

Pragmatic Variation in Service Encounters in Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Abstract

The present study investigates pragmatic variation in public service encounters in corner stores in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Drawing from previous service encounter studies (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Placencia, 2005, 2008), this study seeks to analyze three levels of pragmatic variation (Barron & Schneider, 2009; Schneider & Barron, 2008): the interactional level (openings and closings), the actional level (request types), and stylistic level (address forms and pronouns). The analysis also addresses the issue of gender variation. This paper examines 97 transactions from natural recordings at corner stores (“kioscos”) recorded between September-December 2012 in Almagro, Buenos Aires. The results demonstrate a general trend for preference of direct questions and elliptical requests (actional level), the presence of short and informal openings and closings (interactional level), informal-you (*vos*), the use of nicknames, and the absence of lexical downgraders in both requests and relational talk (actional and stylistic levels). In terms of gender, this paper argues that excluding the stylistic level, there is almost no difference in service encounters in Buenos Aires Spanish.

Keywords: service encounters, variational pragmatics, speech acts, Argentina

1. Introduction

Service encounters are brief interactions between a customer and an employee that fulfill a specific purpose (make a purchase, request information). Research on service encounters has been conducted in different linguistic settings, and has focused on interlocutors' use of mitigation and politeness strategies. Aspects of the interactions, such as openings and closings, request types (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2012, 2015; Merritt, 1976; Placencia 2008), and address forms have been analyzed, and social factors, such as age and gender, have been taken into consideration.

As defined by Ventola (2005), service encounters are “everyday interactions between the customer and the server whereby some commodity (information or goods) will be exchanged” (p. 19). They are considered ‘semi-institutional’ due to the mixture of a uniform structure of the interaction and the opportunity for informal or conversational talk (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2008). Aston (1988) defined service encounters based on their institutional nature, responsibilities of involved parties, and expectations. The discourse structure of service encounters has been divided into different phases: the opening, the exchange, the payment, and the closing, and a number of different negotiations within those phases. Throughout the process, both parties aim to complete the desired goal.

The data for this study was collected in Buenos Aires and as such, it will emphasize the pragmatic use of the language in this city. However, it is important to consider that there is significant variation of Argentine Spanish throughout the country. It contains important influences from Quechua, Portuguese, some influence the *afro-rioplatense* slaves and other indigenous languages (Lipksi, 1994). The Argentine Spanish of Buenos Aires experienced the most influence from the influx of immigrants in the late 19th century and early 20th century, leading to the strong Italian influence in its vocabulary, slang, and other linguistic characteristics, especially its intonation. While many studies have given emphasis on phonology, morphologic, and lexical characteristics of Argentine Spanish (Lipksi, 1994) and alternation between *voseo* and *ustedeo* (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2005), none have focused on the pragmatic uses of these characteristics in service encounters. The objective of the present study is to investigate service encounters at kiosks in Buenos Aires Spanish to determine: the most common openings and closings (interactional level), request types (actional level), and address forms (stylistic level).

This article is organized into five sections. First, the theoretical framework, where I review previous service encounter studies with particular attention to studies conducted in Spanish speaking settings, characteristics of Argentine Spanish and research questions. Next, I present the method, the results, the discussion, and finally the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Previous research on service encounter studies

Most studies of service encounters have focused their analysis on three levels of pragmatic variation as determined by Barron & Schneider (2009): actional, interactional, and stylistic. The actional level investigates request types (“Give me cigarettes”); the interactional level analyzes openings and closings and request response sequences (V: “Hello,” C: “Hi, how are you?”), and finally the stylistic level examines address forms (formal-you and informal-you, sir, madam). The present study analyzes its data according to these levels.

The classic studies of service encounters (Antonopolou, 2001; Aston, 1988; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2006; Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso, 2008; Merritt, 1976) considered several levels of analysis and set the foundation for the study of customer-employee pragmatics. For example, Merritt (1976) identified elliptical response (questions following questions) as a form of request (actional level). Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2006) acknowledged the ritualistic nature of the encounters and various negotiating techniques to soften a request and internal modifiers to suggest politeness. Finally, Aston (1995) determined that the request of the customer depended on his or her role in the interaction and need to negotiate. While all of the mentioned studies are crucial to the field of service encounters, for the purposes of this study, I will only focus on service encounters in Spanish-speaking countries.

Although there has been no study of service encounters in Argentina, there have been analysis of service encounters in Cuba (Ruzickova, 2007), Ecuador (Placencia, 2005; 2008), Mexico (Félix-Brasdefer, 2012; 2015), Puerto Rico (Vélez, 1987), and Spain (Placencia, 2005). On the interactional level (openings/closings and request sequences), there is significant variation in the type of greetings used. In Ecuadorian Andean Spanish, greetings were prevalent with 92.6% of interactions beginning with a greeting, while in Ecuadorian Costal Spanish, only 17.5% of interactions included a greeting or a greeting exchange (Placencia, 2008). Spanish from Madrid had a tendency towards less formal greetings, such as the *hola/hola* (hi/hi) sequence, whereas Quiteño Spanish showed more formal greetings (*Buenos dias- Hola, ¿Cómo está?/ Good morning – Hi, how are you?*) (Placencia, 2005). Formal closings, including *gracias* (thanks) or *muchas gracias* (thank you very much) or *que le vaya bien* (have a good day) were prevalent in Ecuadorian Quiteño (Andean) Spanish but not in Ecuadorian Costal Spanish (Placencia, 2008). Such intra-country variation emphasizes the possibility of different pragmatic uses of the language, even in the same country. Placencia (2008) attributes the lack of openings/closings or ‘thank you’ statements to a sense of familiarity between the customers and the employee, as evidenced by the shared information found in several interactions. Placencia (2005), in her comparison between Peninsular and Ecuadorian Spanish, alluded to the lack of openings or closings in Spain and the presence of openings and closings in Quiteño Ecuadorian

Spanish (similar to the imperative requests mentioned above) as different variations of Fant's (1995) model of an either task-oriented or person-oriented perspective, where Peninsular Spanish exhibits a tendency toward task-orientedness.

Pragmatic variation across Spanish demonstrates that regardless of the uniformity of the structure of service encounters, interactional level patterns alter, and several authors note external cultural factors that produce to differences. For example, in Yucatan Mexican service encounters, openings and closings were almost non-existent, but requests did involve 'pre-sequences' where the customer inquired about requests for availability or more information (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). Félix-Brasdefer (2015) interprets these pre-sequences as negotiations that lead to mutual acceptance of the interaction. Placencia (2005, 2008) notes that in Ecuadorian Quiteño (Andean) Spanish, there are often four to five greeting sequences before the requests are made. In Spanish used in Havana, Cuba, the conventionally indirect and direct requests were preceded by build-up statements that Ruzickova (2007) interprets as politeness strategies, showing a desire not to impose but ultimately exhibiting characteristics of positive politeness, not negative.

On the actional level (request types), the majority of analysis of request utterances following the adapted model of Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989) (Placencia, 2005; 2008; Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). In Spanish service encounters -whereas in general conventional indirect request strategies were far less common- direct strategies, including imperative, elliptical, want statements, direct questions, assertions, and implicit requests were more prevalent (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Placencia, 2005; 2008). In Placencia's (2005) comparison of Quito and Madrid corner store transactions, the author found that while 18.75% of requests in Madrid were implicit ("tacit"), this method was absent in Quito. Furthermore, Quiteños exhibited an overall tendency for direct strategies above all others. In a comparison between Ecuadorian Coastal (Manta) and Andean Spanish (Quito), Placencia (2008) finds that speakers in both Manta and Quito favored imperative requests, evidencing task-oriented or person-oriented encounters (Fant, 1995). Service encounters in Havana, Cuba shows that direct requests (37.9%) were less frequent than conventional indirect requests (50.8%) (Ruzickova, 2007).

On the stylistic level, previous studies on service encounters in Spanish have focused on the address forms [*tú* (or *vos*) versus *usted*, and terms such as *señora* or *señorita*], and other ways of showing solidarity or politeness, such as the diminutive form and internal modification within the request. For example, a customer might ask the vendor, referring to him as "sir" (*señor*), for "little bread" (*pancito*). In regards to the use of pronouns in Spanish, Blas Arroyo (2005) identifies the distinction between the use of the formal-you (*usted*) and the informal-you (*tú* or *vos*) in Spanish as a tool to demonstrate relations of power and solidarity. The selected pronouns by both the person that directs the pronoun and the person that receives the pronoun establish these power structures, which are caused by various social factors, such as

age, profession, gender, and socioeconomic status. The address form chosen can determine beliefs regarding solidarity, inferiority, distance, and superiority. Félix-Brasdefer (2015) argues that there is no explicit power structure between the customer and the vendor in a service encounter situation. However, in certain instances, such as service encounters, the interlocutors in an interaction may alternate between the informal-you and the formal-you. In such cases, contextualization is necessary, as the vendor or the customer may be alternating between the use of positive and negative politeness strategies, showing distance or solidarity in different moments of the conversation (Blas Arroyo, 2005).

Placencia (2005) found that Quiteño Spanish tended towards negative politeness strategies that employed the diminutive and internal modifications. Instances of *regáleme pancito por favor* ('gift me a little bread please'), where both lexical downgrading and the diminutive are used. In other examples, the terms *hágame el favor* (do me the favor) and *dejar llevar* (allow me to take) were utilized to sound more like pleas than requests. Quiteño Spanish data also saw frequent use of *por favor* (please) or *hágame el favor* (do me the favor) whereas it was almost absent in Madrid data. Placencia (2005) explains that in Peninsular Spanish, *por favor* (please) and *gracias* (thank you) are more frequently used when someone does a personal favor. In a service interaction, the employee is expected to carry out the customer's requests and therefore would not be a favor. Another politeness strategy that Quiteños used was the ambiguity of the amount of the product they requested. For instance, *unos/unas* (some) (as in *unos pancitos por favor* (some little bread please)) serve to mitigate the request (Placencia, 2005). Placencia (2005) interprets requests in Ecuadorian Spanish as more ritualistic than those of Madrid, explained by lengthy introductions and frequent how-are-you build-up strategies to the request. Félix-Brasdefer (2015) notes that the greetings used in Mexican Spanish, including terms of endearment, nicknames, names, or titles were used to show solidarity or affiliation and interpersonal relations between the interlocutors. This coincides with Placencia (2008)'s analysis of Quiteño Spanish as using varying rapport-building strategies [adapted from Aston (1988)] by the use of teasing and play on words.

Félix-Brasdefer (2015) and Ruzickova (2007) note gender variation on the actional, interactional, and stylistic levels. On the actional level, Ruzickova's (2007) data, found men to use more indirect request strategies than women. This data disproves several gender and pragmatics theories that view women's speech as less invasive and as having softer request strategies (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975).

In Mexican open-air market service encounters, the variation on the stylistic level depended on both the gender of the customer and the vendor (male/male, male/female, and female/male) (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). The author reports that the use of the informal (T) and the use of the formal (V) ways of addressing the vendor varied by the gender of the customer and vendor. The T form was prominent among male-male interactions, but in 50%

of the female customer-male vendor interactions the formal V form was used. In many of the interactions, the male vendors used the T form, while the female customers used the V form. And Placencia (2005) notes that, exhibiting less ceremoniousness to their interactions, the T form dominates Madrid service interactions while Ecuadorian interactions more frequently used the V form.

2.2 Politeness and gender

The previously mentioned studies of Spanish-speaking studies discussed politeness and gender issues in their interactional, actional and stylistic analysis. Antonopolou (2001) and Félix-Brasdefer (2012, 2015) note the relevance of gender as it influences politeness, address forms and request strategies. Antonopolou (2001) notes that gender influenced the form of request, the use of questions and joking at the initial or final stages of an interaction. The author argues that women's speech is typically more uncertain, more hesitant, and more likely to utilize politeness markers. Lakoff (1975) observed that women's speech typically included more doubt, a factor that suggests lack of confidence, a lack of humor, and extreme politeness ("Would it be possible for you to..."), therefore affecting women's behavior in social situations. In this study, gender will be a variable highlighted in this study in order to determine its importance as a social factor that influences the pragmatic variation of the actional, interactional, and stylistic levels.

In the present study, politeness is understood as the cooperation, by exhibiting a type of face, between the customer and the vendor given the social circumstances of a service encounter. Politeness has been conceptualized based on the concept of face, as elaborated by Goffman (1967), which is the image that an individual demonstrates publicly. Face influences how the role of the speaker, as relative to the interlocutor, is determined by the sociocultural context and variables such as age, gender, and profession. Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness stems from the concept of face. In this theory, there are two faces: positive face, the need for approval; and negative face, the speaker's self-determination. The authors correlate indirectness with positive politeness. However, this theory has been widely critiqued for its lack of universality beyond the Anglo-American context.

For the purposes of the present study, the realization of politeness in service encounters follows Bravo's (1999) notions of affiliation and autonomy. The development of the face either defined as affiliation or autonomy is also contextualized by the geopolitical context. As such, Bravo's (1999) definitions of autonomy and affiliation is more adaptable and applicable to non-English speaking contexts. It views the two faces as empty categories- behaviors and speech determined by each social context. Therefore, the need for approval (negative face), may not always be exhibited through indirectness in all cultures. Affiliation is how an individual is

perceived by others as part of the social group, and autonomy is how one is perceived as apart from the group. The way in which the social context determines how these categories unfold linguistically. Both the customer and the employee utilize different strategies to exhibit affiliation or autonomy, or both, and fulfill the desired goal (complete a service encounter). In the interactions, the customers and vendors establish politeness via the demonstration of their willingness to comply with the other's wishes. In this study, affiliation is understood as the closeness between the two parties, whereas autonomy is understood as distance or unfamiliarity between them.

While the aforementioned studies analyzed various aspects of pragmatic variation in different varieties of Spanish (e.g., Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Spain), there is an absence of investigation of Argentine Spanish. These studies show that there is great pragmatic variation, even between regions within the same country (Placencia, 2008). And according to Barron and Schneider's (2009) model of variational pragmatics, previous research on service encounters focused on the actional, interactional, and stylistic levels. Further, these studies show a tendency towards autonomous politeness strategies, and significant variation of the three levels depending on the culture, which includes other social factors, such as gender. Internal mitigation as analyzed in previous research is shown to be paired with more direct requests, thus softening them. Nicknames were frequent tools for rapport building and solidarity in the previous studies, and other stylistic markers, such as the pronoun choice, were influenced by gender. However, none of the mentioned service encounters analyzed Buenos Aires Spanish, and thus an examination of this variety is necessary.

The present study investigates the following questions:

1. What are the recurrent realization patterns of opening and closing sequences in service encounters at kiosks in Buenos Aires? (interactional level)
2. What are the recurrent realization patterns of request strategies in service encounters at kiosks in Buenos Aires? (actional level)
3. How do customers and vendors address each other? Do they employ the use of nicknames/terms of endearment, or more formal address forms in service encounters in Buenos Aires? (stylistic level)

3. Method

3.1 Setting

Thirteen hours of natural data recordings were collected at two different corner stores (known as "kioscos") in the Almagro neighborhood in Buenos Aires, Argentina between September and December 2012. The stores typically had one vendor at a time, although the recordings demonstrate there was at times an additional vendor present. However, this was not consistent

throughout the data. The stores sold everyday items such as gum, candy, chocolate, hot dogs, ready-made sandwiches, drinks, cigarettes and recharges for prepaid cell phones. As seen in Figure 1, the products were displayed in front of the register and, with the exception of hot dogs and cigarettes, customers grabbed the product they wanted to buy and presented it to the vendor.

The corner stores were located off busy metropolitan streets, close to the subway and bus stops, which contributes to a lower quality of the recordings. A major mall was located a few blocks from each of the stores. All transactions included cash monetary exchanges. Because of the crowded streets and commercial attractions nearby, many of the stores had first-time customers. However, the data suggests that many of the customers were familiar with the vendor and frequented the store on a daily basis.



Figure 1. The setting of the corner store in Buenos Aires where data was collected

3.2 Data collection

The recordings were done during peak hours, including the lunch hour and end of the workday when many customers frequented the stores. Due to the goal- or task-orientated nature of the setting, many transactions happened simultaneously, and vendors informally chatted with friends (who were not customers) while working. There was usually loud music obstructing the data. Many of the recordings were incomprehensible due to the background noise, including public transportation, sirens, and loud music. The researcher was not present during any of the recordings and did not take notes on observations. Although a total of about 130 transactions between customers and vendors were identified, only 97 of those were usable for the purposes of the current study. There were 49 female customer and 48 of male customer transactions

identified. All recordings were transcribed by the author and verified by an Argentine native speaker, a female college student from Buenos Aires. All data was coded by the researcher and verified by the same Argentine native speaker to ensure correct interpretation. All transcriptions were transcribed using notation system adapted from Jefferson (2004) (see Appendix). Data were analyzed according to each research question mentioned above and for each level of analysis: interactional, actional, and stylistic.

While using natural data collection in service encounters has benefits, there are also disadvantages. By solely relying on audio, there is the chance of misinterpretation in terms of sequence of events or subtle nonverbal cues, such how a customer may indicate an implicit request and maintain politeness, or how a vendor responds nonverbally to an elliptical request. Nonverbal language is also an important factor pragmatic analysis, and through the current method of research collection it is not able to be determined. Other factors previously mentioned, such as noise, multiple voices while the transactions were occurring, and music, also have the possibility to inhibit accurate interpretation and analysis. Nevertheless, natural data collection audio allows for uninfluenced spontaneous speech, thus allowing for a more accurate depiction of the recurring patterns. Audio also allows the listener to carefully note linguistic subtleties that hint at politeness, such as voice inflection and word placement. Although audio-only data may hinder analysis of nonverbal language, it nonetheless provides data on unaltered speech.

3.3 Data analysis

For each research question, the data coded by the researcher was analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the first research question (What are the recurrent realization patterns of opening and closing sequences in the service interactions at kiosks in Buenos Aires?), the interactional level, data was examined for different strategies for opening and closing the interaction.

The second research question, the actional level (What are the recurrent realization patterns of request strategies in service encounters at kiosks in Buenos Aires?), included classifications of types of customer-initiated requests adapted from Blum-Kulka et.al (1989) and Félix-Brasdefer (2015). All request types were also analyzed for gender. Table 1 shows the eight different request types and examples of each.

Table 1. Request variants in the realization of the request for service

Request Type	Example
Performative	Te pido un col light, de los verdes, de los altos <i>I ask you for a light [candy], the green ones, the tall ones</i>
Imperative	Unas Mana de leche dame, por favor <i>Some of the milk Mana [Brand], please</i>
Want Statement	Quiero un pancho, por favor <i>I want a hot dog, please</i>
Direct Question	C: ¿Camel blanco, tenés? V: ¿De 10? C: <i>Do you have white camel?</i> V: <i>A box of 10?</i>
Assertion (with rising intonation)	Me das un Lucky común↑ <i>You will give me a regular Lucky?</i>
Elliptical	¿Un pancho puede ser? <i>A hot dog, could it be?</i>
Implicit	Customer picks up product and pays
Conventional Indirectness	¿Te puedo pedir Marlboro diez? <i>Can I ask you for a Marlboro box of 10</i>

Additionally, internal modification embedded in the request for service, including the diminutive, the politeness marker “please,” was analyzed according to Félix-Brasdefer (2015) and Placencia (2005).

Finally, on the stylistic level (How do customers and vendors address each other? Do they employ the use of nicknames/terms of endearment, or more formal address forms in service encounters in Buenos Aires?), attention was given to the address forms (nicknames, formal address forms) as well as pronouns (*vos* vs. *usted*) chosen by both the vendor and the customer, throughout the negotiation of the request.

4. Results

In this section, results for each research question will be presented. Out of 97 transactions, 48 of the customers were male and 49 of the customers were female, allowing for an almost equal comparison between the two genders. The majority of the transactions involved a male vendor (88), while only a small fraction involves a female vendor (9).

4.1 Interactional level: Openings and closings

Figure 2 below shows the distribution of greetings between greeting and no greeting.

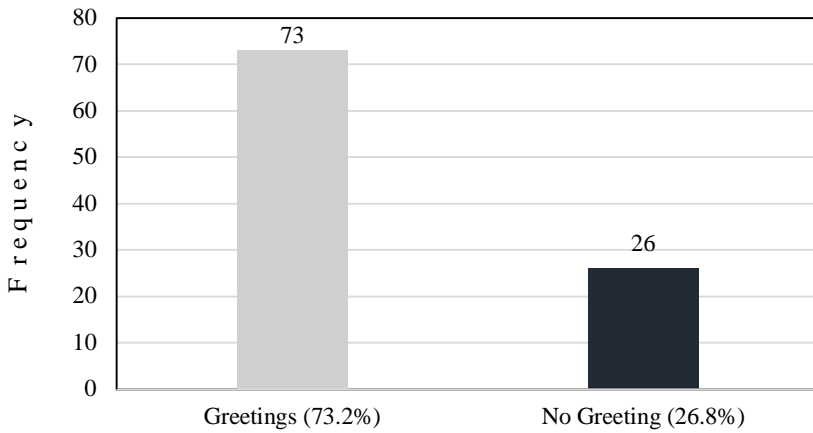


Figure 2. Distribution of openings divided between greetings (73.2%, $n=73/97$) and no greetings (26.8%, $n=26/97$)

According to Figure 2, Buenos Aires service encounters exhibit a preference towards greetings (73.2%, $n=73/97$). Table 2 shows the distribution of all greeting types:

Table 2. Distribution of the six types of opening sequences

Openings	Frequency	%
Greeting Sequence	37	(38%)
No Greeting	20	(21%)
Vendor Initiates Greeting	19	(20%)
Customer Initiates Greeting	15	(15%)
Vendor Initiates Transaction With No Greeting	5	(5%)
Customer Initiates Transaction With No Greeting	1	(1%)
Total	97	(100%)

There was a clear preference for greeting sequences (38%, $n=37/97$) in the service encounter interactions from the present study, while the least common was a customer-initiated transaction with no greeting (1.0%, $n=1/97$). Among the instances of a greeting, the majority were greeting sequences with the *hola/hola* (hi/hi) informal sequences. A few instances surpassed the *hola/hola* (hi/hi) to a greeting including *¿cómo estás?* (how are you?), or *¿cómo andás?* (how is it going?), and at times included the use of a nickname.

There were also a variety of closings found in the interactions. Table 3 shows the different types of closing sequences and their frequencies:

Table 3. Closing types and frequencies

Closings	Frequency	%
Thank-you Sequence	35	(36%)
No Closing	22	(23%)
Customer Closes With 'Thank you'	18	(19%)
Closing Sequence With No Thanks	12	(12%)
Vendor Closes With 'Thanks'	10	(10%)
Total	97	(100%)

As shown in Table 3, the most common closing was a thank you sequence (36%, n=35), and the least common was the vendor closing the transaction with thanks (10%, n=10). It is also notable that the second most common closing was none at all (23%, n=22). Example (1) shows a greeting sequence in line 1 and no greeting after the total is given in line 6:

- (1) Greeting sequence and no closing. (male vendor and female customer)

01 → C: ¿Qué tal mi vecino?
What's up, neighbor?
 02 → V: hola, ¿qué tal? ¿Cómo te va?
hi, what's up? How's it going?
 03 ((customer places product on the counter))
 04 V: a ver, ya te digo
let's see, let me tell you
 ((referring to how much the product costs))
 05 ((pause))
 06 V: \$3.50

In line 1, the customer opens the interaction with an informal greeting and the vendor reciprocates and elaborates on the greeting in line 2. The interaction is finished without a verbal closing. The example in (2) demonstrates a less elaborate greeting and a more lengthy reciprocal closing sequence:

- (2) Vendor initiated greeting and thank you closing sequence. (male vendor and male customer)

01 → V: Hola
Hi

02 ((customer hands him something)) [implicit request]
 03 V: ¿algo más?
anything else?
 04 ((customer indicates that he does not want anything else))
 05 V: gracias capo
thanks, boss
 06 C: no a vos
no, thank you
 07 V: chau, suerte
bye, good luck
 08 C: chau Capo
bye, boss

Unlike Example (1), the interaction in (2) shows an interaction initiated by the vendor in line 1. The vendor greets the customer and without further interaction the customer places the product on the counter in line 2. Where Example 1 did not include a closing, the vendor initiates a closing sequence using a nickname. The full closing sequence continues until line 8.

4.2 Actional level: Request types

Figure 3 shows the distribution of request variants during the realization of a request for service in Buenos Aires Spanish. The present study analyzes 97 interactions.

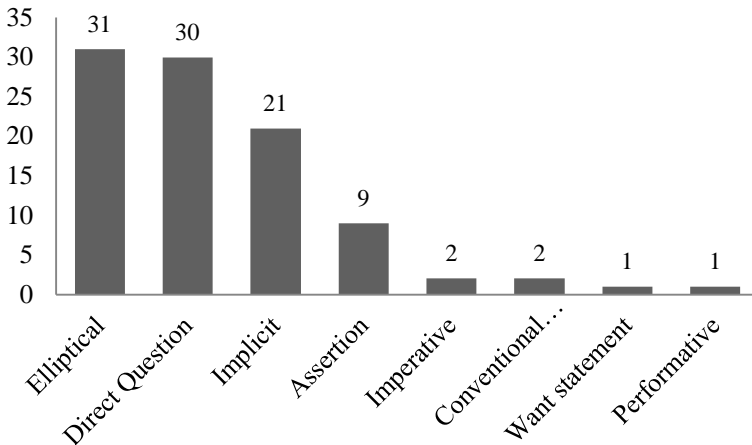


Figure 3. Request Variants of the request for service in Buenos Aires service encounters

As seen in Figure 3, the three most prevalent request strategies for service in the present study were the elliptical (32%, n=31/97), the direct questions (31%, n=30/97), and the implicit request (22%, n=21/97). Elliptical and direct question predominate, demonstrating they are the most common request strategies in service encounters found in the present study. Example (3) shows a transaction where the customer's request for service was a direct question. The request is made in the first turn.

(3) Direct question. (male vendor and a male customer)

01 → C: *Hola, ¿Camel blanco tenés?* [Direct Question]
hi, do you have White Camel?
 02 C: *de 10*
a box of 10
 03 V: *de 10* ↑
a box of 10
 04 V: *3.75*
 05 ((customer gives vendor the money))
 06 C: *gracias*
thanks

The least frequent strategies were want statement (1.0%, n=1/97) and performative (1.0%, n=1/97), followed by the imperative and conventional indirect strategies (2%, n=2/97). Implicit was the third most common (21.6%, 21/97), suggesting that no explicit request for service is required in kiosk service encounters. Example 2 above shows a transaction in which an implicit request is made (line 02). In this example, although not visible through the audio collected, the customer grabbed the product and placed it on the counter. Because of the organization of the setting, the products are available to be brought to the counter and shown to the vendor without further inquiry, negotiation, or verbal request.

The absence of greetings and short, informal greeting sequences, as described in the previous section, correlate with the direct nature also found in the request strategies. There was an overall absence of pre-sequences before the request was made. An overwhelmingly percent of the requests took place in the first, second, or third turn. The absence of pre-sequences aligns with this data. While 29.9% of the requests were made in the first turn, 28.9% were made in the second and 22.7% in the third. The direct nature also correlates with the data found in the following section on internal modification.

4.3 Internal modification of the request for service

Internal modification of requests and within interactions typically serves to mitigate a request. The data collected for this study shows very minimal internal modification within the request strategy. Further demonstrating

informality and routineness, 92.8% of requests did not have any internal modification, although some of the requests (7.2%) did include “please,” (*gracias*) the diminutive or conditional downgraders, “could it be” (*puede ser*), or two or more strategies. For instance, in the following example, the customer combines the use of a direct strategy, the imperative (“give me,” (*dame*) turn 3), with internal modification (“please,” (*por favor*) line 3) embedded in the request. The internal modifier is shown in bold in example (4):

- (4) Internal modification of an imperative request. (male vendor and female customer)

01	V: Hola <i>Hi</i>
02	C: estoy viendo las galletitas que tenés. <i>I'm looking at the cookies that you have</i>
03 →	C: unas Mana de leche dame, por favor <i>some of the milk Mana [Brand], please</i>
04	V: ¿algo más? <i>anything else?</i>
05	((indicates that he does not want anything else))
06	V: 6
07	((customer hands vendor the money))
08	V: gracias <i>thanks.</i>

As demonstrated by this example, the customer makes her request in the third turn. Although she utilizes the imperative, a less commonly used request strategy, she pairs it with a softener, another less frequent politeness strategy.

4.4 Pragmatic variation of the request for service by gender

This section presents the results for variants of request types by gender. Although elliptical, direct question, and implicit were the most common strategies, there was still slight gender variation in regards to the request strategy chosen. Table 4 shows the distribution request strategies by gender by number frequencies and in percentages:

Table 4. Customer request types by gender. (* indicates an indirect request strategy)

Request Strategy	Number of males	Percent of males	Number of females	Percent of females	Total number
Elliptical	18	37.5	13	26.5	31
Direct Question	17	35.4	13	26.5	30
Implicit*	8	16.7	13	26.5	21
Assertion	4	8.3	5	10.2	9
Imperative	0	0	2	4.1	2
Conventional Indirectness*	1	2.1	1	2.0	2
Want Statement	0	0	1	2.0	1
Performative	0	0	1	2.0	1
TOTAL	48	100%	49	100%	97

As shown in Table 4, females used a wider variety of request strategies (three more than males: imperative, want statement, and performative) and a higher concentration of males used elliptical (37.5%, $n=18/97$) and direct question (35.4%, $n=17/97$). Both males and females had almost equal frequency of assertion requests (8.3%, $n=4/97$ of males and 10.2%, $n=5/97$ of females), but the numbers were significantly lower than the most common request type. Likewise, males and females had comparable rates of implicit requests. Finally, in the next section, I will discuss the Research Question 3, which highlights stylistic variation including address forms and pronouns.

4.5 Stylistic level: Address forms

The short interactions between customer and vendor did not typically include address forms, and many did not include a pronoun. When address forms were used, they were used to demonstrate either familiarity or respect for an elder. Terms of endearment were used in 28 of the 97 transactions. Table 5 lists the different address forms used by vendors and by customers and their numerical frequencies:

Table 5. Frequency of address forms in Argentinean service encounters (corner stores, ‘Kioscos’)

Address forms used by vendor	Number of times found in the data	Address forms used by customer	Number of times found in the data
Capo (Boss)	6	Capo (Boss)	4
Señora (Ma’am)	5	Yanqui (Yankee)	1
Señor (Sir)	4	Papa (Daddy)	1
Maestro (Teacher)	4	Amigo (Friend)	1
Campeón (Champion)	3	Chico (Boy)	1
Chicos (Boys)	2	Vecino (Neighbor)	1
Señorita (Miss)	2		
Chico (Boy)	1		
Loco (Crazy boy)	1		
Amigo (Friend)	1		
Negro (Black guy)	1		
Querido (Beloved)	1		
Papa (Daddy)	1		

In 20 (20/28) of those interactions where terms of endearment were used, the vendor was the only one who used them. In three interactions (3/28) only the customer employed an address form, and in five (5/28) of those interactions both the customer and vendor used terms of endearment towards each other. The use of nicknames among women was rare. In seven (7/28) of the interactions where address forms were used the customers were women and did not reciprocate. In the nine interactions in the data where the vendor was female, the female employee did not use any terms of endearment towards a customer. Among the interactions where address forms were used, only some of the customers and vendors reciprocated the other’s use of them. In the male vendor/male customer interactions, five instances of the use of the address forms were reciprocated. All customers that used address forms toward the vendor, with the exception of one female customer, were male.

In example (5), the vendor used the formal-you “*usted*” while simultaneously addressing the customer as “*negro*” (black guy) and “*maestro*” (teacher), terms that demonstrate his familiarity with the customer and show closeness.

- (5) Term of endearment. (male vendor and male customer)
- 01 C: Hola
Hi
- 02→ V: ¡hola **maestro!**
hi, teacher!
- 03 C: ¿me das un Beldent verde?
you will give me a green Beldent? [Brand of gum]
- 04 V: un Beldent ↑
a Beldent?
- 05 C: un Beldent verde y un Col negro
a green Beldent and a black Col [brand]
- 06→ V: nada más, **maestro?**
nothing else, teacher?
- 07 C: ¿cuánto es?
how much is it?
- 08→ V: 6 **negro**
6, black guy
- 09 ((client hands vendor the money))
- 10 V: 6
- 11 ((vendor takes the money))
- 12 V: listo
good
- 13 C: gracias
thanks
- 14→ V: no, gracias a usted, **maestro**
no, thank you teacher (formal you)

Similar to other interactions where address forms between male customers and male vendors demonstrated a sense of familiarity, the vendor's use of *señora* 'ma'am,' *señorita* 'miss,' and *señor* 'sir,' in various interactions also demonstrates both a familiarity and a desire to show respect to the customer. In one instance, the vendor used the term *señora* 'ma'am,' but also employed the informal-you. While this was used to show distance and solidarity, other examples, such as Example , included a nickname (*amigo* 'friend,' *papa* 'daddy,' *querida* 'beloved,' *capo* 'boss') to show solidarity and the *usted* formal-you to show distance.

In example (6), both the vendor and the customer used address forms. There was also small talk found and an apparent knowledge of each other's personal life, in addition to closing the transaction with "thank-you SO much" (*muchísimas gracias*) in turn 21 (line 21).

- (6) Term of endearment. (male vendor and male customer)
- 01 V: Hola
Hi

- 02→ C: ¿tenés pancho **amigo**?
do you have hot dogs, friend?
- 03→ V: sí **papa**, ¿Querés uno?
yes, papa, do you want one?
- 04 C: sí
yes
- 05→ V: ¿qué le pones **campeón**?
what do you put on it champion?
- 06 C: eh, mayonesa
um, mayonnaise
- 07 V: ¿mayonesa?
mayonnaise
- 08 C: ¿papá tenés?
do you have potato chips?
- 09 V: sí tengo
yes, I have them
- 10 C: mándale papa
put some potato chips on it
- 11 V: ¿Laburo? ¿Tenés laburo?
Work? Do you have work?
- 12 C: sí
yes
- 13 V: sí, ¿no?
yes, right?
- 14 C: sí, por suerte ((pausa)) el mes pasado
yes, luckily ((pause)) last month
- 15 V: sí, ¿no?
yes, right?
- 16 ((vendedor gives customer the hot dog))
- 17→ V: 8 **capo**
8 boss
- 18 ((customer gives vendedor the money))
- 19 V: tu vuelto
your change
- 20 ((vendedor gives customer his change))
- 21 C: muchísimas gracias
thank you so much
- 22→ V: de nada **querido**
you're welcome, beloved

In this interaction, five different address forms were used (*amigo* ‘friend’ (line 2), *papa* ‘daddy’ (line 3), *campeón* ‘champion’ (line 5), *capo* ‘boss’ (line 17), *querido* ‘beloved’ (line 22)) and the customer and vendor engaged in small talk related to work and vacation. Again, although short and task oriented, such interactions prove the desire to have a positive social image.

Address forms found in the data also included varied pronoun usage. As indicated in the theoretical framework, the Argentine variation of Spanish employs the use of “*vos*” instead of “*tu*” as the informal-you pronoun, in addition to the formal-you pronoun “*usted*.” Table 6 demonstrates the different pronominal address forms accompanied by their numerical and percent values:

Table 6. Customer and vendor address forms

Address form	Customer		Vendor	
	N	%	N	%
No pronoun used	34	35.1	48	49.5
<i>Vos</i> (T)	62	63.9	42	43.3
<i>Usted</i> (V)	1	1.0	7	7.2
Total	97	100	97	100

The majority of the interactions used the informal-you ‘T’, *vos*, while only a small fraction used the formal-you ‘V’, *usted*. Out of the seven instances where the vendor employed the formal-you, five of those cases alternated between the vendor using the informal-you and the formal-you. In example (7) below the vendor alternates between the formal-you and finishes with the informal-you:

- (7) Variation on the pronominal level. (male vendor and male customer)
- 01 C: *Hola*
Hi
- 02 V: *hola*
hi
- 03 C: *Claro*
Claro [Phone Company]
- 04 V: *¿compañía?*
company?
- 05 C: *Claro*
Claro [Phone Company]
- 06→ V: *¿cuánto le carga señor?*
how much do you want to put on it?
- 07 C: *trienta*
thirty
- 08 V: *muy bien*
alright
- 09 V: *treinta pesos en Claro, muy bien, ¿numerito por favor?*
thirty pesos in Claro, okay, number please?
- 10 C: *156213...*
- 11 V: *6213...*

- 12 C: 13... 0149
 13 V: repito. ¿62..13..01..49?
I'll repeat: 62, 12, 01, 49?
 14 C: sí
yes
 15 V: claro, ¿\$30.00?
claro, \$30?
 16 C: sí
yes
 17→ V: \$31.00 sería, ¿sabés?
it's going to be \$31, do you know? (informal you)
 18 C: \$31.00 ¿por qué?
\$31, why?
 19 V: así se hace la carga, ¿la hago?
that's how you do the recharge, do I do it?
 20 C: no no dejá chau
no, no, leave it, bye

In example (7), the vendor shifts from a formal address form to an informal at strategic moments during the transaction. The vendor's pronominal variation can be interpreted as first a desire to show distance and respect (line 06), shown with both the use of the formal you and the address form *señor* (sir). However, in line 17, the vendor must explain to the customer that his recharging his prepaid cell phone will be more expensive due to the use of a machine. The strategic use of *vos* (informal pronoun) in line 17 can be interpreted as the vendor's request for compliance, putting the vendor and customer on a level of familiarity in which extra costs can be negotiated. Nevertheless, the mitigation fails as in line 20 the customer abandons the transaction.

In example (8) the male vendor used the informal you towards the female customer in turn 15 (line 15), 17 (line 17), and 21 (line 21), and finished the transaction with a formal you in turn 27 (line 27).

(8) Variation on the pronominal level. (male vendor and female customer)

- 01 C: Cigaritas
Cigarettes
 02 V: Chiquita o grande
Small or large
 03 V: \$6.50
\$6.50
 04 V: ¿trae los dos?
should I bring both of them?
 05 C: sí por favor
yes, please

- 06 C: y los caramelos, ¿a cuánto están?
and the candies, how much are they?
- 07 V: tres por un peso
three for one peso
- 08 C: ((pause)) Y nueve caramelitos
and nine candies
- 09 V: ¿nueve caramelos?
nine candies?
- 10 C: sí
yes
- 11 V: \$3.00
- 12 C: dale ¿tenés una bolsita?
okay, do you have a bag?
- 13 V: dale
yeah
- 14 C: ¿cuánto es en total?
how much is it total?
- 15→ V: ahí **tenés** \$3 por los caramelos
there you have \$3 for the candies
- 16 C: y el otro ((Pause)) a ver
and the other ((pause)) let's see
- 17→ V: **ponga** todo junto
put everything together
- 18 C: 6, 7, 8 me falta uno
6,7,8 I'm missing one
- 19 V: bueno
okay
- 20 C: y::
and...
- 21→ V: ¿**quiere** agregar dos más y hacemos veinte?
do you want to grab two more to make the total 20?
- 22 C: sí, cuento dos más
yeah, I'll count two more
- 23 ((gives vendor two more))
- 24 V: 20 pesos
20 pesos
- 25 ((customer hands him the money))
- 26 C: gracias
thanks
- 27→ V: a **usted** señorita
thank you, Miss

In the above transaction, the vendor first addresses the woman with the informal-you 'T' (line 15). It was an initially successful transaction, and thus solidarity is expected. The vendor, in negotiation and softening a direct

request, switches to the formal *usted* form in line 17. In line 21, the vendor continues with the formal-you, and closes the interaction with the formal-you in line 27. Examples (7) and (8) will be analyzed in more detail in the following section.

5. Discussion

In the following section, the results presented in the previous section will be discussed in relation to each research question.

5.1 Interactional level: Openings and closings

The data of openings and closings demonstrated in this study is similar to that which Placencia (2005) determined to be common in Madrid service encounters. Both the present study and Placencia (2005) demonstrate a tendency towards task-orientedness, where either no greeting, or an “hi/hi” (*hola/hola*) sequence is most common. Subsequently, the data is unlike the longer four to five turn greetings in Quito, Ecuador (Placencia, 2005), or the absence of greetings in Yucatan Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). The normalcy of the use of greetings suggests its commonality and expectedness. However, the third most common greeting strategy was the absence of a greeting, also revealing that in service transaction circumstances, the ritualistic nature of greetings is not required, as the situation has the tendency to be more task-oriented, such as in Spain (Placencia, 2005). The difference between task-oriented and person-oriented may also be influenced by the type of store. However, as shown in Figure 1 and described in the method section, the location of the products causes the customer to be clearly visible to the vendor, and he or she needs to summon the vendors to physically grab certain products.

Similar to openings, the data show a tendency towards a variety of different closing options. Unlike many of the formal closings such as *que le vaya bien* (have a good day), that Placencia (2005) noted in Quito, Ecuador, the majority of closing sequences in Buenos Aires Spanish were informal thank you sequences (36.1%). A small fraction of those included phrases such as *suerte* (good luck), but such additional phrases suggested familiarity and closeness between the customer and the vendor. On the other hand, in many of the interactions where there was an obvious sense of familiarity between customer and the vendor, as evidenced by the terms of endearment such as *vecino* (neighbor), there was not an elaborate greeting and a closing was absent. Coinciding with Boretti’s (2005) and Kaul de Marlageon’s (2005) arguments of Argentines’ conflict between individualism and solidarity, the use of these terms exhibit familiarity and respect at the same time, coinciding with Bravo’s (1999) distinction of affiliation and autonomy. The interactions may be short, simple, and without small talk or rapport building strategies

(autonomy), but the use of the terms further highlight the social ties between parties (autonomy).

5.2 Actional level: Request types

As explained in the results section, the most common request types were elliptical (32%, $n=31/97$), direct questions (30.9%, $n=30/97$), and implicit (21.6%, $n=21/97$). Although the direct requests were the most frequent, there were very few imperative requests, and the least frequent strategies were want statements (1.0%, $n=1/97$), and performative (1.0%, $n=1/97$). There were only two instances of conventionally indirect strategies, such as those interactions analyzed in Havana, Cuba (Ruzickova, 2007). It is important to note, however, that the data in the Cuban Spanish study also included bus terminals.

In regards to the turn in which the request was made, their placement reflects perception of politeness. While 29.9% of the requests were made in the first turn, 28.9% were made in the second and 22.7% in the third. This pattern exemplifies that politeness on the actional level did not necessarily require build-up or rapport-building strategies to soften the face-threatening request, such as it was the case in Yucatan Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015). In Placencia's (2005) data from Quito, many requests were preceded by four to five turns of greetings, therefore softening the request.

As indicated in the results section, in Example 4 (found in the results section), the customer pairs an imperative request with a softener (please). This suggests a preference for affiliation, according to Bravo's (1999) theory, where a request in a service encounter is expected and therefore pre-sequences and lengthy, ritualistic openings are not necessary. Félix-Brasdefer (2015) argues that the lack of openings and closing does not demonstrate impolite behavior among customers and vendor; rather, they represent a sociocultural expectation. Similarly, as shown in the data at kiosks in Buenos Aires, sociocultural expectations determine the behavior. It is not impolite to directly state what the customer desires, yet it may also be under the realm of politeness to mitigate that request. The customer's use of direct-yet mitigated request- may also be interpreted as Kaul de Marlangeon's (2005) analysis of Argentines as mitigating between the individual and the group.

Finally, in the present study, gender was less of a determining factor of linguistic behavior than in aforementioned variational pragmatic studies. As indicated in the theoretical framework (Antonopolou, 2001; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975), pragmatic variation by gender assumes females to be less direct and softer in their speech. Contrary to the literature, the data collected for this study demonstrates that both males and females showed tendency toward the overall most common request types, the first two being direct: elliptical, direct question and implicit. It is important to note that future research with a larger sample size might find gender differences of request strategies. The majority of the customers directed their requests to a male vendor, although 9 of the 97 the transactions took place with a female vendor.

5.3 Stylistic level: Address forms

While Félix-Brasdefer (2015) and Placencia (2005) noted that nicknames were used as rapport-building strategies, many of the nicknames used in the present study, such as those mentioned in the results section (*negro* ‘black guy,’ *maestro* ‘teacher,’ *capo* ‘boss,’ *amigo* ‘friend,’ *querido* ‘beloved,’ etc.) were only employed when there was an obvious sense of familiarity. However, in some instances where the terms of endearment were used, the vendor used distancing strategies, such as the formal-you.

In Argentine Spanish, as previously discussed, *vos* conveys familiarity and solidarity, where *usted* is used to show distance and respect (Fontanella de Wienberg, 1999). In the majority of the interactions pronouns or you-informal conjugations were used, showing a tendency towards both the vendor and customer using the informal-you *vos* pronoun. This also demonstrates a desire to show solidarity (Bravo 1999). Whereas in Mexico (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015) and Quito, Ecuador (Placencia, 2005), the vendors and customers showed more preference toward the formal-you, the Argentine data correlates more to Placencia’s (2005) data of Madrid, where the informal-you predominated, demonstrating affiliation.

In regards to gender variation on the pronominal level, the data from Buenos Aires differed from Félix-Brasdefer’s (2015) analysis of Yucatan Spanish discussed in the theoretical framework section. Félix-Brasdefer (2015) demonstrates that in Yucatan Spanish, 50% of the interactions with a male vendor and female customer used of the formal-you. In that data, female customers showed a preference for addressing the vendor as the formal-you. In contrast, in Buenos Aires Spanish, there was almost no gender variation in terms of pronoun choice. In only one interaction the customer addressed the vendor by the formal-you, and even in cases where the vendor used the formal-you to address the customers, this form of showing distance was not reciprocated by the customer. There were seven interactions in which the vendor addressed the customer with the formal-you.

However, out of the seven instances where the vendor employed the formal-you, as mentioned in the results section, five of those cases alternated between the vendor using the informal-you and the formal-you. Alternation at the pronominal level, adopted from Blas Arroyo (2005) and Kaul de Marlangeon (2011) describes the alternation between the informal-you and the formal-you towards the same person in the same conversation, as shown in Examples 7 and 8 in the results section. In four out of the five cases of alternation by the vendor, the vendor also used politeness strategies of address forms, *señor*, *señora* and *señorita*. Out of the five cases, three of the customers were female and two of the customers were males. In both of the examples (7 and 8) in the results section, the pragmatic variation at the pronominal level serve a purpose. This purpose changes depending on the progress of the interaction; some are to soften an imposing request or establish familiarity.

Moser (2006) explains that in Costa Rica, where the *voseo*, *ustedeo* and *tuteo* function simultaneously, the *voseo* is used when making a request, or a face-threatening statement. However, outside of Buenos Aires, where the *tú* is not used, the *voseo/ustedeo* alternation can be described as an instance where the interlocutor attempts to manipulate the receptor (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2011). The alternation can show a sense of the vendor trying to be strategic, wanting to show familiarity and distance within a family setting (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2011).

As shown in Example 8, these instances can be seen as the “strategic” desire, even within the conversation, to show solidarity and respect as the “changing of roles” continues throughout the interaction. Namely, after initially addressing her in the informal-you, showing solidarity between them, then switches to the formal-you in line 17 when he directly requests that she perform a task (put all of the products together). The use of the formal-you in this line can be interpreted as the desire to soften the request for her to do something that he as a vendor might normally be expected to do. In other words, the switch to the formal-you in this moment is strategic. When the vendor uses the formal-you in line 21, he is requesting her to add more products so that the total becomes an even number, therefore easier to deal with. Similar to the function -softening his imposition- this plays in line 17, he is asking her to perform an action that is not her responsibility, nor expected. However, the use of the formal-you and his expectation for her to comply with the request shows the solidarity between the customer and the vendor as two parties working towards a common goal. In the last line, the use of the formal-you accompanied by the address form *señorita* is a demonstration of respect and gratitude for her compliance.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze 97 service encounters in corner stores (“*kioscos*”) in Buenos Aires Spanish to investigate the most common realization patterns for openings and closings, requests, and the use of nicknames and pronouns. Drawing from previous service encounters in Spanish, three levels of pragmatic analysis were addressed: interactional (openings and closings), actional (request types), and stylistic (pronouns, address forms). Gender analysis of request strategies was also incorporated into this study. Overall, the data presented in the current study of service interactions in kiosks in Buenos Aires, Argentina, exhibit preference to the use of openings and closings, direct request strategies, including elliptical and direct question. Based on the absence of pre-sequences and internal modification and the prevalence of the request within the third turn, the service encounters in Buenos Aires Spanish can be interpreted not as an imposition or face-threatening request, but as a situation where the vendor is expected to comply with requests. Furthermore, the prevalence of the informal-you pronoun demonstrates the sociocultural expectation of the

informality of service encounters, both for vendors and for customers. Familiarity was shown through the use of nicknames, such as *capo*, *maestro*, *negro*, *amigo*, and *querido*, although the use of these terms was limited to obvious familiarity and closeness between the vendor and customer. Some of the interactions even showed alternation between the formal and informal-you, suggesting a changing of roles.

While the present study presented findings on each level of pragmatic analysis, there are some limitations. To begin with, although 13 hours of recordings were collected, only 97 interactions were coherent and thus able to analyze. Therefore, the represented sample was small and must be tested again. The stores where data was collected were in the same neighborhood of Buenos Aires, where the majority of the residents share similar socioeconomic statuses and ethnic backgrounds. Future research must consider more factors such as regional, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences and similarities. Finally, this study only focused on gender, and did not address differences in socioeconomic status, age, or other social variables that produce pragmatic variation.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

(Adapted from Jefferson 2004)

These are the convention transcriptions that are used in the examples.

A. Contiguous utterances

= Equal signs indicate no break up or gap. They are placed when there is no interval between adjacent utterances and the second utterance is linked immediately to the first.

B. Overlaps

[A left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.

] A right bracket indicates the point at which two overlapping utterances end, if they end simultaneously, or the point at which one of them ends in the course of the other. It is also used to parse out segments of overlapping utterances.

C. Intervals

() Parentheses indicating the time in seconds and placed within an utterance mark intervals or pauses in the stream of talk.

- A dash marks a short untimed pause within an utterance.

D. Characteristics of speech delivery

↑↓ The up and down arrows mark sharp rises or falls in pitch.

: A colon marks a lengthened syllable or an extension of a sound.

::: More colons prolong a sound or syllable.

— Word underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis, either by increased loudness or higher pitch.

. A period marks fall in tone.

, A comma marks continuing intonation.

? A question mark signals rising intonation.

E. Other markings

(()) Double parentheses are used to mark the transcriber's descriptions of events.