication between speakers of the same (basic) language is mostly seen as unproblematic. This results from the implicit assumption made between the national language spoken by native speakers and the lack of diversity with which national languages and their speakers have been generally understood (cf. Gumperz, 1983 on communicative repertoires; Bloomaert, 2010). In addition,

the general availability of the internet has enabled (local) businesses to operationalise their services across the globe (e.g. call centres), leading to the observed standardisation of certain communicative practices (e.g. Cameron, 2000 on the feminization of the workforce) and to the commodification of certain languages (e.g. Heller, 2003 on French in Quebec). It has resulted in the assumption that intercultural salient phenomena may be less likely to occur (Sifianou, 2013 on politeness patterns). However, research on the political economies of language (see, for example, Duchêne and Heller, 2012) and on intercultural communication between speakers of Spanishes in globalised communicative settings (e.g. Márquez Reiter, 2011) have shown that this is not necessarily the case, especially when one or both interactional parties resists other-ascribed categorisations (see example 3 below). It is the findings of these studies with special attention to those that concentrate on Spanish that the current chapter addresses. Before we proceed to do so, we will clarify our definition of intercultural communication relative to cross-cultural communication and briefly dwell on methods that these studies have employed.

2. On the distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural communication

As pointed by Gudykunst (2003) the terms cross-cultural and intercultural have often been used interchangeably (see also Keckecs, 2017 and the chapter on Cross-cultural pragmatics in this volume). A broadly shared view and one we concur with considers that cross-cultural pragmatics examines phenomena in two different languages and cultures which are contrasted with one another and analysed through native speakers' productions. Native speakers' performances are used to establish the pragmalinguistic forms of certain activities (i.e. speech acts) in given languages and provide insights into the cultural values, norms and representations related to such forms. Cross-cultural pragmatics has proved to be a fruitful area of interest in Spanish. Studies have examined the cultural norms, politeness strategies and style choices in the realization of speech acts by means of different degrees of elicitation procedures -from discourse completion tests to open role-plays- (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Hickey, 1991; Márquez Reiter, 2000 on Spanish and English; Maíz Arévalo, 2012; Siebold, 2008 on Spanish and German, Ruiz de Zarobe 2004 on Spanish and French). One of the common denominators among these studies is the focus on the realisation of given speech acts to ascertain the extent to which the pragmalinguistic formulations of the acts, particularly their level of (in) directness indicate differences in politeness orientations. In this sense, these studies, much in line with the research in other lingua cultures at that time, is informed by the quest for universality that characterised the pragmatics enterprise in those days (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983). This is evident in the connection that the most of these studies make between patterns of (in) directness and the politeness orientations of the lingua cultures of the native speakers who participated in them.¹

The cross-cultural pragmatics venture has also employed naturalistic and quasi-naturalistic interactions. For instance, Fernández Amaya (2013) examined simultaneous speech in American English and Peninsular Spanish mundane telephone closings. She maintained that simultaneous speech in Spanish may not be perceived as a violation of the turn-taking principles, but rather as a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) aimed at creating a bond between speakers who are relatives and friends (see also Placencia, 1992 on patterns of politeness in everyday telephone conversations in Ecuadorian Spanish and British English). A similar interactional orientation of the cross-cultural venture was marked by studies on sociopragmatics (Márquez Reiter and Placencia, 2005). In these, the overall organisation of interactional activities (e.g. service encounters) and their specific characteristics (e.g. discursive strategies) including their associated speech acts, are examined and interpersonal

orientations and cultural values identified. For instance, Curcó (1998) compared Peninsular and Mexican Spanish and observed that while requests in both varieties are indirect, in Mexican Spanish they were internally modified, especially by means of diminutives which were virtually absent from Peninsular Spanish. Similarly, Fant (1996) examined conversational regulation in negotiation interactions in Mexico and Spain and reported that Spaniards not only uttered more words and intervened in more occasions than Mexicans, but also showed more instances of speech overlap and interruption. Mexican speakers, on the other hand, were reported to use lateral sequences more often than Spaniards. The differences in conversational style was attributed to higher cohesion among Mexican participants, and higher tolerance to confrontation in negotiation among Spaniards. Bravo (1998) explored negotiations between Swedes, Spaniards and Mexicans with a focus on the role of laughter. She found that Spaniards, unlike their counterparts, used laughter in thematic negotiating activities in order to mitigate expressions of disapproval. García (2004) observed that Venezuelan speakers approached their employees as if they were in symmetrical relationships, unlike the Peruvian Spanish speakers who participated in her study whose linguistic behaviour stressed the asymmetry of the relationship. Overall, the findings from the above studies indicated differences in terms of degree rather than absolute differences. In view of this, Márquez Reiter (2002) examined conventional indirectness, the most preferred strategy for requesting in Spanish -as well as in the other languages- and showed that the Uruguayan Spanish speaking participants of her study used more internal and external modifications than the Spaniards. She thus maintained that the observed difference in padding resided in tentativeness rather than in levels of indirectness (understood as the correlation between sentence structure and illocutionary force).

This illustrative and non-exhaustive list of contrastive pragmatic studies focused on two varieties of Spanish, from a geographical or regional perspective (see also Placencia, 2004 on Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador) and applied a similar analytic toolkit to the previously mentioned cross-cultural studies between Spanish in contrast with another language (i.e. the study of speech act realization and differences in style or politeness strategies in discourse practices, considering the roles of social variables such as social distance and power in the way interpersonal relations are managed). Findings from studies where two varieties of Spanish are analysed independently and then compared to one another have been of value to language learning, translation, business communication, and mediation in general to better understand and advice on the adequacy of language use in line with expected cultural norms. Overall, they have brought to the fore the relative directness that characterizes Peninsular Spanish relative to Latin American varieties of Spanish and offered a platform for the development of (socio) pragmatic variation (Placencia, 1998; Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005).

3. On intercultural communication and interculturality

Broadly speaking, intercultural pragmatics “is concerned with the way the language system is put to use in social encounters between human beings who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and usually, represent different cultures” (Kecskes, 2014, p.14). In our view, however, intercultural pragmatics also encompasses interactions between speakers who do not share the same language or language variety or cultural ways, creating an interactive space where diverse and potentially unfamiliar communicative repertoires and styles come in contact with one another creating “interculture” through interaction. Intercultural pragmatics and, more specifically, intercultural communication may also include speakers of the same basic language who come from different backgrounds, such as speakers of Spanishes as well as speakers of any basic language with different educational trajectories,

income or occupations who rarely interact with one another, especially in contexts of inequality (consider *Pygmalion*). In this sense, intercultural communication needs to divorce itself from the native-speaker model it developed from. Intercultural communication started in 1946 when the U.S. launched the Foreign Service Act. Culture was then equated with nation, and within the nation it was the behaviour of the middle-class that constituted the main focus of attention. It has been difficult since then for the field to depart from its homogenic and hegemonic² roots. Let us consider example 1, below, taken from a televised interview between Spanish citizens and politicians where a citizen asks Josep Lluís Carod³ a question.

Example (1) [Televised interview between citizens and politicians] (RTVE,⁴ 17/10/2009)

202 Reporter: *Hola/ buenas noches/*
 203 Carod: *bona nit/*
 204 Citizen: *don José Luis*
 205 Carod: *Perdón/ yo me llamo Josep Lluís*
 206 Citizen: *Bueno, es que yo no entiendo catalán*
 207 Carod: *y no*
 208 Carod: *[No/ no/] es que no hace falta entender catalán// Yo me llamo como me llamo*
 209 *aquí y en la China popular//*
 210 Citizen: *[yo/ yo]*
 211 Carod: *y usted no tiene/ perdone que se lo diga/ ningún derecho a modificar mi*
 212 *nombre// Yo me llamo Josep Lluís/ No me llamo de otra forma//*

‘Reporter: Hello/ good evening/

Carod: bona nit/

Citizen: don José Luis/

Carod: Excuse me/ my name is Josep Lluís/

Citizen: Well/ the thing is/ I don’t understand Catalan/

Carod: no

Carod: No/ no/ the point is that you don’t need to understand Catalan//my name is the same here and in China

Citizen: I/ I....

Carod: and you have no/ sorry to tell you/ you have no right to change my name//my name is Josep Lluís/I have no other name than that’

In example (1), despite the deference with which the citizen addresses Carod (i.e. note the insertion of the title ‘Don’ in line 204), upon hearing his name in Spanish, especially after offering a second pair part to the Spanish greeting in Catalan, the politician utters a repair, albeit prefaced by an apologetic formula (‘perdón’), thus in keeping with the deference conveyed thus far to assert his Catalan identity. Beyond this being an appropriate setting to do so (i.e. an interview between citizens and politicians), the repair offers Carod a legitimate opportunity to challenge what he sees as a hegemonic view of Spanish culture where diversity is erased (Urciouli, 2011). Carod’s repair leads the citizen to attempt to remedy damage to her face (i.e. not knowing the name of the politician she addresses) by offering a justification (line 206). The justification, however, adds insult to injury as observed by Carod’s reaction (lines 208-209). It is successfully countered by invoking the individual’s rights to self-identity claims in any society, including far away cultures with a different political system (line 209). This example captures how interculturality is constructed within the same nation State by locals, and is not necessarily a communicative phenomenon between speakers who are not proficient

in one of the official languages of the nation State: in this case Spanish. Intercultural communication does not just entail the contact between different groups of speakers who may or may not speak the same language variety. Intercultural communication is located at the level of interaction (written and spoken) and potential differences between groups of speakers are not necessarily understood in terms of their belonging to a given national culture (Márquez Reiter, 2011).

As far as Spanish is concerned, intercultural communication has mainly focused on interactions in situations of language contact. Schrader-Kniffki (2004, 1995) examined interactions between Spanish and Zapotec (Mexico) speakers. She observed the emergence of mixed forms of politeness, which do not occur in natural native speaking practices in either language but are the result of intercultural interaction. Having a long experience of contact with Hispanophone speakers, Zapotec speakers have adapted certain Zapotec politeness strategies used in in-group interactions, such as the avoidance of refusals to requests, in order to interact with those who are not part of their in-group and avoid misunderstandings.⁵ Steckbauer (1997) examined Spanish as lingua franca in Lima (Peru), where indigenous immigrants coming to the capital do not share the same language or the same variety of Quechua and communicate in Spanish even if mastery of this language varies considerably depending on previous instruction. Also, Gugenberger (1997) focused on language contact between speakers of Aymara and different varieties of Quechua. The author analysed interviews with members of the indigenous communities where negative attitudes towards varieties of Quechua emerged, showing the asymmetries between speakers who share a basic language (Spanish) but do not have common cultural norms. Of note within the long list of studies on language contact is Henze's (1997) work on code-switching by New York City Puerto Rican speakers from an intercultural angle. Henze found that while Puerto Rican speakers do not have problems of comprehension, their use of English or Spanish reflect two different, even opposite, cultural worlds and models of identity.

As Zimmermann (2000) points out, intercultural communication has occurred throughout history in many contexts where language contact and multilingualism have been common, spread phenomena and lingua franca (Latin for instance) has played an important role in bridging speakers from different cultural contexts and backgrounds. However, the possibilities of intercultural encounters have increased exponentially in the past century, as a result of the evolution of capitalism and its pervasive effects on mobility, internationalization, migration and globalization processes. Although in smaller numbers than English, the Spanish language has undergone similar processes of dissemination and diversity than English (Garrido, 2010; Moreno Fernández, 2013), making the traditional view of language with clear identifications and distinctions between speaker's language varieties and national, regional or geographical identifications impossible to hold (Mar-Molinero 2008).

4. Interculturality in globalised settings

In this new context of globalization and transnational structures (for instance, services offered by outsourced companies), intercultural communication has focused on interactions between speakers who have different linguistic and cultural characteristics and have had, in most cases, little contact with one another (Márquez Reiter, 2011). Under this perspective, Márquez Reiter (2011) analysed interactions in service calls to/from an outsourced call centre between speakers from different varieties of Spanish. She observed, among other things, the way that the lack of shared formulaic language which comprises social recognised expressions (Coulmas, 1986)

leads to extended telephone closings as the participants attempt to coordinate interactional cessation without causing offence. A case in point was the use of *sí señor/a/ita* as a putative pre-closing device by speakers of Colombian Spanish after the confirmation of a service arrangement. The expression was often interpreted by speakers of River Plate Spanish as an acknowledgement token but not necessarily as projecting a next action, in this case the exchange of farewells. This allowed the latter to expand on the arrangement until an expression of thanks (*gracias* at line 162) was uttered with final intonation, indicating that the speaker had nothing else to add, as shown in example 2, below, taken from the database collected by Márquez Reiter (2011) but previously not analysed

Example (2) [C=client, A= telephone agent]

- 152 A: *Entonces nos comunicamos más adelante por el tema del acceso al internet desde*
 153 *su habitación,*
- 154 C: *Sí señor.*
- 155 A: *Hablamos con el hotel y nos volvemos a poner en contacto con usted.*
- 156 C: *Sí señor.*
- 157 A: *le avisamos en cuanto antes, aquí figura que hay wifi en las habitaciones*
- 158 C: *Ajá*
- 159 A: *=pero vamos a aclaralo antes no sea cosa [que:*
 160 C: *[Muy bien.*
- 161 A: *No sea así en la práctica*
- 162 C: *=excelente, gracias.*
- 163 A: *Por favor, (.) a las órdenes señor [Carlos*
 164 C: *[gracias pues.*
- 165 A: *Hasta luego,*
- 166 C: *Adiós.*
- 167 A: *Que pase bien*
- 168 C: *Y usted también.*

‘A: We communicate again for the internet access in your room

C: Yes Sir

A: We talk to the hotel and we contact you again

C: Yes Sir

A: We will contact you as soon as possible, here it says that the rooms have wifi

C: Yes

A: but let’s make sure beforehand, just in case

C: fine

A: it is not like that

C: Excellent, thank you

A: please, at your service, Mr Carlos

C: thank you then

A: see you later

C: Good-bye

A: Best wishes

C: to you too’

In addition to the way in which the participants' differing formulaic expressions may affect the trajectory of the encounters, different social expectancies are also sometimes verbalised by means of metapragmatic comments and thus oriented to as marked behaviour, as illustrated below by example 3. This intercultural episode was taken from fieldnotes conducted during silent listening at the same call centre. The agent, Mariana, a speaker of River Plate Spanish who worked at the call centre to fund her postgraduate studies was in the middle of a call with a Mexican client. Following procedures on answering the call she proffered her first name to the client (e.g. *Vacaciones Inolvidables buenos días habla Mariana en qu le puedo ayudar*)

Example (3)

- 1 Mariana: *Señor González de la Peña tenemos lugar en la Maya Grand para [cuatro personas]*
- 2 Client: *[Licenciado] González de la Peña, Mariana*
- 3 Mariana: *Doctora Mariana Pérez*
- 4 Client: *(0.8)*
- 5 Mariana: *Señor Licenciado González de la Peña, sigue usted en línea,*

'Mariana: Mr González de la Peña we have vacancies at Maya Grand for [four people]
Client: [Licenciado]
González de la Peña, Mariana
Mariana: Doctor Mariana Pérez
Client: (0.8)
Mariana: Mr Licenciado González de la Peña, are you still online?'

Example (3) showcases differences in the participants' cultural expectations of what constitutes an appropriate degree of deference in a business environment where the interactional parties are unfamiliar with one another and the agent's role is to service the client's needs. While Mariana, in line with her experience of working with Mexican clients, had addressed the caller deferentially by means of *usted* and, her use of vocatives was preceded by a title (*Señor González de la Peña*), the title was considered inappropriate by the client. The perceived lack of deference from the agent to the client is constructed as some sort of 'anomaly' (line 2) (Wolf, 2015) by the client. It is observed in the client's repair at line 2 to which the agent reacts with a counter in which she repairs the vocative used by the client to address her. In so doing, she resists what she perceives as unequal treatment while nonetheless respecting the client's wishes (line 5). In keeping with example (1) above the client and the agent in example (3), all claim self-identity in light of what they interpret as an inadequate categorisation of themselves by others.

Similar perspectives emerged in interviews with employees from the call centre. In these, participants reflected on their lived experience working with other Spanish-speaking Latin Americans. Among intercultural significant episodes, the participants reported the difficulty that the Colombian and Venezuelan *vis à vis* the Argentinean clientele have to decline service offers or express their lack of interest in sales pitches in a direct manner. Some of the author's analyses thus dwell on the intercultural ambivalent meaning of *sí* and *no*, respectively and on observed patterns of informality which were evaluated by Colombian, Mexican and Venezuelan employees as indicative of lack of respect. A case in point is offered in the words of a Venezuelan call centre supervisor:

Example (4)

Nos vas a creerme pero hay veces, en realidad pasa muy a menudo que cuando los agentes están en línea me llaman la atención para que los ayude tronando los dedos. Es insólito. No se les ocurre poner al cliente en espera y venir a hablarme directamente. ¿Qué piensan, que soy? ¡¿Un perro?!

‘You won’t believe me but at times, actually they do it quite often, when the agents are online, they call my attention asking for help by clicking their fingers. It’s unbelievable. It doesn’t occur to them to leave the client on hold and come and talk to me directly. What do they think I am?! A dog??!’

Besides these assessments which indicate differences in what may be culturally appropriate in a given context, both agents and supervisors explained that clients from different parts of the Spanish-speaking world used different strategies to obtain a better service (Márquez Reiter 2013 on fabricated ignorance). Their intercultural perceptions were informed by their lived experience of contact with one another at the call centre. Indeed, experiential knowledge of living with different cultures has been shown to be particularly relevant in contexts of transnationalism such as migration and tourism. The notion of knowledge was recently drawn upon by Patiño-Santos and Márquez Reiter (2018) in their study of Latin Americans in a multicultural district in London. Their ethnographic study shows the ways a group of culturally diverse Spanish-speaking Latin Americans categorise each other on the basis of the knowledge of one another’s behaviour that circulates among members of this social group. Such knowledge is ‘hearsay’ and based on stereotypes of one another. Patiño-Santos and Márquez Reiter note that “[T]hose who construct themselves as “knowledgeable” subjects spread ideas and beliefs about the “others”, based on their everyday encounters with other Latin American migrants who do not share the same linguistic or migratory trajectories or cultural experiences” (2018, p. 4). In view of this, the authors put forward the notion of “banal interculturalism” to refer to the type of knowledge that emerges in the discourses that circulate among migrants about other migrants in diaspora.

The notion of banality has also proved useful in analysing transnational contexts such as those resulting from tourism (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010, 2011 for sociolinguistic studies on tourism with a focus on English). Within Spanish, the language of tourism and issues of politeness have received some attention (see, for example, Calvi, 2012; Fernández Amaya, Hernández López and Garcés-Conejos, 2014, respectively), however, interculturality in contexts of tourism remains unexplored. Recent studies on globalisation processes have examined the cultural practices by which tourism is organized and experienced, as well as identified some of its communicative practices. According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) “tourism is a key site for the study of human communicative processes – most obviously with regards intercultural contact and exchange, but also in terms of the circulation of linguistic “material” (p.4). The way knowledge about culture and its representations are transmitted plays a key role in shaping the traveller and tourist experience, since they tend to form themselves ideas of the landscapes and cultures they will visit before travelling. Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) analysed instances of tourism discourse, such as TV travellers’ programmes, guidebooks, and the greeting game in tourist tours. In the words Thurlow and Jaworski (2011, p.5) “The experience in tourism is semiotic in nature, since the tourist prepares the knowledge before travelling and then travels to collect the memories, in form of images mostly, of the

experience which was recalled and confirmed by his experience”. The knowledge of the visited landscapes and cultures is thus based on images featured in advertising and brochures, and enact instances of banal globalisation.

A case in point from our own database which comprises over 120 travellers’ Trip Advisor reviews and responses of hotel stays in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Spain, reveals the banal knowledge of the tourist destination that the traveller has *vis à vis* their lived experience therein. As shown in example 5 below, the traveller’s tourist experience is often juxtaposed against their knowledge of the chosen destination and their identity as global and therefore knowledgeable travellers.

Example (5) [Tripadvisor review and response, Hotel Meliá Varadero, Cuba]



Rutifruti

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Opinión escrita hace 2 días mediante dispositivo móvil (23/10/2018)

Decepción

Estuvimos 4 noches en este hotel, como parte del combinado Habana/Varadero contratado en la agencia de viajes. Independientemente de que el clima no nos acompañó, he de decir que este hotel es lo peor que he encontrado en mis múltiples viajes al Caribe.

El hotel se ve nuevo, con habitaciones bonitas e instalaciones a priori adecuadas. Hay que caminar un poquito y cruzar un puente para llegar a la playa, ya que ésta se encuentra al otro lado de la carretera.

Lo peor, con diferencia es el buffet; yo entiendo que hay restricciones en la comida, pero nunca jamás había estado en un buffet libre de un resort 5 estrellas y me había quedado con hambre. Nunca. Las personas alojadas allá teníamos todas la misma queja. Variedad nula (papas fritas congeladas, hamburguesas de burger barato, y puntualmente arroz y frijoles), calidad nefasta, presentación inexistente. Cómo puede ser que no hubiera fruta, ni zumo en el desayuno. A veces había yogur líquido en una jarra....un desastre absoluto.

No puedo hablar mal de la calidad de los tragos, puesto que sólo bebo ron, cerveza y agua, y eso es rico, en Cuba, pero de nuevo, la presentación deja mucho que desear. Y agua para la habitación, también en vaso de plástico????

En resumen, no recomendaría este hotel, no entiendo cómo la cadena Meliá permite estos estándares de calidad en sus hoteles.

Yeinsy J, Community Manager en Hotel Meliá Marina Varadero, respondió a esta opinión Respondido: ayer

Estimado Rutifruti:

Sentimos enormemente que su experiencia con nosotros no haya sido satisfactoria. Todo el equipo se esfuerza al máximo para poder ofrecer una estancia de ensueño a nuestros huéspedes y nos entristece saber que en su caso no lo hemos conseguido.

Sabemos que el clima es un punto muy relevante durante las vacaciones de cualquier cliente en un resort de playa y teniendo en cuenta que en este sentido no tuvieron suerte, podemos entender hayan tenido un mal comienzo.

Sin embargo nos ha sorprendido mucho su comentario acerca del buffet y queremos hacerle saber algunos detalles al respecto. Siguiendo precisamente los estándares correspondientes contamos invariablemente con tres tipos de carnes: cerdo, pollo y res y a ello se adicionan tres tipos más de carnes que alternan entre conejo, pavo y cordero. De la misma manera se encuentran siempre tres variedades de pescado, cinco variedades de embutidos y cuatro de queso. Las modalidades de cocción de estos alimentos también varía y permanece unido a ello la plancha para aquellas personas que así lo prefieran.

No obstante a ello rogamos acepte nuestras disculpas por no haber conseguido alcanzar sus expectativas. La opinión de nuestros huéspedes es fundamental para nosotros y nos ayuda a conocer sus impresiones y valoraciones, siendo la mejor manera para determinar dónde debemos concentrar nuestros esfuerzos para superarnos cada día.

Esperamos tener otra oportunidad para demostrarle que sí podemos cumplir con sus expectativas y hacerle pasar unas vacaciones inolvidables con nosotros.

Sinceramente

Yeinsy Jiménez

Community Manager

The reviewer, Rutifruti, presents him/herself as an experienced traveller who is an expert in the Caribbean (“el peor que he encontrado en mis múltiples viajes al Caribe”/‘the worst I have encountered in my numerous trips to the Caribbean’) and understands what qualifies a hotel as 5*. It is the frequency and supposed range of travelling within the area and his/her past experience at other Meliá hotels that has vested the traveller with the epistemic authority to evaluate the service received as substandard. Interestingly, the traveller’s misgivings indicate, on the one hand, an awareness of the local environment (e.g. the shortage of consumer goods in a country with economic restrictions such as Cuba) and, on the other, the global expectations of a 5* hotel experience regardless of local structural conditions (“yo entiendo que hay restricciones en la comida”, “pero nunca jamás había estado en un buffet libre de un resort 5 estrellas y me había quedado con hambre”/‘I understand that there are food restrictions, but I had never been to a 5 star resort buffet and had felt hungry’). It is the image and lived experience of the latter coupled with the traveller’s constructed image of the country, culture and stereotypical habits (“ron, cerveza y agua”/ ‘rum, beer and water’) (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2011) that makes his/her on the ground experience difficult to understand and unacceptable. Global expectations are resorted to legitimise the critical assessment of the service received resulting thus in the erasure of the lived local cultural circumstances as valid.

As Thurlow and Jaworski (2011) point out, the key of the tourist experience is the expectations projected over the visited site, in this case the hotel’s website and brand by which Meliá is known, and how they tally or not with reality. “Tourism seldom merely represents cultural difference or reflects existing socioeconomic relations within and between countries; instead, it is instrumental in producing the very culture that tourists set out to know, and in (re)organizing relations between groups, communities and entire nations” Thurlow & Jaworski (2011: 4). The intercultural experience and, more specifically, the creation of an ‘interculture space’ is resisted and challenged in favour of expected homogeneity. The hotel’s response,

unlike the customer's review, is constructed from a local rather than a global perspective (i.e. a branch of the Meliá chain of hotels). That a range of four different types of meat (i.e. carne, pollo, res and an alternate fourth one), including fish and dairy products was offered indicates that this, contrary to what the customer claimed, represented a good spread.

Example 5 illustrates how globalisation and its multinational corporations reshape the potentiality of intercultural exchange and its expectations.

5. Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have offered a discussion of the studies that have (in) directly examined intercultural communication in Spanish-speaking contexts. We did this by presenting a review of those studies that have tangentially focused on Spanish: contrastive pragmatic studies and demonstrated that the patterns observed cross-culturally cannot necessarily predict the communicative patterns that may emerge in intercultural contact. In so doing, we distinguished between cross-cultural and intercultural communication and offered a definition of the latter which departs from the accepted view that intercultural communication entails the encounter between speakers who do not share the same language. Instead, we showed that interculturality is constructed through interaction and that it can entail contact between speakers who share the same basic language but come from varied backgrounds. We have demonstrated this with the aid of examples which illustrate that when potential differences emerge in intercultural exchanges these cannot be necessarily attributed to questions of belonging to a given national culture.

Despite continuing research in the pragmatics of Spanish, as well as in other languages, that focuses on national cultures as represented by national languages, the traditional understanding of language with clear distinctions between speaker's language varieties and national, regional or geographical identifications is, in our view, untenable especially in the light of the rise and growth of globalisation and transnational mobility.

We have contended that in the interconnected world in which we now live where Spanish occupies an international and arguably a global role, interculturality is often informed by the lived experience of contact that individuals from different backgrounds have of each other and, that this is especially relevant in transnational settings. Contact between people who were previously separated by physical borders is now an everyday reality. In today's globalised world, direct knowledge of each other's cultures by way of lived physical or virtual experiences inform much of our daily exchanges with cultural others. In spite of this knowledge, intercultural experiences are often challenged in favour of an artificial homogeneity grounded in banalism.

In short, intercultural communication is not a question of "beam me up" but one of that requires the self-consciousness of understanding that we "are all astronauts on ...some kind of [journey]" (*Star Trek*).

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¹ Research in this area has, nonetheless, pointed out that indirectness does not necessarily equate with politeness (e.g. Thomas, 1983; Blum-Kulka, 1987; Márquez Reiter, 2000).

² Intercultural communication is rarely an encounter between equals.

³ Josep Lluís Carod was then leader of the political party Esquerra Republicana, which supports the independence process of Catalonia from the Spanish State. The interviews had an innovative format within the genre of the political interview as the questions were formulated by ordinary citizens, and therefore reflected the “common peoples” concerns and opinions.

⁴ Radio Televisión Española.

⁵ See also Calvo Pérez (2001) for studies on language contact between Spanish and indigenous languages. These studies, however, are primarily concerned with the sociolinguistics of language contact. See Zimmermann (1999) and Zimmermann & Bierbach (1997) explore intercultural encounters in Latin American contexts where there is language contact between Spanish and indigenous languages.