POLITENESS IN *PORTEÑO*: DISCOURSE MARKERS IN BUENOS AIRES SPANISH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson published the first definitive version of politeness theory in 1987, the field of linguistic politeness has accumulated extensive research. This has recently begun to combine nicely with the past several decades of research on linguistics in Spanish-speaking cultures, only recently coming into specific research on politeness in different Spanish-speaking groups. Yet politeness is an invaluable aspect of the study of sociolinguistics studies in any language. The ways in which people communicate within a cultural group provide a wealth of insight into cultural values, preferences, and mindsets, drawing upon a vast variety of contributing factors.

Politeness theory traditionally deals with speakers’ intentions to accomplish the goal of speech acts while still saving face; in other words, to mitigate any face threats that occur in speech acts (Mills, 2003, p. 6). “Face” refers to the image we intend to project of ourselves; Erving Goffman defines it as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself… Face is an image of self-delineation in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman 1955:213). Therefore, many speech acts such as making refusals, giving advice or invitations, or making requests can threaten face; politeness is the multitude of ways speakers choose to mitigate these face threats, as well as to enhance their own or their interlocutor’s (the person with whom they are interacting) face.

Different cultural groups deal differently with face threats and their mitigation; even the perception of what constitutes a face threat varies by language and by culture. While individual personalities contribute to these differences, they are also largely the result of the interlocutors’ different cultural values and perspectives (Alba-Juez, 2007:261). Thus, the purpose of this analysis is to examine manifestations of politeness
in Argentine Spanish (specifically the River Plate Spanish of Buenos Aires) through these cultural acts and perspectives, as well as the social, historical and linguistic backgrounds that have contributed to this linguistic setting.

In addition affecting its history and language, Spanish colonization has heavily influenced Latin American thought. According to Susana Boretti, “Latin American thought… although it comes from the concept of reality brought by the Spanish, ended up permanently modified: the Latin American conscience constitutes a process that, begun on the [Iberian] peninsula, is defining itself as alert, polemic and critical and because of this, subjected to instability, doubt, restlessness, fright and individualism” (Boretti 2001:79). Extensive studies of politeness in Latin American Spanish are still emerging; many appear from the same authors, such as Boretti, Carmen García and Elizabeth Rigatuso for Argentina, and a clearly defined field is still lacking, despite the clear existing space for one. However, even if a balance of varying opinions and observations is still in emergence due to the field’s relative newness, there are still several strong case studies in specific relation to Argentine Spanish, as well as a few strong overviews of the field overall.

In analyzing several case studies related to politeness in Argentine Spanish as well as my own recorded conversations from Buenos Aires, I argue that Argentina’s unique historical and cultural background have contributed to an evermore informal linguistic tradition. Its heavy European and primarily Italian immigration, a conspicuous lack of an indigenous population, the gaucho tradition, and national struggles such as military dictatorships and economic crises have fostered values of confianza (confidence in the sense of trust or closeness), reciprocity, generosity and warmth that appear throughout Argentine and Buenos Aires Spanish.
In this analysis, I will give an overview of the most relevant aspects of politeness theories as well as how they relate to Buenos Aires Spanish, followed by an overview of relevant Argentine history, including both immigration and national history. I will then discuss several Argentine studies including small talk, the unique informal pronoun vos, reprimands, invitations and invitation refusals, impoliteness in the language of tango songs, the informal appellant che, a discourse marker adapted from the Iberian Spanish version, and my own observations of two discourse markers unique to Argentina. Each of these sections will examine preferences for different types of politeness and discuss possible reasons for these preferences.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Why Buenos Aires?

Over tea, two participants in my study were joking about one of them learning Chinese for work, and inadvertently addressed an important distinction in types of Spanish.

Speaker 1: Vos no podés hablar ni (. ) ni castellano, y vas a hablar chino ((laughs))

You can’t even speak (. ) even Spanish, let alone learning Chinese! ((laughs))

Speaker 2: ((laughs))

Speaker 1: Habla mejor inglés que porteño ella (. ) no, porteño si, mejor castellano,

porque porteño hablamos bien

She speaks better English than porteño (. ) no, porteño yes, better be Spanish,
because we speak porteño well

Speaker 2: Sí, porteño – porteño—yo hablo porteño, no es castellano

Yeah, porteño—porteño—I speak porteño, it’s not Spanish
Speaker 1: Porteño, si, no hablamos castellano ((both laugh))

*Porteño, yep, we don’t speak Spanish ((both laugh))*

These participants make the distinction between Spanish (*castellano*, which is already a more South American word for Spanish than the standard *español*) and *porteño*, meaning Buenos Aires Spanish; a person from Buenos Aires is also a porteño/a. While porteño is, of course, still Spanish, it differs considerably in accent and vocabulary from other areas, especially outside of Argentina and the River Plate region (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1*

The River Plate region where Rioplatense Spanish is spoken; includes the Buenos Aires and Montevideo, Uruguay regions

As the country’s largest urban center, Buenos Aires can be argued to have the most opportunity for linguistic exposure and evolution; it is also of interest because River Plate Spanish is known for being unique in South America. This region also includes
parts of Uruguay, which was not studied here; therefore, the findings of this study could be researched in the future in Uruguayan Spanish for similarities and differences.

In any anthropological work it is important to address the issue of stereotypes. In this work, I will be presenting cultural generalizations referring to Argentine values and Argentine speech patterns. In discussing theories and studies of the broad term “Argentina,” it is important to recognize that none of these generalizations intends to apply to the whole of the Argentine population, but merely acts as a marker of cultural trends, especially as compared to outside cultures.

2.2 The essentials of politeness theory

In most interpersonal interactions, there is a variably conscious level of constant power play. All parties seek to become aware of and comfortable with the relationship among them through their speech and actions; what is acceptable and unacceptable in this relationship? Does one person have more power than the other? How close are they and how important is it to reaffirm closeness, respect, trust, or power distance in this relationship? Many of our reactions to these questions appear in our speech; politeness theory encompasses the ways we test the answers, affirm and reaffirm our relationships, and potentially change them.

“Face” in terms of politeness theory refers to the image of ourselves that we project to others. Positive face refers to the individual’s want to be liked and included; negative face refers to the individual’s want for independence, or not to be imposed upon. Thus, in speech interactions, both parties can affirm and threaten their own face as well as the other person’s, and the face threats usually work in pairs. For example, for an employee to affirm his boss’ negative face, he will often threaten his own; he may say
that he is free anytime she’s available to meet, thus affirming that she has full authority over her actions but limiting his own control over his. On the contrary, the boss may enhance both her own and her employee’s positive face by insisting that he use her first name, minimizing their power difference and validating both of their needs to be liked.

Accordingly, politeness refers to all of the speech acts used to mitigate face threats (Mills 2003:6). Positive politeness affirms either the speaker or the addressee’s positive face; if the speech act is inherently a positive face threat, positive politeness refers to the speaker’s intention to mitigate that threat. For example, in refusing an invitation, the person refusing (the speaker) inherently threatens the inviter’s (addressee’s) positive face: it implies that the speaker doesn’t want to be with the addressee. Consequently, the speaker needs to soften that threat, perhaps by using a nickname or joke, giving an excuse, or saying “maybe” rather than directly refusing. This is positive politeness; it is solidarity-oriented and emphasizes shared attitudes and values (Holmes 1992:297). Conversely, negative politeness mitigates threats to negative face (the need not to be imposed upon). In asking a favor or request, the speaker inherently imposes on the addressee’s freedom to do as he or she chooses; in order to mitigate this face threat, the speaker might speak more formally to show respect, (“I was wondering if…”) add qualifiers and questions to the request (“Do you think you could maybe…”), offer something in return, or begin with a negative (“I understand if not, but…”). A third category of speech acts known as bald-on-record refers to entirely direct interchanges with little or no face threat mitigation (“Pass me that bowl”). Bald-on-record interchanges are generally considered to occur between close friends or family where face threat is less of an issue (Brown and Levinson 1987).
2.3 Cultural differences in politeness

Different cultures place higher emphasis on different types of face and politeness, often reflective of variation in cultural values. For example, a culture such as Japan that highly values respect would place more focus on negative face and deference politeness. In contrast, this analysis argues that in Argentina, values revolve more around closeness and warmth, translating to a higher emphasis on positive politeness and even bald-on-record so as not to imply a lack of *confianza*.

However, there is some discussion as to the applicability of Brown, Levinson and Goffman to areas outside the English-speaking world. Specifically, these theories are based on and refer to Anglophone societies, which tend towards strong individualism. (see below). Many other cultures, including much of Latin America, are much more collectivist. While Argentine culture does have an individualist aspect, it is complemented and contrasted by a stronger affiliative and collectivist aspect than can be found in most Anglophone cultures. Individualism and collectivism are sociological concepts with roots in the late 19th century. While useful, they are by no means comprehensive explanations of culture, and are best viewed as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. As explained by Geert Hofstede in his extensive studies on cultural dimensions, individualism “describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society” (Hofstede 2001:209). Individualism and collectivism include differences in gregariousness such as the complexity of family units as well as the broader societal norms including familial, educational, religious, political, utilitarian and moral structures (210). More collectivist cultures focus on the group’s well-being as the best for the individual (China is an exemplar collectivist culture, especially since the rule of Mao Zedong), while more individualist cultures are described
as more calculative and focus directly on the individual and his or her self-concept as such. While there are certainly deficiencies in quantitative studies of somewhat ambiguous values such as individualism and collectivism, Hofstede’s Individualism Index Values clearly demonstrate that Anglophone cultures are significantly more individualist than Spanish-speaking cultures (see Table 1).

### Table 1

Hofstede’s Individualism Index for English and Spanish-speaking Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rank (out of 53 countries examined, where 1 is the most individualist)</th>
<th>IDV (out of 100) (higher score = more individualist)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEAN FOR ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>83.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-Speaking Countries</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>22/23</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEAN FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td>42.25</td>
<td>21.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Hofstede’s study, English-speaking countries directly constituted the 4 most individualist countries, while Spanish-speaking countries constituted the 5 most
collectivist; note that the mean English-speaking Individualism Value is 83.2 while the mean Spanish-speaking Individualism Value is 21.77. Despite any problems with quantitative evaluations of a qualitative concept, one can safely reach the conclusion that on average, Spanish-speaking cultures are considerably more collectivist than English-speaking ones.

Keeping this in mind, Brown and Levinson’s “universal” discussions of face and politeness were developed in English-speaking contexts and therefore revolve around the individual, specifically how the individual promotes or threatens her own face in relation to another individual. While this aspect is indeed important in all discussions of politeness, Diana Bravo questions the universality of these theories, recognizing that different cultural motivations (a higher degree of collectivism) may affect their applicability and emphasizing the importance of recognizing these motivations (Bravo 1999, 2008). Using this case as an example, Argentine society’s increased collectivism from Anglophone contexts means that group face, shared meanings and shared experiences become an important aspect of politeness not discussed by Brown and Levinson. According to Bravo, these premises can be referred to as the needs for autonomy and affiliation within a group. Autonomy is driven by self-esteem; it is the recognition of the value of the individual and his ability to act (agency). Autonomy is related to pride and self-confirmation; these in turn merit interest, appreciation, self-concept and admiration within the group. This is comparable to the idea of negative face, but differs in that it refers to an individual as he relates to the group instead of merely an individual with entirely discrete needs. The second premise excluded in an individualistic analysis is affiliation. This refers to the individual’s adherence to the group; it involves affection, tolerance and confianza, mutual familiarity, generosity,
reciprocity and sincerity. In comparing English-speaking to Spanish-speaking cultures, Boretti indicates that “‘confianza’ affiliative content, includes the tendency to use direct language… or a speech style different from the elaborate and indirect forms of strategic courtesy. It’s possible that an English-speaker wouldn’t tolerate this style, presumptive for them – and in consequence, impolite – due to the importance that they assign to the rights of each individual” (2003:85). In contrast, in the more collectivist Argentine culture, directness is more likely to imply affiliation within the group, so it is neither presumptive nor impolite.

However, among Spanish-speaking cultures, Argentina rates relatively individualist: compare its score (43) to countries such as Ecuador and Guatemala (8 and 6 respectively); it is also still considerably above the average for these countries (21.77) and rates only below Spain in terms of individualism. Therefore, Brown and Levinson and traditional concepts of face can still be applied, so long as they are supplemented with Bravo’s ideas of autonomy and affiliation to account for the added collectivism that does not appear in Anglophone cultures.

While face and positive/negative politeness theories constitute only a portion of work on politeness, they, along with Bravo’s ideas, are considered to be the most relevant to this particular discussion of informality in Argentine Spanish and its sociocultural implications. More theoretical works on the subject of linguistic politeness include Brown and Levinson’s contemporaries Leech, Lakoff and Lavandera, who discuss the social pragmatics of linguistic politeness at length. Of these discussions, the principal methodology used here will be that of Beatriz Lavandera, who is herself Argentine and who acts under the general premise that pragmatic facts must be explained “by appeal to extremely general principles of human behavior, which are not specific to language”
This study expresses Lavendera’s principle in examining the multitude of anthropological factors surrounding informality in Argentine Spanish rather than solely its manifestations. Lavandera also assesses Brown and Levinson’s theory as failing to see politeness as a permanent composite of all speech acts and thus ascribing “politeness to a strategy rather than to the entire speech act within which it occurs” (Alba Juez 2007:37). I agree with this criticism and therefore do not place emphasis on the analysis of single politeness strategies nor the statistical analysis of these strategies, even where these analyses occur in cited studies on Argentine politeness.

2.4 Research Methods

While much of this study is a compilation of research surrounding Argentine language and culture, it also includes data that I collected in Buenos Aires in May and June of 2011. Most subjects were friends and relatives of participant host families from a US study abroad program; this was not a requirement to participate, but the program was the main source of recruitment, so nearly all participants had some connection to it. This means that all subjects had had at least some, if not considerable, exposure to college-aged American youth; this was done to assure willingness to participate in an undergraduate study and some familiarity with what it would entail. However, no part of the study was conducted in English and whether participants knew English or not was not relevant, known or recorded. Due to the nature of selection of participants, most were middle to upper middle class (although this information was not formally recorded), and females were more highly represented than males (there were ten female participants and seven male). All participants were between 18 and 55, with the majority being in their mid-20s and early thirties. Fourteen conversations were recorded in total; all participants
knew they were being recorded, but were asked to engage in natural conversations. They were not told the specific nature of the study so as to affect speech as little as possible; they were told only that it was a study on Argentine Spanish, that they should speak as naturally as possible, and that I would be examining the way they spoke rather than what they said, so topic of conversation didn’t matter. In general, conversations did not seem to be affected by the presence of the recorder; if they were, it was for a few minutes towards the beginning and then stopped, except for a few sporadic references or jokes later on. I was present at all conversations except one and actively participated in three; all subjects considered themselves porteños; all had been born and raised in Buenos Aires except one, who moved there over 25 years ago as a child and whose data was not included. This was a requirement for participation as the study strictly deals with Buenos Aires Spanish, with Argentina as a whole only applying to the more general cultural analysis and not the linguistic discussions. I included a variety of social situations, which will be explained when the background situation is relevant to the conversation.

Because this study was not an experiment, I have chosen to include pieces of it within broader categories rather than devoting one entire section to my findings, although all data in the sections on discourse markers escuchame and escuchame una cosa is my own; other data from my recorded conversations appears throughout other sections, such as the use of che. Because each conversation includes interesting instances within several categories, rather than all pertaining directly to each other, I have chosen to discuss these categories (such as the uses of different nicknames) including my own examples rather than discuss the conversations separately.
3. ARGENTINE SPANISH: LINGUISTIC INFLUENCES AND HISTORY

3.1 National Identity

The creation of a national identity separate from Spain is a recurring theme throughout Latin American studies; in the creation of the Argentine dialect, the relatively neutral context of Spanish as a common language ceased to be neutral when Argentina began its quest for a national identity. According to Yakov Malkiel’s study of linguistics in Spanish America, “the alternative type of social implications of dialect speech would… involve such chosen elements of the standard language as convey enhanced ‘social messages’ in comparison to the, in this respect, relatively neutral context” (Malkiel, 1972:112). When Argentine Spanish began to form as its own dialect separate from Iberian Spanish, the “choices” (intentional or not) of vocabulary, grammar, and even accent reflected the influences Argentina wished to keep or discard from Spain and other countries of influence. There was a distinct intent towards linguistic and cultural separation from Spain; this concept is clearest in the creation and naming of the *criollo*. The referent *criollo*, during the time of its use in the 19th century, referred simply to someone of Spanish descent but who was born in Argentina, thereby creating a distance between those with “roots” in Argentina and those who emigrated from Spain. This was part of the creation of a regional and national Argentine identity, and as a part of its creation, Argentina opened the door for its language to evolve away from standard peninsular Spanish (Castro 1961). This Spanish increasingly reflected values of trust and closeness, demonstrated by informality such as nicknames and informal verb morphology, stemming from various factors throughout the country’s progressive history. Besides having a distinctly non-Iberian Spanish, Argentina has accumulated various influences that distinguish it from the Spanish of the rest of Latin America. These
include influences from other languages due to extremely high numbers of immigrants, a conspicuous lack of indigenous population brought about by extermination campaigns, influences brought about by the country’s own history, and the gaucho tradition that roots in the country’s vast plains and agricultural tradition. Some of these factors have led to arguments as far back as the mid-19th century that despite being popularly perceived as arrogant, (Boretti 2001:80), Buenos Aires Spanish has its roots in the poor, vulgar, uncivilized and uneducated: the gaucho and agricultural traditions, lunfardo (a dialect stemming in Argentine prisons), and uneducated immigrant populations; this, too, been argued to contribute to the extreme familiarity in Argentine Spanish (Abeille 1900, Castro 1961:85-86, Conde 2011:110-112).

3.2 Immigration

Argentina is a country of immigration, often likened to the United States in its strong historical roots as a melting pot, or crisol de razas, whose immigration from Europe played a large role in its transition into a modern country. Throughout its history, Argentina’s European immigration has been heavily political; in 1953 President J. B. Alberdi famously pronounced: “To govern is to populate.” ‘To populate,’ it went without saying, referred to very specific populations: all European, and preferably Northern European countries over the already proliferous Spanish and Italian immigrants (Dama 2008:60). Between 1881 and 1914, more than 4,200,000 people immigrated to Argentina, around 2,000,000 of which were Italian, 1,400,000 Spanish, 170,000 French, and 160,000 Russian (Devoto 2003:247). Accordingly, when the government reinstated an effort to populate Argentina with Europeans in the 1950s (Dama 2008), it focused on countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and other countries that the
Argentine ruling class considered more elite and therefore more valuable in Argentina at the time: “These were ideas fostered by those who wanted Argentina to be a European-like country keeping its own traditions, but making progress at the pace of the modern world and to do that immigration had to be promoted as soon as possible” (Dama 2008:60).

However, by the 1950s, the Italians and Spaniards (mostly uneducated immigrant laborers) had already made a significant cultural mark on the country: “the majority of the immigrants that arrived in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century belonged to cultures in the south of Europe, Mediterranean cultures organized around strong family ties and friendships where confianza, reciprocity and generosity as binding principles contrary to the negative perception of social distance” (Wierzbecka 1991, as cited in Boretti 2000:82). Already in the early 20th century, Mediterranean cultural values had affected Argentine ones; the negative perception of social distance that Wierzbecka mentions becomes crucial in Argentine culture as well. Where in some cultures being polite emphasizes social distance to demonstrate respect, (especially in situation of inequality, such as employer-employee or age-youth), in the aforementioned Mediterranean cultures and consequently in Argentina this social distance is negative; therefore, drawing attention to it may be more rude than polite. Where confianza matters so thoroughly, verbally emphasizing social distance through negative politeness and formality undermines an important cultural value; rather than showing respect, one may be seen as distancing oneself from the other person.

Consider that from the 1860’s onwards, Italians were the most highly represented Argentine immigrants, followed by Spanish and surrounding Mediterranean cultures, providing an overwhelming presence of the strong family ties, reciprocity, generosity and
closeness that Boretti discusses. One woman in my study said the following on the subject of why friends and family are so important in Argentina:

“Es mas, por la inmigración italiana, nuestros abuelos, eh, vivían todos en una casa, varias generaciones(.) es una costumbre muy arraigada, no (?) La de la familia, como un lugar de sostén, de crianza, de(.) esto muchos años atrás(.) sesenta años atrás(.) y nosotros como cultura necesitamos reproducir eso(.) y a veces lo reproducimos con los amigos, esa situación de mucha familiaridad, no (?)”

“Also, because of all the Italian immigration, our grandparents, eh, they all lived in one house, several generations(.) it’s a very deep-rooted custom, no (?) That of the family as a place of support, of upbringing, or(.) this many years back(.) sixty years back(.) and we as a culture need to reproduce that(.) and sometimes we reproduce it with friends, that situation of lots of familiarity, no (?)”

Like Boretti and Wierzbecka, this Buenos Aires native directly relates the strong and relatively recent Italian immigration to Argentine values towards family, and uses this to explain the importance of friendship as well.

Even apart from cultural influences, this confianza appears throughout Argentine dialect as informality and positive politeness, even in the many hand gestures used in dialogue, most of which are direct descendants of Italian patterns. Also during this era was the extermination of hundreds of indigenous groups, beginning in the 1830’s with Juan Manual de Rozas’ Campaña del Desierto and coming to a peak in the 1880s with Julio Roca, who killed or drove far south to Patagonia the remaining indigenous
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populations in the Conquista del Desierto. As a result of these conquests, there is very little indigenous influence on River Plate Spanish, as most of the indigenous populations that inhabited the province of Buenos Aires and other southern areas were driven back. However, there is still a relatively strong indigenous presence in some of the northern regions such as the Chaco and Corrientes provinces (see Figure 2; in the northeast) with slightly more linguistic crossover.

Those migrating to Argentina, no matter what they spoke, often did not speak the standard version of their native tongues. A large percentage of immigrants to Argentina were of the lower classes and illiterate, especially the Italians, most of whom were from the south of Italy and spoke dialects other than standard “Florentine” Italian. This was likely a strong contributing factor in the stigmatization of Italo-Argentines and the preference for Northern European immigrants. Furthermore, Ángela Lucía di Tullio argues that many of the most highly represented languages, “the Italian dialects, Galician and Basque Spanish, colloquial Arabic or Yiddish were vernacular varieties that did not solicit a strong enough loyalty to resist the battering of the
linguistic policies outlined specifically to eradicate them” (2003:31). These linguistic policies were implemented in schools and other public arenas to standardize Spanish as Argentina’s national language; the high percentage of illiterate and lower-class immigrants allowed for most of their dialects to be easily subsumed into the evolving Spanish, as they were spoken among few people who had not learned them formally or likely even learned to write them. Accordingly, instead of maintaining distinct cultural and linguistic communities within a larger Argentine grouping, these languages were enveloped, but not without making their own contributions to the new Spanish, which began to include words, gestures and speech preferences from the many immigrant populations that were using it. For example, an entire dialect called lunfardo arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mostly from Italian and related to prisons and criminals; the word itself likely originates in the Italian lombardo, meaning “thief” (lombardo > lumbardo > lunfardo). While it may have begun there, it moved to the lower and middle classes and now contributes many words to Buenos Aires and River Plate Spanish, such as “laborar,” 2 “fiaca,” 3 and “morfi.” 4

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1 Lunfardo is neither a language nor a dialect. It is not possible to speak purely lunfardo, as it lacks many of the required syntactic mechanisms; nor is it a dialect, if a dialect is defined as the regional variation of a language. Oscar Conde puts it best when he describes it as an addition to Spanish using Spanish mechanisms: “it’s not possible to speak in lunfardo, but rather at the most to speak with lunfardo” (Conde 2011: 41-42) (my translation). However, to the extent to which River Plate and Buenos Aires Spanish can be considered a dialect, lunfardo is a key contributor of many key words that make it so.

2 To work. The usual Spanish word for “to work” is “trabajar”; laborar comes from the Italian “lavorare.”

3 Laziness; in Italian fiacco means “weak”

4 Food, chow. The usual Spanish word is “comida”; “morfi” comes from “morfer” of the French argot. This is an example of some lunfardo words that don’t come from Italian; other words have origins in African and Portuguese. There was forced African immigration through slavery up until the late 19th century, although much of the African
3.3 The Gaucho Tradition

The Argentine gaucho is now a romanticized figure much like the US cowboy. He is a lone hero, obliged only to himself and nature, with incredible horse and survival skills. While the modern gaucho tradition is almost entirely converted to these men working on ranches where tourists can go for a weekend getaway, during Argentina’s booming period of immigration the gauchos really were living outside of society in the pampas. While gauchos were at one point stigmatized as lawless, the publication of José Hernández’ Martín Fierro in the 1870s and Eduardo Gutiérrez’ hugely popular Juan Moreira began a change in this perception; the gaucho became a romantic figure, a lone hero with his own morals and no debt to society. He was a good person, uneducated but righteous, and connected to nature (Boretti 2003, Castro 1961). The gaucho became a symbol of Argentine identity, relating back to the quest for a national identity separate from Spain. Thus, the values associated with the gaucho were elevated not only for their intrinsic value, but also for their contribution toward a united and self-standing Argentina, including values that supported a democratic state (Castro 1961:70).

Accordingly, “the word gaucho… is now an everyday word for Argentines to express all that is good and noble, friendship, generosity, and even the valuation of family” (Boretti 2003:81), although this draws upon only one of several images of the gaucho, where others, such as the gaucho malo, were less favorable. The gauchos were known for using a reciprocity values system; without any need for “civilized” society (as determined by the elite of Buenos Aires), money had little value for them, so when trade or debt did and Afro-Argentine population died out; what remains has tended to receive little attention.
come into play, it was an honor-reciprocity system. Because of this they became known as trustworthy, honorable men; this is reflected in the use of the derived *gauchada*, a uniquely Argentine word for “favor” in addition to the standard word *favor*. A *gauchada* differs from a simple request in its implication of *confianza*: “it is a courteous activity that presupposes principles based on trust, availability, generosity and reciprocity…on the part of the doer, all of which have a frankly affiliative nature” (Boretti 2003:81). The use of the word *gauchada* presumes that it is not subject to conditions, and therefore linked to friendship. Consequently, asking for a *gauchada* appeals to both the speaker and the interlocutor’s positive face and affiliation within the group; the speaker implies closeness and friendship between them. This is especially notable because in asking for a favor, a standard method of politeness might be to mitigate the interlocuter’s negative face, since the request impedes on negative and not positive face; instead, *gauchada* utilizes more positive politeness, reenforcing the notion that *confianza* is considerably more important than the traditional respect implied in social distance. Moreover, the word *gauchada* draws upon the values of friendship, honor, generosity and reciprocity and connects them to interlocuters’ common identity as Argentines; the gaucho and the values associated with him prevail. In addition, the gaucho is sometimes partially credited with the upkeep of the second person singular pronoun *vos* in Argentina, where it might otherwise have been stamped out.

### 3.4 National Crises

Argentina’s history of the past 60 years has included some extremely difficult times. The mid 20th century was characterized by coups, several of which resulted in military dictatorships. The last of these was from 1976 to 1983 and has been dubbed the
Dirty War. It was one of the darkest times in Argentina’s history, characterized by state-sponsored violence resulting in thousands of victims. These years are still burned into the collective Argentine mind and identity; many survivors are still alive, and many organizations have been born as a result. One of the most famous of these is Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, a human rights group with roots going back to the time of the dictatorship itself. It is almost entirely comprised of now elderly women who lost children that literally “disappeared”: los desaparecidos. The desaparecidos were people perceived in any way to be a threat to the state, including activists, students, people with dissenting political views, and many more who simply disappeared. Many were killed, but there is still no record of many, over three decades later. The scars of this period run deep in Argentina; it is not simply ignored, but remains a painful part of Argentine history.

The country’s more recent economic history also caused difficult times, with low points in 1983 and 1999-2002, all of which and related mostly to debt. The crisis was characterized by enormous inflation, huge debts for unfinished infrastructure projects and the Falklands War in 1982, instability caused by the prior military dictatorships and the unpegging of the peso from the US dollar, unemployment of up to 18% (depending on the source; official figures claimed 5%), the takeover of private debts and the introduction of a neoliberal economic platform. In 2001 a state of emergency was declared, causing huge riots in the Plaza de Mayo; the then-president De la Rua, one of five in a two-week period, fled in a helicopter. The economy has since made a relatively slow and steady recovery, but this is an extremely recent time of difficulty that affected all but the very youngest of current citizens.
Hard national times bring a nation together; the classic example in the USA is the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, after which the nation showed a record high of unity and patriotism (the rally-round-the-flag effect) (Mueller 1970). In the prolonged periods of instability described above, Argentina has had ample opportunity to form this national bond.

4 CASE STUDIES

4.1 Small Talk

Given the background influences that contribute to Argentina’s strongly indirect, informal language, it becomes appropriate to examine specific instances of politeness and how they manifest themselves in the Argentine dialect. One of the prominent researchers on politeness in Latin American Spanish is Elizabeth Rigatuso, whose study on small talk in Buenos Aires Spanish investigates how small talk works in institutional and non-institutional settings and identifies some of its functions. Small talk is closely connected with phatic communication, communication whose only function is to perform a social task, not to convey information (Malinowski, 1923); small talk is “a resource for the establishment and maintaining of friendly, harmonious relationships in interpersonal construction of social and transactional talk” (Rigatuso 2008:134), where the occurrence of an exchange of words is more important than what is actually said. She first discusses weather, which acts as a shared experience that includes both members in a relational moment, therefore acting as a positive politeness act in bringing parties together (Rigatuso 2008:147). Discussion of the weather can “be considered particularly in its function as a replacement for traditional forms of greeting, which permits the speakers, despite the briefness of the interaction produced in the quick crossing of those involved,
the transmission of a more friendly, amiable message of closeness” (Rigatuso 2008:147). This supports the hypothesis of Argentines’ preference for positive politeness and positive face in Brown and Levinson’s theory, and affiliation in the earlier analysis of autonomy and affiliation. The extremely notable weather in Buenos Aires also contributes to the shared experience and makes it an excellent ice-breaker; summer heat tends to be suffocating, while rains can cause mini-floods on a semi-regular basis, making small talk regarding the weather easy and commonplace.

In addition to weather, Rigatuso discusses tiredness, which expresses “understanding and affiliative accordance on the part of the interlocutor towards whomever he or she has professed tiredness –when the reference to tiredness is oriented towards the speaker—or of recognition and validation of the work hours and effort of the addressee” (2008, p. 148). In her study, this occurred especially between colleagues, in business transactions, and among teachers, all situations where maintaining a harmonious working relationship is central. Both the weather and tiredness serve to relieve awkwardness by enhancing solidarity in brief, repeated encounters; even if participants don’t intend to intensify their relationship, small talk gives the impression of interest and enhances the addressee’s positive face.

In Rigatuso’s findings, speakers also used small talk to protect their own image and that of the addressee from any conflicts. Small talk served to create a friendly atmosphere in the knowledge of conflicts that had previously occurred or might occur, as well as a “strategy to produce at an operative organizational level of the interaction, a change of topic, as a method of protection of the addressee’s image or prevention of conflict, set by directing or re-directing in the middle of the conversation to small talk regarding the weather or questions about the interlocutor’s family” (2008, p. 151).
Conflict threatens both parties’ positive face; disagreement may appear to imply dislike, and depending on the nature of the conflict may also threaten negative face (i.e. disagreement regarding what to do, where neither party feels they get to do what they want to). Therefore, small talk surrounding or preventing conflict is consistently positively polite.

Finally, and of most interest in this discussion, this study found small talk to be used as an instant turning point in a conversation from the use of the formal second person singular pronoun “usted” to the informal one, “vos.”

4.2 El Voseo

The use of the ‘vos’ in Argentine Spanish is of particular interest because of its high specificity to Argentina and the River Plate region. Castro describes it as originally a word of the uneducated but that is now considered “the height of Argentinity” (1961:73). Spanish, like many other languages, specifies between a formal and an informal second person singular pronoun (in English, “you”), normally tú for the informal and usted for the formal. The uses of these pronouns vary significantly throughout the Spanish speaking world; for example, in Mexico, where respect and power distance are higher than in Argentina (Hofstede 2001:87), children will commonly refer even to their parents with the formal usted and parents may use the formal pronoun with their very young children during language development so that the children default to usted when they begin speech. Yet in other regions in South America, a middle-aged woman may be offended by an adolescent using the formal pronoun with her because it implies a large age difference and essentially calls her old. Vos, despite the common
misconception of similarity to the Iberian vosotros,\textsuperscript{5} is an informal, almost ubiquitous form of address in Argentina and Uruguay. *Vos* is generally conceived as a strongly Argentine word, more specifically the River Plate region; this includes Buenos Aires, parts of Uruguay and surrounding areas in Argentina.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second person singular (you)</td>
<td>Tú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vos</em> (<em>Argentina and Uruguay</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second person plural (you all)</td>
<td>Ustedes (<em>Latin America</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vosotros</em> (<em>Spain</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Table 2.}

Note that *vosotros* refers to the second person plural, while *vos* is singular.

However, it is also found in small communities in other regions of Latin America as an intensely intimate pronoun. These regions use the two regular pronouns, formal and informal, in addition to *vos* as a third pronoun for very intimate relationships, such as parent-child or husband-wife, and even then often only in very intimate, loving moments. In the River Plate region, however, *vos* has essentially replaced both of the other second person singular pronouns.

\textsuperscript{5} *Vosotros* is the second person plural informal, whereas in Latin America there is no distinction between formal and informal in the second person plural; both are *ustedes*. *Vos* is essentially the same as *tú* as a second person singular pronoun; see Table 2.
Several more studies on the *voseo* exist but focus on colloquial Spanish in areas such as Salta (in the far northwest) and Rosario region slightly to the northwest of Buenos Aires (see Figure 2). While this study focuses specifically on Buenos Aires Spanish, Rosario is similar in cultural values and history that would affect language, and Boretti’s (1991) article closely analyzes the second person singular in the present subjunctive in Rosario. Both relate to Fontanella de Weinberg and Lavandera’s (1975) study of the accentuated and nonaccentuated variants of the negative imperative (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Imperative</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accentuated</td>
<td>No lo comás</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonaccentuated</td>
<td>No lo comas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**
Accentuated vs. nonaccentuated negative imperative using *comer* (to eat)

Fontanella de Weinberg concluded that the former was viewed as explicit, direct and peremptory, whereas the latter was viewed as a polite imperative.6

According to Susana Boretti, “the advance of the *voseo* in Argentine society, even between strangers, is a demonstration of the tendency towards colloquialism that can also be considered as an affiliative, equalitarian phenomenon” (2000:83). The tendency towards colloquialism to which she refers is a decided preference towards the informal, or positive politeness that minimizes the demonstration of power distance for both parties.

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6 The former is more closely related to “vos,” which accentuates the last syllable in present and imperative, although in modern Buenos Aires the nonaccentuated negative imperative is more common.
in a discourse. Elizabeth Rigatuso investigates this phenomenon in her article “Señora, no tenés más chico?”, which discusses the conjugations corresponding to vos (vos tenés) used with the formal pronoun (señor or señora) in sales interactions, usually from the vendor towards the client. She utilizes the concepts of power and solidarity from Brown and Gilman’s 1960 work, but for our purposes, this is essentially another version of Brown and Levinson’s solidarity and deference (positive and negative) politeness and Bravo’s affiliation and autonomy: the desire to be independent and respected and the desire to be liked and included. Based on Brown and Gilman, Rigatuso describes a continuum with confianza and familiarity on one end and respect and formality on the other end. The use of the first name plus vos (second person singular, informal) reaches the far end towards confianza and the use of the last name and/or title plus usted (second person singular, formal) constitutes the formal end. Thus the center of the spectrum consists of mixing pronouns and names, such as first name plus usted (Rigatuso uses in-laws as one of the possible examples) or title plus vos. She describes this phenomenon using Henk Haverkate’s reference to Spanish as a three-level system of second-person reference, where the mixing of name and pronoun creates a third semiformal level between formal and informal (Rigatuso 2000:310). The salesperson must simultaneously come across as courteous and friendly, and he or she combines a formal title with the informal verb morphology to create a semiformal appellant that is both. In concordance with the extreme increase in the use of vos over usted in Buenos Aires especially for the last 150 years, the use of vos implies solidarity where usted can imply a large power distance. Depending on the situation, the salesperson may not want to incur this power distance in order to come across as amiable. Rigatuso found that the title + informal pronoun strategy occurred more often towards women, especially middle-aged women,
from both men and women of younger and equal ages, and that the use of *señora*
appeared with a certain regularity when the salesperson was initiating contact, offering
something, and discussing payment. All of these represent situations where the
salesperson would not want to encroach upon the client’s autonomy or negative face and
therefore emphasizes the respectful side of the semiformal appellant.

Rigatuso’s study expresses an important point beyond the examination of power
and solidarity in sales interactions: that of lexical gaps in Buenos Aires Spanish. She asks
whether “contemporaneous Buenos Aires Spanish presents all of the necessary nominal
formulas, adequate for all speakers of all sociocultural levels, ages, and for all types of
discourse” and finds “the existence of lexical gaps in the system, generated by the
absence of formulas for determined contexts, situations or addressees in certain language
varieties” (2000:324) 7. Keep in mind that her findings are not universal; she merely
examines one choice of strategy by salespeople, arguing that set nominal formulas do not
exist for many situations, effecting the use of these strategies in the first place. Thus, the
emergence of the relatively new (at least in Buenos Aires) “mixed” pronominal-nominal
forms attempts to fill some of these gaps.

Rigatuso also discusses the use of *vos* in her study on small talk in Buenos Aires.
According to her study, there is a more formulaic or ritual aspect to “phatic
communication, the routine interactions of opening a conversation, or the so-called
‘access rituals’” (Goffman as cited in Rigatuso 2008:154). Small talk as an access ritual
allows speakers to begin the conversation more deferentially (using *usted*), but then
creates the cordiality and *confianza* necessary to change to the informal. Rigatuso found
this to be especially common between students and professors in the university

7 My translation
environment. For example, in her study, a joke has a similar function to the previously mentioned uses of tiredness and the weather. Occasions where *usted* appears are in bold, while the use of *vos* is underlined.

*Context:* two colleagues cross in the hall of an academic department of a university

Professor 1: cómo *le* va profesor? (. ) qué *dice* (?) cómo *anda* (?)

*how’s it going professor? (. ) what’s up (?) how are you (?)*

Professor 2: aquí andamos (. ) en el medio de un curso de posgrado en el descanso

*here we are (. ) in the middle of a grad course on break*

Professor 1: ((Mirando un tero de agua caliente y un mate que lleva su colega, sonriendo y en tono de broma)) ah, pero veo que no se privan de naada (. ) estudian o qué hacen (?) qué es esto (?)

*((looking at a thermos and mate [objects used in a popular Argentine tea] that his colleague is carrying, smiling and in a joking tone)) ah, but I see you guys don’t have anything with you (. ) are you studying or what are you doing (?) what’s all this (?)*

Professor 2: ((Riendo)) no critiques no critiques (. ) no seas malo (. ) claro que estudiamos (!) son muchas horas y hay gente de afuera

*((laughing)) don’t criticize, don’t criticize (. ) don’t be mean (. ) of course we’re studying (!) it’s a lot of hours and there are people from outside*

In this conversation, the first professor begins using the formal pronoun *usted*, a formal way to address a colleague. However, the second professor teases the Professor 1, asking jokingly if she is actually doing anything in her class or not, which opens up the
doors to informal expression and therefore address. Thus, the use of the informal pronoun can be viewed as an affiliative mark of politeness, where friendliness and affect are the marked determinants in the change in the interaction; it also creates a pleasant environment for the development of the interaction (Rigatuso 2008:156). This also occurs in business interactions, where a salesperson may begin an interaction with a customer using *usted*, but switch to *vos* after the small talk that occurs during the transaction.

Of the fourteen conversations I recorded, *usted* was never used as a form of address. This by itself is not highly significant, as the participants of each conversation already knew each other or, if not, were youth in a highly social setting with other youth; formal verb morphology would rarely be expected in these types of situations. The only instance in which it occurred was during a joke told at a party, where a man in the story formally addressed his doctor. In the joke, the man and the doctor are in a highly awkward situation due to homosexual undertones, perhaps contributing to the formal morphology; closeness has already been overachieved by the nature of the man’s ailment, therefore linguistic distance emphasizes awkwardness, as the men are not normally in confidence. This is not to say that a regular patient-doctor relationship could not include *usted*; it certainly could, but given that *vos* is absolutely the regular form of address, especially in the audience of young people, the use of *usted* in the joke pointed out that the two men were not familiar with each other, emphasizing the awkwardness of the situation. Note that the formal instances (*usted*) are in bold; translated version follows.
“Bueno, no sé, siéntese, que le voy a revisar. Sí sí, porque la verdad, me estoy muriendo, realmente no puedo más. Dice bueno, bájese el pantalón y siéntese en la camilla. Bueno, está bien, así que se sienta al cuatro, y dice bueno me duele, bueno, sí a Usted no le molesta, yo voy a tener que revisar. No no, por favor, me duele. Bueno. Empieza a mirar, dice, no pero ‘pere un momento este acá (.) tiene una rama dice. Él le dice no sé, a mí me pa – una rama. No sí, a mí me parece que algo tengo, porque a mí me duele. Y me duele. Dice bueno yo voy a tirar despacito. Bueno sí sí haga lo que tenga que hacer. El chabón tira y le dice pero, escuchame una cosa. Esta rama tiene espinas, como no le va a doler (?) No, sí, es que yo le estoy diciendo que me estoy muriendo! Bueno, voy a tirar, usted tranquilo. No, sí sí sí. Sigue tirando y dice pero, pero, Usted tiene hojas también (!) Dice no, que le digo, el dolor es insoportable, bueno voy a tirar un poquito mas ya se… el momento. Tira, y cuando termina de tirar, y dice pero Señor, Usted tiene una flor metida en el culo (!) Es para Usted.”

“Well, I don’t know, have a seat, and I’ll have a look at you. Yes, yes, because the truth is that I’m dying here, I really can’t stand it anymore. He says well, pull down your pants and have a seat on the table. Ok, that’s fine, so he sits on all fours, and says, well it hurts. Well, if it doesn’t bother you, I’m going to have to take a look. No no, please do, it hurts. Ok. He begins to look, he says, no, wait a minute, this here (.) you have a stick he says. He tells him I don’t know, to me it se – a stick. No, yeah, it seems to me that I must have something, because it hurts. And it hurts. He says ok, I’m going to pull slowly. Yes, yes, ok, do whatever you have to do. The guy pulls and he tells him but, hang on (escuchame una cosa). This stick has thorns, how can it not be hurting you (?) No, yeah, that’s what I’m telling you that I’m dying here (!) Ok, well, I’m going to pull, you hold
still. No, of course. He keeps pulling and says but, but you’ve got leaves here too (!) He says no, I’m telling you, the pain is unbearable, ok well I’m going to pull it out a little more... He pulls, and when he finishes pulling he says but Sir, you have a flower stuck in your ass (!) It’s for you.”

In the following section I will discuss the significance of the underlined escuchame una cosa, as it is an informal conjugation where every other instance of “you” and verb conjugations are formal.

4.3 Discourse Markers: ¿Me entendés?, Escuchame, and Escuchame una cosa

¿Me entendés?

Based upon work on the Iberian Spanish equivalent ¿me entiendes?, Susan Boretti completes an excellent analysis of the Argentine discourse marker ¿me entendés? that is still very much a minority in discussions on politeness in Argentina. She differentiates between the canonical use of “entender” (to understand) and the phrase, which literally means “do you understand me?” but is here likened to “you know?” , a similar discourse marker in English. (Chodorowska as cited in Boretti 1999:144). Boretti describes that the “speaker, upon speaking it, doesn’t think about the intellectual fact of ‘to understand,’ but rather uses it to achieve the cooperation or approval of the listener” (Boretti 1999:140).

In examining the pragmatic functions or “instructions” of ¿me entendés, she finds that it sometimes acts as a mitigator, which is traditionally understood by Brown and Levinson to create respect and interpersonal distance between speakers. For example:

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8 My translation
Speaker 1: Y sí, es difícil organizarlo ¿me entendés?, pero sería el primer congreso internacional en Rosario para nosotros.

Well yes, it's difficult to organize, ¿me entendés? But it would be the first international conference in Rosario for us.

Speaker 2: El asunto es que se arme una buena comisión y trabajar con todo, claro.

The thing would be getting a good commission together and working with everything, of course.

Speaker 1: Por eso, en mi opinión, bah, por experiencia, cuanto antes, sí, hay que llamar a reunión ¿me entendés?

That’s why, in my opinion, bah, from experience, as soon as possible, yes, we should call a meeting, ¿me entendés?

Speaker 1 uses the phrase to mitigate any imposition on Speaker 2, who may need some convincing to call a meeting; in this case, the phrase does serve the mitigation purposes assigned by Brown and Levinson.

However, Boretti sees an aspect of positive politeness as well: the phrase marks or achieves both cooperation and a common ground between speakers:

Speaker 1: Y había mucha gente? Porque me dijeron que fue buenísimo… ese hombre como baila… aunque dicen que al final…

So were there a lot of people? Because they told me it was excellent… that man can dance… although they said that at the end…

Speaker 2: mínimo, pero el espectáculo fue brutal ¿me entendés? ¿pero me entendés lo que te digo? bru-tal.

minimum, but the show was awesome, me entendés? but me entendés what I’m telling you? awe-some.
Here the discourse marker is not a mitigator but an intensifier; the speaker is emphasizing what she is saying to include Speaker 2 in her emotion about the show. Boretti finds that in both types of situations, the speaker is manifesting positive politeness and affiliation values: making sure that the listener is following him, creating common ground, and equalizing their relationship. The discourse marker intensifies the interpersonal connection of the participants; the speaker also enhances his own positive face and affiliation by assuring himself that he is being heard and followed, and that the listener is interested in what he is saying.

**Escuchame una cosa**

I would like to propose two more discourse markers in Buenos Aires Spanish, neither of which has an academically examined “tú” counterpart to my knowledge. I also claim that both of these enhance the same positive politeness values seen previously with ¿me entendés?.

Throughout the doctor-patient joke above, which lasts for several minutes, the speaker consistently utilizes “Usted” for both the patient to the doctor and the doctor to the patient. But in one instance, the speaker says (through the doctor) escuchame una cosa (underlined), an extremely common interjection meaning something akin to “listen to this” but used often to begin a question or new topic. This expression uses vos verb morphology, but is so ingrained in conversation that it has lost the meaning of vos (see Table 4).
Later in the evening, it is also used to address a large group, despite that multiple people should require second person plural verb morphology. I hold that both *escuchame* and *escuchame una cosa* are discourse markers, meaning phrases with no syntactic function in the sentence, but that still impart meaning to the listener. For example, “like” in English may signal that a quote or approximation is to follow (“And I was like, ‘no way, are you really going to make me do that today?’”; “There were like fifty of them”). Similarly, *escuchame* and *escuchame una cosa* have become discourse markers; the former demands attention and the latter marks that the speaker is going to ask a question for clarification or that changes the subject, but both can be used without necessarily meaning “listen” (*escuchar*: to listen) and without the syntactic function of the informal second person singular verb morphology (see Table 4). Note that in the joke above, the
instance of *escuchame una cosa* occurs within dialogue between the doctor and the patient; it is not the speaker saying something outside of the context of the joke. Therefore, the doctor momentarily switches out of using *usted* – which both men use throughout the joke – to say the phrase; we can conclude from this that the phrase is independent of syntactic function within the sentence and instead holds purely discursive meaning. In this case, the doctor is asking for clarification; in these instances, *escuchame una cosa* has a similar function as the English *hang on*, followed by a question that clarifies, occasionally implying some incredulity (e.g. “Hang on, he actually thought you weren’t going to show up?”). Here, the doctor is saying “escuchame una cosa. This stick has thorns, how can it not be hurting you?” The discourse marker precedes a request for clarification, implying that it doesn’t make sense for the stick not to be hurting the patient.

Instances of *escuchame una cosa* to ask a question changing the subject*

1) Speaker 1:  
Qué - qué estudiás vos (?)  
*Wha – what do you study (?)*  
Speaker 2:  
Antropología / y lingüística /  
*Anthropology /and linguistics /*  
Speaker 1:  
/ Ahh, mira  / (…)  
*Ahh look at you / (…)*  
Speaker 3:  
Bueno, y, escuchame una cosa (.) y, ehh, de qué vamos a hablar (?)  
*Well, um, escuchame una cosa () so, umm, what are we going to talk about (?)*

* My recordings, transcriptions and translations
Speaker 2: /Cómo (?) /
/Sorry (?) /

Speaker 1: Claro, de qué querés que hablemos (?)

Yes, /what / would you like us to talk about (?)

Speaker 3 begins with “bueno,” another common discourse marker, but uses escuchame una cosa to ask what topic should come next, changing the subject from Speaker 2’s studies.

Instances of escuchame una cosa preceding a question for clarification
(Speaker 1 is not Argentine, but the instance in question is used by Speaker 2)

Speaker 1: Hay estrategias de cortesía – que es todo muy complicado pero –

There are strategies of courtesy – that’s all very complicated but –

Speaker 2: No, no no escuchame una cosa (. ) así / eh - al - el que pega primero pega dos veces / tranquila, eh (?) (. ) claro, hay formas y formas

No, no no escuchame una cosa (. ) Like / uh – the – the one that strikes first strikes twice / hang on, ok (?) (. ) of course, there are tons of ways

Speaker 1: / Asi, exacto, eso es lo que estoy diciendo /

/ Like that, exactly, that’s what I’m saying /

In this instance Speaker 1 is explaining a complicated topic; when Speaker 2 interjects to ask about an example, he precedes the example with escuchame una cosa.

In another instance:
Speaker 1: Es lo mínimo que voy a hacer. La puta me cagó la licencia; lo hizo ella, una mina de recursos humanos que no le caigo bien.  
That’s the least I’m going to do. The bitch ruined my permit; she did it, a lady from human resources that doesn’t like me.

Speaker 2: Pero, escuchame una cosa, ehhmmmm (...) claro, cuando vuelvas, ya no (...) cuando vuelvas no vas a (...) ya está, te van a desvincular pero (.) y no te van a pagar indemnización  
But, hang on (escuchame una cosa), umm (...) well yeah, when you get back, it won’t (...) when you get back you’re not going to (...) that’s it, they’re going to dissociate you but (.) well they’re not going to give you severance pay

In this conversation Speaker 2 uses escuchame una cosa to introduce her doubt, essentially asking Speaker 1 to clarify and confirm that he is aware of the consequences of what he is planning to do.

Escuchame

Where it appears by itself (without una cosa), escuchame generally serves to demand the attention of the addressee or of a group.

(One person speaking to several): “Cuando él dice - escuchame, che, no me jodan”

(When he says – escuchame (vos morphology), che,  
don’t screw with me (ustedes morphology))  

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9 All translations of these conversations are my own.
In this instance, the same fixed morphology appears as seen previously with 

*escuchame una cosa* between the doctor and patient in the joke, but instead of replacing 

*Usted* morphology, *escuchame* replaces the second person plural (*ustedes*).

The speaker is addressing several others, which is clear from the end of the sentence when he says *no me jodan*, using the second person plural, but still says *escuchame*, which is technically the second person singular (see Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>JODER</strong> (negative command)</th>
<th><strong>ESCUCAR</strong> (affirmative command)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vos</strong></td>
<td>no me jodas</td>
<td><strong>escuchá/escuchame</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(second person singular: Argentina)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tú</strong></td>
<td>no me jodas</td>
<td><strong>escucha/escúchame</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(regular second person singular)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usted</strong></td>
<td>no me joda</td>
<td><strong>escuche/escúcheme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(formal second person singular)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ustedes</strong></td>
<td><strong>no me jodan</strong></td>
<td><strong>escúchenme</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(second person plural)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5**

Imperative verb morphology of *joder* and *escuchar*
This occurs again in the same large group of people (8-12) where the speaker wants to draw attention to what he is saying despite many people talking at once, utilizing *escuchame*.

((A group of young people (mid-20s) are talking about their signatures))

Speaker 1: A los 16 firmaba Alondre Mallea

*When I was 16 I used to sign Alondre [a spelling error from the name Alondra] Mallea*

(Laughter) (Lots of talking in background))

Speaker 2: (writing) Mira, mira, ahí va a continuar una L, una E, O y una S. Bueno, mira lo que dice ahí, parece una L, ‘sol’ al revés”

(writing) *See, look, there it keeps going, an L, an E, O and an S. Well look at what it says there, it looks like an L, “sol” backwards*)

(…)

((A cell phone sounds))

Speaker 3: *Escuchame*, esa firma la hice cuando tenía 8 años (.)(background talking))

a los 8 la hice

*Escuchame (listen), that’s the signature I did when I was 8 (.)*

(background talking) at 8 I did it

In the conversation above, the speaker uses *escuchame* to demand the attention of the group after a long pause, where the others may have been distracted by the cell phone or may have begun to think about something else. Here again the form appears as

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10 Name changed
fossilized; he is telling the group at large to look at his signature, but using the discourse marker *escuchame* rather than conjugating the verb to address the group. Were he to say *escúchenme*, it would be literally interpreted as *listen to me, all of you*, whereas the common form *escuchame* demands attention without the semantic meaning of *listen*.

(Same group of young people, different topic. Speaker 1 (male) is attempting to talk to one person in particular (Speaker 2, female) and addressing someone that is interrupting him (Speaker 3, male)).

Speaker 1 (to Speaker 2): Y qué analizan, de lo que / (. ) /dale, te hago una pregunta

*And what do you analyze, from what / (. ) /come on, I’m asking you something*

Speaker 2: /((laughs))/

Speaker 3: ((speaks over Speaker 1))

Speaker 1: ((mock-threatening tone, towards Speaker 3))

*escuchame, vos dale que me apruebes a la piba, porque se te pudre todo, se te pudre todo, eh (?) te mando a los pibes, y son jodidos, eh (?)*

*escuchame, you come on and pass my [female] friend here, because I’ll screw everything up for you, I’ll screw everything up for you, eh (?) I’ll set the gang on you, and they’re tough, eh (?)*

The speaker uses *escuchame* to demand the addressee’s attention as he is switching from addressing Speaker 2 to Speaker 3, and to emphasize his mock-threat.

From these instances, one can conclude that *escuchame* by itself generally serves to demand attention, but is a fossilized phrase because despite being conjugated in the
informal second person singular; it can be used to refer to multiple people (second person plural) without changing the conjugation. Further research is required to determine whether *escuchame* (without *una cosa*) can appear when the rest of the conversation is occurring in the formal second person singular (*usted*) and with what meanings, as my recordings did not include any formal conversations. However, these conversations all demonstrate the fossilization of *escuchame* and *escuchame una cosa*; they no longer have syntactic meaning so much as specific functions in discourse.

While it would be difficult to mark when these expressions began to fossilize without longitudinal recorded evidence of their use, it is clear that they are specific to Argentina due to the original use of *vos* in the formation of the phrases; they are definitely discourse markers in Buenos Aires, although future research is required to obtain evidence from elsewhere in Argentina or Uruguay, where *vos* can also occur. Either way, there is a clear link between these phrases and the *voseo*, which, as discussed earlier, is an important feature of Buenos Aires Spanish. The fossilization of these phrases demonstrates just how penetrative the *voseo* is; its morphology is appearing outside of its syntactic meaning, even to the point where *voseo* command morphology can be safely used in plural and (pending further research) formal contexts.

The fossilization of these phrases may be related to the appellant *che*, another endemic word to Argentine Spanish. *Che* can be used to address a group (a full discussion of the word is on page 50) and is intrinsically connected to the use of *vos* (Dishman 1962:94); these expressions may have arisen where the two are used together. One of our examples of *escuchame* was: “*escuchame, che, no me jodan*” (*escuchame che, don’t screw with me* (plural)). In this case, the speaker is addressing a group with both *escuchame* and *che*. Prior to complete fossilization of *escuchame*, perhaps *¡escuchame*
che! or ¡Che, escuchame! were common; then, since che could already address a group, escuchame followed. While this hypothesis is difficult to prove without recorded evidence over the last several hundred years, it is a plausible contributing factor given the intrinsic connection between vos and che in Argentina. Both are extremely Argentine and highly affiliative, implying closeness and confianza between speakers; consequently, escuchame and escuchame una cosa fit well into the Argentine values system as expressed in linguistics. In using these phrases speakers affirm that ceremony is unnecessary between them and that even where some distance may exist, as porteños they share a common linguistic identity unique from the rest of the continent.

4.4 Reprimands

In addition to small talk, reprimands and responses to reprimands are another area where politeness manifests itself. In Carmen García’s study on reprimands and responses to reprimands, she used a role-play situation, where participants were given a role and asked to interact with a retired schoolteacher in her 60’s, unknown to the participants. First they were asked to be an employer reprimanding an employee about tardiness and poor quality of work, then switched roles and responded as the reprimanded employee. This is a clear hierarchical structure; thus, García predicted that participants would rely mostly on negative politeness strategies, deferring to the boss and claiming autonomy of action as the boss. Without going into specific conversations here, the importance of the results of this study lie in that Argentine participants “approached this situation as if it were a symmetrical, rather than asymmetrical interaction by using more solidarity politeness strategies (bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies) than the expected deference politeness strategies” (García 2004:268). Bald-on-record strategies are 100%
direct speech acts that get right to the point without worrying about face; their use
generally implies closeness between participants, as they do not have to worry about
politeness, so their use here implies that participants disregarded the hierarchy of position
and acted as they would in a situation where things were equal. The same can be said for
the use of positive politeness strategies, where both indicate closeness even where it does
not really exist. This supports the idea that Argentine language reflects cultural values of
closeness and equality: “These results lead to the conclusion that within this cultural
context, social power and social distance may not be ‘a motivating factor in the
performance of speech acts’” (García 2004:268). García concludes that social distance is
not particularly relevant in Argentine Spanish; the underlying values of confianza and
equality triumph. If, “in fact, the only manner in which Argentines expressed deference
was by threatening their own positive and negative face much more than their
interlocutor’s” (García 2004:268), this merely reinforces the idea that Argentine speakers
uphold a collectivist mentality and values system; in reprimanding and responding to
reprimands, they chose to threaten their own autonomy in order to defer to the
interlocutor, pushing down themselves in order to defer to the group, where here the
group is the workplace, run by the boss, or the group of employees which the participant
(as the boss) heads.

4.5 Issuing Invitations

Another speech act relating to politeness is the act of issuing invitations, which is a
subcategory of request and which Carmen García examines in Establishing and
with the basis that different cultural perspectives lead to different perceptions of the face
threat of invitations and therefore react distinctly, emphasizing either deference or solidarity, and utilizes a role-play situation where participants interact with an unknown 27-year-old male. According to Brown and Levinson, issuing an invitation threatens negative face (the desire to do as one pleases); however, García’s results “support Ferrer and Sánchez Lanza’s (2002) assertion that Argentineans prefer to convey camaraderie when making an invitation” (274). Upon initial rejection, “strong insistence is expected and necessary to maintain and strengthen the close vínculo (link) between participants” (287); overall, García finds a highly significant preference for solidarity over deference strategies and generally chose to impose on both themselves and the addressee. In contrast to Brown and Levinson’s theory that deference is more relevant in invitations, young Argentineans once again show that confianza is more important in this cultural context: they feel comfortable enough with each other to impose without problems and preferred to impose on their own and their interlocutor’s negative face over positive face. They also use strong insistence, name-calling and pseudo-insults, which “sends out a message that the speaker feels comfortable with his/her interlocutor and that they trust one another enough to be able to use these words with a positive meaning” (Alba-Juez 2000 as cited in García 2007:295).

4.6 Invitation Refusals

Another study by García points to similar conclusions. It is important to note that in both of García’s studies used here, she utilizes almost entirely Brown and Levinson’s notion of politeness, reinforced by supporting articles that also utilize Brown and Levinson. Both studies are still highly relevant in this context, as Brown and Levinson is not entirely irrelevant to Argentina; it merely must be supplemented by more collectivist
notions of verbal interactions, which is included in the analysis of both of these studies.

Garcia’s study of invitation refusal is specific to informal settings, so the hierarchy discussed in the previous study is no longer relevant. When issued an invitation, someone may accept, demure, or refuse; acceptance is preferred because it satisfies the inviter’s positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987:101); a demurral avoids either accepting or refusing and thus avoids threatening face of the interlocutor or speaker, and a refusal, as a dispreferred response that inherently threatens face and may therefore be mitigated by strategies to save the inviter’s positive face (essentially reassuring them that “I like you even though I am refusing this invitation”) and protecting the invitee’s negative face (“My decision not to attend is my right”) (García 2007:551). Thus, the study looks at these strategies of saving face as they interacted in a role-play scene with a 27-year-old university student they did not know as he invited them to his birthday party.

In this study, again, Argentines preferred to threaten their own face to that of the interlocutor; in threatening the interlocutor’s face, they “preferred strategies that would curtail their freedom of action over those that would make them not likable” (García 2007:561). Once again, Argentines showed a noted preference for positive politeness strategies; when positive and negative face are the factors in question (as opposed to autonomy and affiliation), the need to be liked and demonstrate to the other person that they are liked is much more important than showing respect for the ability to make independent decisions. This most likely stems from the fact that likeability is far more closely related to confianza than is freedom from imposition; because confianza, closeness and equality are so much more important, negative face becomes much easier to threaten than positive face, making Argentina a positive politeness culture.
4.7 Impoliteness and the Language of Tango Songs

As Alba-Juarez points out in her overview of Argentinean and Uruguayan Spanish (Alba-Juez 2007: 35-57), there has been relatively little research on the subject of impoliteness in Spanish despite the recent increase of interest in politeness studies of Latin America. Impoliteness, by negative definition to politeness, would be the intentional threatening of face; in a singular study in this area, Kaul de Marlangeon distinguishes between on-record and off-record impoliteness: overt impoliteness appears to, but does not, minimize face threat, and irony and sarcasm also illustrate the possibility of intentional impoliteness. She proposes that impoliteness generally appears where there is a conflict of power and asymmetricality between speakers and examines the phenomenon in the tango discourse, namely from men (the singer) towards women (addressee).

This study is particularly interesting because unlike the majority of studies included here, it addresses situations of inequality. Where the other articles discuss differences in strategy but where all participants share common cultural values, Kaul de Marlangeon addresses what happens when these values are not shared – or at least perceived as such by the speaker – between interlocutors. The tango lyrics accuse the woman of devaluing and debasing the ideals of friendship, faithfulness (on the part of the woman), and love for one’s mother, all of which are affiliative values of friendship, love, family, and confianza. The tango lyrics give an Argentine perception of what happens when these values go by the wayside and legitimize male assertion of dominance over women under the pretense that she has done away with these indispensable core values. This emphasizes the perception that these affiliative values are essential and shared by all;
whether or not the subject of the lyrics really did anything wrong, the singer is justified in villainizing her once these values are violated.

4.8 El Che Argentino

_Che_, for being such a simple and common word in Argentine Spanish, is disproportionately difficult to define and discuss. In ¡Che Boludo!: A Gringo’s Guide to Understanding the Argentines, James Bracken defines _che_ as an exclamation:

“1) hey!, hey you! 2) also used as a meaningless interjection in whatever context. The origins of this catchy explicative are very debated” (Bracken 2008:24).

While ¡Che Boludo! is more of a cultural guide than an academic analysis, Bracken hits the nail on the head; _che_ is an exclamation of extremely varied use and with highly speculative theories of origin. It is, however, extremely Argentine, so much so that “the Argentineans call their country the land of the _che_” (Daireaux as cited in Rosenblat 1962:326) and vice versa; Argentines are commonly referred to as “ches” by Spanish speakers from other countries. It can be used among friends, family, strangers, children, in hierarchical relationships, between men and women: essentially in any kind of relationship. While the word is used in other isolated parts of Latin America, it has entirely separate meanings (Rosenblat 1962:351-355), such as a child's exclamation of fear in the Piuria region of Peru and meaning “man” where the indigenous language of Guarani is spoken (parts of Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia and almost all of Paraguay). Even so, the distinct Argentine use of "che" is still recognized throughout Latin America (Rosenblat 1962; Dishman 1982). The most well known example of this is "Che" Guevara, whose real name was Ernesto and earned his moniker by dint of being Argentine and using "che" throughout his travels. In Argentina he is known as "El Che"
(the Che), but in English it is often assumed that Che is his first name. Similarly, Argentines are often called "los ches/cheyes", or jokingly addressed as "che" by Spanish-speakers who would not normally use the term.

By the sheer volume of supported theories on the origin of the Argentine “che,” it is safe to eliminate the possibility of confirming its genesis. As far back as 1888, Emilio Daireaux hypothesized that “che” originated in the pampas with the Tehuenche Indians, for whom “che” means “man”; similar theories have since linked its origins to the Mapuche, Aymara and Guaraní Indians, with the gauchos as the linguistic link between the indigenous populations and the country’s common Spanish (Rosenblat 1962: 327). Other theories find its roots in Italian (“che” is basically analogous to the Spanish “que,” meaning “what” and appearing in myriad situations), nineteenth century Spain’s Galicia, Andalucía or Valencia, saying that the Argentine che precedes any contact with indigenous populations; the Iberian Spanish theories link “che” to “tú” or “te” (the personal pronoun for the second person plural; may have been pronounced “tse” or “che”) and to instances where it may have been used as an exclamation (such as in reproach). The argument for Valencia is somewhat convincing, as Rosenblat cites an exclamative ¡ce! (pronounced “tse”), but no matter where its origins, the Argentine che has doubtlessly evolved considerably since.

Like vos, che is distinctly Argentine; it is little used outside of Argentina, but where one appears in places such as Uruguay, the other does as well; Uruguay, furthermore, is in the same River Plate region as Buenos Aires and the two areas share considerable linguistic and cultural similarities. Dishman directly relates vos to che: “its link with the voseo is habitual, to the point that to chechear (or use che with somebody) is used as a
synonym of *vosear* (or to use *vos* with somebody)” ¹¹ (Dishman 1962:94). Both are not only strongly linked to Argentine identity, but also embody the unique informality found in Argentine and River Plate Spanish.

Apart from being quintessentially Argentinean, “che” has further appeal to this study in that it acts to create, reaffirm and/or emphasize familiarity and *confianza* between interlocutors. Emilio Daireaux describes it as having “a great sweetness and a special enchantment; familiar, friendly, affectionate… it contributes more than any other word to filling the environment with familiarity” ¹² (Daireaux as cited in Rosenblat 1962:326).

According to Amalia Dishman, “che” has a multitude of applications in Argentine speech, including (but not limited to) the following (Dishman 1982:94-97). These explanations are given using a combination the individualist concepts of positive and negative face and the more collectivist versions of autonomy and affiliation within a group. The applications and following examples are Dishman’s, unless noted otherwise; explanations and translations are my own (original article in Spanish).

1. As an expression of doubt, hunger or tiredness, consisting of the personal pronoun
   a. “Che, no sé” (Che, I don’t know”)
      • In this example, “che” can be seen as enhancing the addressee’s positive face, essentially assuring her that the doubt is not towards her but generalized.
   b. “¡Che, qué frío hace!” (Che, it’s so cold out!)
      • This is similar to Rigatuso’s study on small talk, where the weather acts

¹¹ My translation ¹² My translation
as a statement to create familiarity between interlocutors; in this case, “che” added onto an exclamation (not only about the weather) acts affiliatively, affirming the speakers’ inclusion in their “group” (even if it is just the two of them). This is true of many of the following examples of uses of che.

2. As a filler to end a phrase with energy
   a. “Te he dicho que vengas, che” (I told you to come, che)
      • In addition to adding emphasis to the phrase and depending on the tone, the “che” affirms the addressee’s positive face (softening perceived anger; “we’re still buddies”)
   b. “Vos no creés, che?” (Don’t you think so, che?)

3. Alone, as pure exclamation

4. As an expression of surprise (sometimes admiring, sometimes reproachful; also as “hi!”)
   a. “¡Che, vos por aquí!” (Che, what are you doing here!)
   b. “¡Che! ¿qué es eso?” (Che! What is that?)
   c. “¡Pero, che!” (But, che!) (as an expression of surprise, not contradiction)
   d. “¡Che, qué sorpresa!” (Che, what a surprise!)

5. To call someone (animal or person)
   a. “¡Che, che vení!” (Che, che come here!) (vos is the pronoun used)

6. As a part of an address:
   a. “¡Che María!”
   b. “¡Che viejo!” (Che old man!) (friendly nickname)
c. “¡Che, prestame cien pesos!” (Che, lend me ten pesos!)

d. “Che, ¿adonde vamos?” (Che, where should we go?)

7. As a personal address:
   a. “A vos, che, te estamos esperando” (We’re waiting, che, for you)
   b. “Te digo, che, que no” (I’m telling you no, che)
      • Again, in these examples “che” can soften what might otherwise
        encroach on the individual’s positive face or affiliative needs; it is
        a friendly, familiar vocative that ensures the addressee that they are
        close

8. As a way of getting someone’s attention, reproach, remonstrance, or rejection:
   a. “¡Che, qué te has creído!” (Che, you’ll believe anything!/you believed
      that!?)
   b. “¡Che, estate quieto!” (Che, hold still!)
   c. “¡Che, termina de una vez!” (Che, stop it already!)

9. As an address to a group
   a. “¡Che vengan!” (Che, come on! (second person plural))

10. As an expression of familiarity and closeness between men
    • This expression is similar to “dude” among American youth, as
        discussed by Scott Kiesling (2005); Kiesling discusses “dude” as a
        way for young men to express homosocial (as opposed to
        homosexual) desire.

11. Hey! (negative or exasperated)
    a. “Che, ¿cuántas veces te lo he de decir?” (Che, how many times did I tell
       you?)
In addition to Rosenblat/Dishman’s categories, I posit one more regular appearance of “che” in discourse: to emphasize a congratulations.13

- “Que bueno, che, te felicito” (That’s great, che, I congratulate you/congratulations)
- “Que bien, che, te felicitamos” (How great, che, we congratulate you)
- “Si, pero, genial!... Que bueno, che” (Yes, but of course! How great, che)

In these situations “che” serves to enhance both autonomy and affiliation. The first of these appears where “che” emphasizes the person or persons receiving the congratulations as separate in their well-doing; it positively singles them out for commendation. The latter, affiliation, appears with all uses of “che”; as it is a type of nickname, it demonstrates closeness between the speakers and recalls the common group identity as Argentines.

All of these uses are forms of address or expression; they correlate with many words in English, such as “hey,” “dude,” “hun” and other vocative particles, “ok,” and some situations without any English equivalencies (such as “¡Che viejo!”). It should be noted, however, that che is always directed towards someone, even if it is not a direct address, and thus affirms positive face (the desire to be liked) by Brown and Levinson’s model and affiliation within a group (confianza, trust, affection, mutual familiarity, generosity, reciprocity and sincerity).

It is not a coincidence that che, considered by many to be the defining word for Argentines, is inherently reflective of the affiliative values of warmth, confianza,

13 All of these examples appeared in my recordings; two were middle-aged women and one a young man.
closeness and reciprocity. Argentines use it amongst each other and with outsiders to demonstrate and even increase solidarity; it can be used with strangers and loved ones alike, and consistently mitigates threats to positive individual face and affiliative group face by increasing friendliness and affinity.

5 CONCLUSION

Argentine Spanish differs considerably not only from its Iberian Spanish roots, but from the rest of Latin America; this manifests itself throughout River Plate Spanish as well as the rest of the country in various ways. This linguistic distinction is due mainly to Argentina’s unique history of immigration; the large Italian population, as well as the rest of Europe, essentially wiped out native cultures in the 19th century, leaving a largely Italian, Spanish and French population to evolve into what is now Argentina and Argentine Spanish. As we have seen, the demographics of immigrants into Argentina likely contributed greatly to its Spanish, from the illiterate populations whose dialects were easily subsumed into a national Spanish, to the closeness-oriented immigrant families of the Mediterranean. These background values and the search for a national identity encouraged the adoption of the gaucho values of reciprocity, trust and generosity, and contributed greatly to the informality of Argentine Spanish today; this informality is a reflection of the confianza, equality and reciprocity inherent in the Argentine values system.

Because of the increased collectivism of Argentina over English-speaking countries, Bravo’s categories of autonomy and affiliation work well in conjunction with Brown, Levinson and Goffman’s theories of face and positive and negative politeness. This makes even more sense when viewing these theories as different aspects of the same
concept, where autonomy is the collective version of negative face, and affiliation is same for positive face. In both cases, individuals seek to reach a comfortable linguistic relationship with their interlocutors, and rely upon various strategies based on shared cultural values to do so. For Argentines, various analyses of natural and role-played conversations demonstrate a strong preference towards solidarity and collectivism over social distance and deference; however, there is some individualism – more than appears in any other Latin American country, according to Hofstede’s IDV. This is likely also related to the strong family values that originate with Argentina’s Italian and Spanish immigration: “behavior is individualist because the Argentine ‘prototype’ isn’t interested in other people, except when it is for a family member and for a friend”  

However, there is still considerable room for studies regarding politeness in Buenos Aires and Argentina. The discourse markers esuchame and escuchame una cosa, due to their original conjugation with vos, are almost certainly unique to Argentina with the possible exception of Uruguay; future research is necessary to examine these phrases in contexts outside of Buenos Aires. In addition few or no studies exist for Argentine Spanish on interruptions, giving and receiving advice, persuasion, greetings, endearments or a myriad of other topics that remain inadequately covered in a complete analysis of politeness in Argentina; this overview could then be compared for similarities, differences and sociolinguistic explanations in comparisons to other Spanish-speaking regions, analyses of contributing factors, and uses of this knowledge of politeness in

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14 My translation  
15 Persuasion is briefly examined in Carmen García’s study on invitations and invitation refusals, where the inviter insists after an initial refusal; however, this is discussed in the context of invitations rather than persuasion in and of itself.
intercultural communications with Argentines, be it in business, political, or personal settings. Effective communication is the most valuable tool in intercultural interaction, and even through a language barrier the knowledge of cultural values contributing to speech acts is an essential part of interacting with, and in, Argentine Spanish.
6   APPENDIX

The following transcription marks were used:

A.  (.) and (…) to indicate pauses (short and long, respectively)

B.  // to indicate the start and finish of simultaneous utterances

C.  ( ( )) to indicate laughter and description of gestures

D.  […] to indicate unintelligible utterances

E.  (?) to indicate rising intonation as a question
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