

**How language shapes interpersonal distance:
An analysis of pronominal forms of address
in Spanish, Polish and Italian**

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to compare the formal and functional aspects of pronominal forms of address in three languages: Spanish, Polish and Italian. The classic typology of the category analysed divides it in two groups: the T-forms applied in the conversations between the participants of symmetrical relations and the V-forms considered reverential and asymmetrical. The present study demonstrates and analyses the pronominal systems in two Romance languages, Spanish and Italian, and a Slavic language, Polish. We classify the pronouns according to the confidentiality/distance parameter, showing the similarities and differences between the formal characteristics, as well as the socio-cultural factors that determine the election of determined pronominal form of address

Keywords

pronouns, forms of address, Spanish, Italian, Polish

Językowe konfigurowanie interpersonalnego dystansu: analiza pronominalnych form adresatywnych w języku hiszpańskim, polskim i włoskim

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest porównanie formalnych i funkcjonalnych aspektów pronominalnych form adresatywnych w trzech językach: hiszpańskim, polskim i włoskim. Klasyczna typologia analizowanej kategorii dzieli ją na dwie grupy: formy typu T stosowane w rozmowach pomiędzy uczestnikami o relacjach symetrycznych oraz formy typu V uznawane za wyraz szacunku i asymetryczności. Niniejsze badanie przedstawia i analizuje systemy pronominalne w dwóch językach romańskich, hiszpańskim i włoskim, oraz jednym słowiańskim, języku polskim. Klasyfikujemy zaimki według parametru poufność/dystans, ukazując podobieństwa i różnice pomiędzy cechami formalnymi, jak i czynnikami społeczno-kulturowymi, które warunkują wybór określonej pronominalnej formy adresatywnej.

Słowa kluczowe

zaimki, formy adresatywne, język hiszpański, język włoski, język polski

1. Introduction

In the course of interaction, participants establish certain relations that are usually reflected by the linguistic mechanisms they apply. One of these interpersonal strategies is the use of the forms of address based on a range of socio-cultural factors that demonstrate the position of each interlocutor in a certain society or within the interaction. In the present article we propose an analysis of the pronominal forms of address used in Spanish, Polish and Italian. The aim of the study is to show what are the formal and functional aspects of the forms of address in these languages. What is more, we propose a socio-pragmatic interpretation of the systems and the changes that they suffer based on Politeness Theory (especially the proposal

of Diana Bravo 2003, 2004) and the concept of dominant interactive style (according to the model proposed and developed by Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996 and Baran 2010). By contrasting three languages we intend to demonstrate that in every society the pronominal system indicates different social order and socially recognized values. Furthermore, the study shows that typological kinship does not necessarily indicate the similarity between the forms of address systems. As we will see, the Italian and Polish schemes seem far more alike in comparison with the Spanish one.

By applying the model of dominant interactive style, we are referring to the phenomena on which Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994 2005) bases her theory of *communicative ethos*.¹ Both conversational norms or discursive and interactive mechanisms seem to create a relational network that corresponds to a certain sociopragmatic logic (the term *interpersonal territory* has to be analysed taking into consideration a range of social and pragmatic elements that determine each other). The concept of *communicative ethos* is delimited by the following typological criteria (Baran 2012b: 10-18): 1) quantitative and qualitative weight of a word (verbosity), 2) type of interpersonal relations, 3) linguistic politeness concept, 4) identity concept, 5) level of ritualisation, and 6) emotivity (interpreted as determined interactive strategic actions, and not an individual exteriorization of affective states).

Comparative studies of the speech acts in different linguistic communities or analyses of the linguistic politeness strategies applied in distinct speech communities seem to demonstrate that cultural systems do not differ when it comes to the type of

¹ The concept derived from the notion of interpersonal rhetoric that appears, among others, in the works of Leech (1983). It considers a number of interactional strategies that characterize the interactive style of members of a certain speech community. At the same time, those strategies reflect the social and cultural values typical for a certain community. The term *communicative style*, a part of interactional rhetoric, can be interpreted as a set of linguistic actions applied in the course of social communication that characterize a certain linguistic, ethnic or cultural community.

values that are manifested on the level of creating the social universe. What does differ in every culture is the scope of the influence of the values exposed and a specific (frequently hierarchic) relation between the elements. Hernández Sacristán (2003: 39-44) describes the dynamics of the interpersonal relations, constituting a part of a general social dynamics, through the following dimensions:

- a) harmony vs. rivalry,²
- b) solidarity vs. the non imposing principle,³
- c) authenticity vs. ceremoniality,⁴
- d) affectivity vs. restraint principle,⁵
- e) liberty vs. obligatority.⁶

Taking under consideration the premises presented, we sustain that the forms of address can be considered a very sensitive parameter that demonstrates the dynamics of such relations. Consequently, a contrastive, typological-functional analysis of the forms of address pronouns that we undertake in this article can reflect the real impact of the principles of: harmony, solidarity, authenticity or affectivity (and their contrary elements). In this respect, the aim of the present study is:

² Although only on the strategical dimension, the conversational expression of agreement and disagreement can be influenced by different sociocultural parameters: the level of assumed verbally manifested unanimity is related to a minor or major representation of the principle of harmony.

³ In some cases, the universal principle of communicative cooperation has to include, for example, the scope of individual autonomy (the concept of interactive territory is conceptualised heterogeneously).

⁴ The level of ritualisation of the verbal exchange is not equal in every speech community.

⁵ Emotivity of the communicative acts undergoes some cultural scripts. Verbal and paraverbal codes and some proxemic signs demonstrate the heterogeneity of the ways of exteriorizing emotions and feelings.

⁶ Existence of certain social norms, constituting some schemes of interactional behaviour, does not exclude the exceptions, that can be very differently evaluated.

- to mark the sociopragmatic conventions that determine the conversational-interactional actualization of the pronominal forms of address in the analysed speech communities;⁷
- to determine to what degree the communities classified as representants of the positive politeness model (what concerns the three communities examined) have developed not always corresponding mechanisms, by implication we investigate the social perception of the distance/closeness parameter.

The present study is not a corpus study, although we do evoke some examples from corpora and other investigators' works.

2. Forms of address

The basis for numerous studies on the pronominal forms of address is Brown and Gilman's theory (1960) which introduces the conceptual opposition of *power* and *solidarity* conceived from a psychosocial perspective. The concept of *power* reflects the control that certain people take (or may take) over others in a particular interactive situation. In that case, the interlocutors tend to apply the asymmetrical pronouns – the part that is in control uses a more confidential form (like *ty* in Polish or *tú* in Spanish), while the person that is controlled uses some reverential forms (like *pan/pani* or *usted*). The category of *power* is provoked by a range of socio-cultural factors such as position in a social or economic hierarchy, age or sex. The *solidarity* parameter reflects the situation in which both of the speakers occupy the same social position and maintain certain kind of relation. In that case, they apply the symmetric formulas like *ty* in Polish or *tú* in Spanish.

Throughout the years societies have changed so the classical dichotomy should be enriched in the third, special type of *power* relation – the situation in which one of the speakers occupies a higher position in the social hierarchy than the

⁷ We use the term *speech community* on purpose, as, when it comes to Spanish, our analysis is limited to the European variety – Peninsular Spanish.

other, but, according to the generally accepted rules, they both apply the V forms (like *usted* or *pan/pani*). The typical asymmetrical relation of power seems to have disappeared in the majority of social contexts, although it is maintained in some very specific situations (for example, while talking to children).

Brown and Gilman's theory constitutes a basis for the research of forms of address, though we consider it should be revised and in some aspects modified. Firstly, as we have already depicted, we consider the categories of *power* and *solidarity* as dynamic and constantly changing due to the social changes and the social perception of hierarchic positioning. This means that the research on the use of pronominal forms should be regularly completed and developed. What is more, the analysed parameters are interactionally dependent – not only is the social position that affects the possible relation, but there are also some interactional parameters that should be taken under consideration while analysing concrete pronominal uses, such as time and place, the presence of other participants or the general purpose of the interaction, among others. As an example of the interactional dependence we can mention the academic situation in which two professors who occupy the same hierarchy position and apply the solidarity T-forms, during a faculty reunion, switch to the V-forms as it is commonly accepted verbal behaviour.

We should also outline that the *power* and *solidarity* parameters are strictly related to a concrete socio-cultural environment. That means that even though the T/V dichotomy appears in two language systems, it is not always applied under the same conditions. We believe that societies can be divided into two types: in which prevail the hierarchical order and the ones with the dominating solidarity social structure. Each of these tendencies is reflected by a certain distribution of T/V pronouns.

The question of pronominal forms of address is frequently associated with politeness theory, introduced by Brown and Levinson (1978) and developed by a great number of special-

ists (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996, Bravo 2003, 2004, Hernández Flores 2002, 2004, Kita 2005, Albelda and Barros 2013, among others) assumes that the interaction is an interpersonal play in which every participant is trying to prevent their and their interlocutor's *face*, constantly threatened by the *Face Threatening Acts*, by introducing some specific verbal expressions. There are two types of verbal politeness: positive (which prevents the speakers from being excluded from a certain group) and negative (which prevents them from being imposed by other participants of an interaction). According to that theory, the T-forms could be considered as positive politeness phenomena (as they provoke a feeling of solidarity and equality between the speakers), while the V-forms represent the negative politeness (they help to keep the distance between the interlocutors). Nevertheless, our intention is to show that T/V opposition does not always reflect the positive/negative politeness dichotomy. Recent politeness theory studies show that politeness rules vary according to the situation, context and society – which means that, under certain circumstances, also the V-forms can be considered as solidarity pronouns as they reflect that the speakers share the same values and belong to the same group.

In the following sections we will briefly discuss the formal and socio-pragmatic aspects of the pronominal forms of address in three languages: Spanish, Italian and Polish. As we observe, they share a number of similarities, both in the organization and the interactional meaning. Nevertheless, we will also demonstrate that every society builds its own particular hierarchy system which is reflected in the use of particular pronouns during everyday conversations.

3. Spanish, Italian and Polish: systems of pronominal forms

In the present work we will apply the *confidence/distance* parameters that we believe demonstrate the actual state of art.

The confidence pronouns reflect a close relation between the speakers, while the distance pronouns mark a less intimate relation. The distance between the speakers, as we intent to demonstrate, depends not only on many socio-pragmatic variables, like the position in hierarchy, the familiar bounds or the age, but it is also created in the course of interaction. What is more, the *confidence/distance* opposition reflects the inner structure of a certain community. That means that some communities are more eager to apply the confidence or distance forms, because they reflect their dominant interactive style.

The Spanish system is known for the diversity of pronouns systems depending on the diatopic factors (see, among others, Almeida and Mendoza, 1992; Betolotti, 2015; Sampedro, 2021). Concerning the geographical extent of the Spanish dominium, it comes as no surprise that it presents a variety of subsystems particular for a determinate community. The dominant system in many parts of Spain and included in the “standard” version of Spanish divides the pronouns the following way:

Table 1
Spanish I

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Tú	Vosotros/as
Distance	Usted	Ustedes

This is the only system in which the confidence/formality parameter is reflected in the plural pronouns, as in the rest of the systems those notions seem neutralized (there is only one form *ustedes* used in both confidential and formal situations). Apart from the “standard” system, frequently taught during Spanish classes to the non-native speakers, there are several others schemes, all collected in the work of Fontanella de Weinberg (1999: 1401-1408).

Table 2
Spanish II

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Tú	Ustedes
Distance	Usted	Ustedes

The second system is characteristic for some of the parts of the Iberic Peninsula, such as western Andalucía, some parts of the regions of Córdoba, Jaen and Granada, in Canary Islands, Mexico, Peru, a vast part of Colombia, Venezuela and the Antilles.

Table 3
Spanish IIIa

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Vos ~ Tú	Ustedes
Distance	Usted	Ustedes

Table 4
Spanish IIIb

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Intimicy	Vos	Ustedes
Confidence	Tú	Ustedes
Distance	Usted	Ustedes

The third systems can be divided into two types. In both of them the pronoun *vos* is present, although indicating slightly different notions. According to Fontanella de Wienberg (1999: 1404-1405) the IIIa type can be encountered in the area of Chile, Bolivia, the south of Peru, some parts of Colombia, western Venezuela, the region between Panamá y Costa Rica and a Mexican state Chiapas. The type IIIb, on the other hand, is characteristic for Uruguay. As we can see, the Uruguayan system consists of three elements, therefore three levels of confidentiality. Like in other cases, the pronoun *usted* reflects the higher level of formality. When it comes to the opposition *vos/tú*, the first one is used between the speakers of a high

level of intimacy, while *tú* demonstrates more confident though not that intimate relations.

Table 5
Spanish IV

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Vos	Ustedes
Distance	Usted	Ustedes

The last system is often used in Argentina, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Paraguay. This particular type does not contain the form *tú* which is substituted by *vos*.

When it comes to the Italian system, it consists of the following elements:

Table 6
Italian

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Tu	Voi
Distance	Voi/Lei/Ella	Voi/Loro

Although it does not present such diversity as the Spanish system, some of the forms are problematic. Firstly, the form *lei* presents ambiguity as it manifests two meanings – it is not only an addressative pronoun that indicates formality, but can also indicate third person, singular, feminine as in the sentence *lei è stanca* – ‘she is tired’. As an addressative pronoun it can be applied both to a male or female interlocutor: *Signora Rossi, lei lavora a Roma?*/*Signor Rossi, lei lavora a Roma?* (‘Signora Rossi, you work in Rome?/Signor Rossi, you work in Rome?’).

Among the formal singular forms, it is *lei* which is considered the most typical realization of *italiano standard*, while the *ella* form is highly formal, used mainly in some administrative texts. According to Bresin (2019), *voi* can be interpreted as an archaism or a French borrowing. Nevertheless, some linguists like Niculescu (1974: 26) consider the *voi* form as a regional-

ism applied in some southern parts of Italy. In the regions where both of the forms *voi* and *lei* are maintained, *lei* is considered as more formal, applied in some situations that require the highest level of reverence. A parallel situation has been observed in the *voi/loro* opposition as plural forms of address. As acknowledged by many (Inglese 2002, Sobrero 2011, Formentelli and Hajek 2015), the pronoun *loro* is used exclusively in some highly formal situations, while *voi* is the most common form addressed as a reverence indicator to multiple interlocutors.

Table 7 presents the Polish pronoun system.

Table 7

Polish

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Confidence	Ty	Wy
Distance	Pan/pani	Państwo

As we can observe, Polish pronominal system does not vary diatopically. On the other hand, the forms *pan/pani/państwo* present some formal ambiguity (see Wierzbicka 2016). Most grammars consider *pan/pani/państwo* not as pronouns, but as nouns: for example, in many contexts, these forms can be translated as *Sir/Madame* (for example, while accompanying names or surnames in phrases like *pani Kasia*, *państwo Kowalscy*, and they can also be used as equivalents of *a woman* or *a man* in sentences like *Rozmawiałem z tamtym panem* – ‘I have talked to that man’). Nevertheless, many investigators, Łaziński (2006:15-17) among them, considers *pan/pani/państwo*, as pronouns that express verbal politeness (such is the case in the sentences like *Czego się pani napije?* – ‘What will you (formal form) drink?’).

4. Analysis

As mentioned above, the confidentiality/distance parameter is present in all of the languages analysed. What significantly differs is the situational context in which they appear. In these three languages the distance forms are used in highly formal situations in which it is of a great value to mark the distance between the interlocutors. We refer to most of the public acts in which interact the representants of some respectful institutions, such as ministers, chairmen, politicians, etc. Nevertheless, in numerous situations, the confidentiality/distance parameter is applied differently, according to a certain sociocultural pattern. In this section we present a selection of contexts in which every community seems to present some peculiarities. Although the examples presented do not encompass all of the possible differences, we believe that they reveal some characteristics of a dominant interactive style of the communities described.

4.1. Spanish *tuteo*

During the last decades, a growing tendency of *tuteo* (the use of T-forms) is observed, especially in Peninsular Spanish⁸ (Wolarska 2004, Granvik 2007). This means that in all types of conversations, also with the speakers that occupy a high position in the social hierarchy, it is totally acceptable to apply the T-forms. Granvik (2007: 238) demonstrates that the distance forms are used only while speaking to the elderly. This indicates that the factor of social hierarchy seems to lose its strength when it comes to the Spanish speaking society.

At this point, Polish and Italian communities seem to greatly differ from the Spanish speakers. In both communities, while speaking with the representants of higher social positions the V-forms are the most appropriate ones. Among the contex-

⁸ In other regions the V-forms are still maintained more frequently than in Peninsular Spanish.

tual situations in which the Spanish systems significantly differs from the Italian and Polish ones there are the conversations between the teachers and students at school and Universities. In Italian and in Polish it is obligatory for students to apply the V-forms, despite other socio-pragmatic factors (like age – even though the teacher is very young, the students are obliged to use the *lei* or *pan/pani* pronouns). What is more, in order to emphasize the hierarchy position, the Polish pronominal system is often complemented with the specific titles usually related to one's office. Such a phenomena is called *tytułomania* - 'obsessions of titles', because the frequency of use of the professional titles seems higher than in other speech communities (Bogusławski 1996: 84-85, Łaziński 2006: 137-138, Huszcza 2005, Baran 2012a). In that respect, the Polish system seems highly asymmetrical – one participant of the conversation marks the higher position of their interlocutor, while the other one uses only the pronominal forms. The phenomena described is especially characteristic for the academic settings – the students are obliged to use not only the pronominal reverence form, but also the academic titles. However, as Łaziński (2006: 76-78) mentions, the use of academic titles seems less frequent than in the past, by complementing the pronominal system with the nominal structures a higher level of distance is accomplished.

In Spanish, on the other hand, the scholastic context does not require the use of *usted* – on the contrary, the pronoun *tú* is applied both by the students and the teachers (Sampedro 2021). In higher education institutions, like Universities, V-forms are used, if the professor with whom the interaction is undertaken is highly respectful or much older than the students. Nevertheless, in a great majority of University situations (during classes, tutorials, etc.) the student-professor interactions are based on the symmetrical T-forms.⁹

⁹ The T-forms applied in scholar systems are well demonstrated in literature, movies and series and constitute a difficult challenge for the Polish translators. For example, in one of the Netflix series "El desorden que dejas".

The other great difference between the use of confidence/distance forms in the analysed language systems regards situations in which the interlocutors are strangers, do not know each other. In Polish and Italian communities we observe the tendency to apply the V-forms during different interactions usually in public surroundings (in restaurants, bars, shops, supermarkets, etc.). The socio-pragmatic rules seem to change when the interlocutors are both relatively young – more and more often we can witness the T-forms in conversations between strangers that are of the same age. Nevertheless, still the most frequent and “safe” form that will certainly not offend anyone are the V-forms. Grybosiova (1998) sustains that such changes are based on the extralinguistic, sociocultural premises and should be studied taking under consideration new patterns followed by the societies.¹⁰

In Spanish, on the other hand, the factor of knowing or not knowing the interlocutor does not influence to such a degree the election of the form. It is generally accepted to use the T-form while speaking in public spaces, except from the situations in which the interlocutors are willing to mark the distance. Roselló (2018: 256), who analyses the forms of address

the main character is a teacher, so a great part of the series consists of teacher-students interactions. The Polish translators have maintained the T-forms, although it does not necessarily reflect the Polish communicative style. On the other hand, it seems that, when possible, they introduced some impersonal forms. For example, when one student asks the teacher “¿Me puedes contestar una pregunta?” (“Can you give me an answer to one question?”) it is translated into “Mogę o coś zapytać?” (“Can I have a question?”) which avoids using any forms of address. We believe that such changes reflect the difficulties encountered while translating the Spanish conversations in this particular context.

¹⁰ For Grybosiova, the change from T-forms to V-forms is a result of a fascination of Polish society with the English culture and language. She sustains that the general patterns followed by the society are “foreign=good” and “new=good”. Although the influence of English and American cultures is undeniable, we believe that the societies, cultures, languages and interpersonal relations change, because the change is one of their internal characteristics. There might be some influence of the expansion of English in the world, although, we suspect that it cannot be considered a dominant factor, as, despite the impact of foreign cultures, the interactive style is a dynamic concept that constantly evolves during everyday conversations.

basing on the oral corpus PRESEEA, affirms that the data collected confirm the unmarkedness of the T-form respect to the V-form. As he states, “*tú* es la forma no marcada, la más usual al dirigirse a la otra persona” (“*tú* is the unmarked form, the most usual when speaking directly to other person”). Sometimes the unknown interlocutors apply the V-forms, for example, if the age gap between the interlocutors seems significant or if at least one of the participant’s intention is to underline the distance. Such is the case of the places that wish to be considered as luxurious, like some restaurants or shops with expensive products. In those establishments the waiters or sales assistants are used to apply the V-forms, even while speaking with young interlocutors. Nevertheless, in such situations the pronouns *usted/ustedes* seem to marked, introducing some extra interactive and social meanings.

4.2. Plural forms

The pronominal forms of address system in three languages analysed present a certain peculiarity – a diminishing confidence/distance dichotomy in the pronouns directed to a multiple recipient. In the Spanish standard system, we can observe the opposition between *vosotros* that include the confidence notion and *ustedes* which marks a certain distance. Nevertheless, as we can see in the tables above, the rest of the systems does not include such a dichotomy applying only one form in both context – *ustedes*. It seems interesting that the form chosen is the reverence one. Nevertheless, we believe that regardless of the form, the simplification of the system reinforces the solidarity relations between the speakers – it indicates that, while talking to the plural recipient, all of the variables that are taken under consideration do not apply. Probably, some sociocultural factors are reflected by other linguistic or discourse mechanisms (like lexical units or the topics that are raised in the course of interaction). Nevertheless, the pro-

nominal forms of address in a majority of Spanish speaking areas do not contain the confidence/distance opposition.

The Italian system formally marks the confidentiality/distance opposition by the pronouns *voi/loro*. Nevertheless, the *loro* form is nowadays considered as highly formal and it is applied only in the context of the highest level of respect (Scaglia 2003, Sobrero 2011). It means that in situations in which the use of distant *lei* is required, while speaking with a plural interlocutor, the distant form is substituted with a confidential *voi*

When it comes to the Polish system, the standard sociocultural norms indicate that the pronouns addressed to a plural recipient should formally mark confidence/distance dichotomy. Nevertheless, the everyday uses seem to reflect a constant change in the perception of the adequate forms. Firstly, we can observe an intermediate phenomena which consists in using the *państwo* pronoun with a verb in second person plural, like in the sentence *Zadzwońcie państwo o siódmej*. It can be applied in very formal contexts, like in the following example:

Zwróćcie państwo uwagę, że jeżeli taką ustawę przyjmimy, jej realizacja może być dla społeczeństwa wielce kontrowersyjna, zwłaszcza w kontekście wojny z Iranem.¹¹

The fragment above constitutes a part of speech during the Parliament session. In such a highly formal situation, the speaker uses the form “zwróćcie uwagę” (‘pay attention’) using the verb in second person plural form and a V-pronoun. Such a peculiar mechanism in which the verb does not conjugate according to the pronoun applied is recently quite often in some semi-formal situations (in which the V-form seems too distant and the T-form too confidential). It also occurs if the speaker for some reasons wishes to reduce the interpersonal

¹¹ NKJP, Sprawozdanie z 8. posiedzenia Senatu RP część 2, wersja robocza, 4. Kadencja, <http://www.nkjp.uni.lodz.pl> (17/11/2021).

distance maintained with other participants of the conversation.

It is also possible to apply the pronoun *wy* in situations in which it is the V-form that is considered the most appropriate due to the socio-cultural norms. For example, it can be observed that while talking to strangers, the Polish speaking participants apply the pronoun *wy* as a sign of reducing the distance and making the conversation less formal. It can be observed in the fragment below:

- *Tak. By w 1/16 nie trafić na słynnego Szweda Ljungberga. Co się opłaciło i skończyło srebrnym medalem.*

* *Co robicie, by zmienić przepisy, który prowadzą do prostytucji sportu?*

- *Piszemy, posyłamy projekty a działacze FILA milczą.*¹²

This is a fragment of an interview with sports coach Józef Tracz published in *Gazeta Wroclawska*. The journalist uses the T-form *wy* (“co robicie” – ‘what are you doing’) and not the V-form *państwo*, probably in order to reduce the distance and make the conversation more direct.

This brief analysis of the forms used in three languages shows us that the plural forms of address present the tendency to reduce the opposition confidentiality/distance by limiting the use of the pronouns that reflect the distance. Every language does it to a different degree and with different strategies. The Italian system presents the highest level of reduction, as generally it is the T-form that is used in everyday language, while the V-form is applied in very strict, highly formal situations. The Spanish standard system does include the *vosotros/ustedes* dichotomy, but many dialectal variations limit it to one form *ustedes*. The Polish system seems less susceptible to change, as generally it is the form *Państwo* that is considered the most adequate while speaking to the interlocutors

¹² NKJP, Dlaczego zapaśnik walczy, by przegrać? Odpowiada trener Józef Tracz, <http://www.nkjp.uni.lodz.pl> (17/11/2021).

with whom the distance should be marked. On the other hand, we observe a spreading tendency to apply some specific mechanisms (like the use of verb in the second person plural) in order to underline, perhaps not confidentiality, but at least a reduction of interpersonal distance between the speakers.

4.3. Switching from V-forms into T-forms

As it has been observed, the Spanish pronominal forms of address system differs greatly from the Polish and Italian ones. Among the differences, there is one characteristic that should be mentioned – a way in which the speakers change the forms of address reducing the distance between them. As it has been observed in the Spanish speaking communities, in Spanish the process of modifying the forms of address applied occurs in the course of interaction – the speakers fluently change from *usted* to *tú* pronouns (Blas Arroyo 1994: 43-409, 2005: 318-319, Baran 2012a: 39-41). During one interaction the participant may start with the forms of distance, then pass to the asymmetrical forms (one participant applies the V-form and the other one the T-form) and then they switch to the symmetrical use of confidential forms. In that case, a change from the distance to the confidential forms acts as a contextualization indicator – a modification in the perception of the interaction context is reflected by the change of the forms applied.

On the other hand, in Polish and Italian systems the change of pronominal forms of address is considered a specific ritual accompanied by specific verbal expressions. In both communities, it is the person of a higher social status that is considered the most adequate to initiate the ritual (Benigni and Bates 1977: 159, Renzi *et al.* 2001: 373, Marcjanik 2009: 36-38). What is more, there are specific formulas that introduce the ritual: like *Przejdźmy na ty* in Polish or *Diamoci del tu?* in Italian (they can be translated as ‘Shall we use the T-form?’). In

contrast with the Spanish convention,¹³ in Polish and Italian communities a change of form of address constitutes a deliberate decision based on a specific ritual.

4.4. Socio-pragmatic interpretation

It is a generally observed tendency of the western societies to flatten the social hierarchy ladder what can be easily detected in the linguistic forms and strategies applied. The comparative analysis shows us that within the European societies, each one presents their own peculiarities. The Spanish society seems to represent the equality model in which the solidarity pronouns are preferred. The Polish and Italian systems, on the other hand, still maintain the importance of hierarchic position, although we can observe some mechanisms and strategies in the contemporary use that demonstrate some exemptions from a traditional hierarchic model.

It is curious though that the Italian system is more similar to the Polish than to the Spanish one taking under consideration the typological kinship of the languages. It seems that it is not the typological background that has the major impact on the organization of pronoun forms of address, but the socio-cultural values that are appreciated in a certain speech community.

Although the Spanish community represents the equality model, while Italian and Polish systems opt for the hierarchical one, we strongly believe that it does not reflect the psychological characteristic of the societies in question. Every community applies a certain interactive style which is developed throughout the years. The Spanish community has uncon-

¹³ As demonstrated by Blas Arroyo (1995: 234-235), in Spanish sometimes the selection of a certain form depends on the individual decisions of the speakers. The author cites an example of a conversation during university class between professor and two students: one was applying the T-form and the other one the V-form while referring to the professor. There is no special ritual that introduces the T-form, but a dynamic decision based on the interpersonal perspective adopted by the interlocutors.

sciously chosen the confidentiality model in which the speakers use the mechanisms and strategies that reduce the distance between the speakers. The Polish and Italian systems, on the other hand, are based on the distance interactive style in which the confidential forms are reserved for generally close relations between the speakers. It does not mean that the Spanish society could be evaluated as more nice or polite – the reduction of distance should be simply interpreted as a dominating interactive style.

The politeness theory suggests that in every society there is a set of verbal behaviour rules. As Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004) assumes, the existence of politeness forms is common for every society, but the rules may differ according to the cultural aspects. In order to avoid the *Face Threatening Acts* and putting in danger the interactional success of the conversation, the speakers subordinate to the rules valid in a particular context. If we compare the same situation in two different societies, possibly the politeness strategies applied will be significantly different. For example, we can imagine a typical situation in which one person asks a stranger on the street how to get to a certain place. According to the Italian and Polish politeness norms, the most adequate strategy would be to use the V-forms (*lei* in Italian or *pan/pani* in Polish). Spanish norm, on the other hand, accepts the T-form represented by the pronoun *tú*. It reflects that the dominant interactive style in Polish and Italian maintains certain distance between the speakers that does not know each other, while the Spanish system admits more confidential forms. Although it does not reflect the psychological characteristics of the societies in question, it certainly demonstrates a general interactive pattern.

The use of the V/T-forms according to the politeness rules established in a particular society can be considered a mechanism of a socio-pragmatic concept of *social image of affiliation* proposed by Bravo (2003). By applying the forms (both of confidentiality and distance) due to the socio-pragmatic norms, the speaker demonstrates their wish to belong to a certain co-

community and to be seen as a part of it. Both using a distant form in situations that require the confidential ones and applying the confidential forms that are considered inappropriate in a certain context can be interpreted as the threat on the social image of affiliation of the speaker. What differs one community from the other are the socio-cultural factors that determine on which values the generally accepted politeness rules are to be based.

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