

Perception of L2 Spanish polite requests and impolite commands by Chinese migrant workers living in Spain

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Politeness plays a key role in cross-cultural communication and intercultural adaptation (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009). Therefore, knowledge about (im)politeness and the acquisition of politeness strategies is central in the integration of immigrants and the achievement of social cohesion. At the same time, prosody is already known to directly affect politeness judgements in all studied languages, including L1 Spanish (Hidalgo 2009; Devís 2011; Albelda 2012). However, the prosodic cues on which L1 speakers rely when judging politeness seem to be different for each language. While L1 Spanish speakers seem to rely more on intonation when judging politeness (Devís 2011), L1 Chinese speakers tend to rely more on other prosodic cues when judging politeness in Chinese (Fan and Gu 2016). This study investigates whether Chinese immigrants in Spain perceive the difference between polite requests and impolite commands the same way L1 Spanish speakers do, when the only difference between the commands and requests is at the prosodic level. Chinese immigrants (N = 22) and L1 Spanish speakers (N = 26) listened to and judged the degree of politeness of 20 pairs of commands and requests produced by 4 L1 Spanish speakers (2 male + 2 female) from Madrid. Pairs of commands and requests had the same lexico-grammatical features and only differed at the prosodic and pragmatic levels. Statistical analysis revealed that while commands were perceived very similarly by Chinese immigrants and L1 Spanish speakers, Chinese speakers had problems perceiving the intention in polite requests, which were rated as more polite by Spanish native speakers than by Chinese immigrants.

Keywords: L2 Spanish, politeness, perception, immigrants, requests, commands, pronunciation, intonation, prosody.

Percepción de peticiones corteses y órdenes descorteses en español L2 por parte de trabajadores chinos residentes en España. La cortesía

tiene un papel fundamental en la comunicación y la adaptación intercultural (Spencer-Oatey y Franklin 2009). Es por ello que el conocimiento y la adquisición de las estrategias de (des)cortesía es central en la integración de las diferentes comunidades inmigrantes y, por tanto, en la consecución de la cohesión social. Al mismo tiempo, ya sabemos que la prosodia afecta directamente a los juicios de cortesía en todas las lenguas en las que esta relación ha sido estudiada, incluido el español (Devís 2011; Hidalgo 2009; Albelda 2012). Sin embargo, las señales prosódicas en las que los hablantes de diferentes lenguas se apoyan para juzgar el grado de cortesía parecen no ser las mismas. Mientras los hablantes de español como L1 aparentemente se apoyan más en la entonación a la hora de juzgar la cortesía de un enunciado en español (Devís 2011), los hablantes de chino como L1 parecen apoyarse más en otros rasgos prosódicos al juzgar el grado de cortesía de un enunciado en chino. Este estudio pretende investigar si los inmigrantes chinos en España perciben la diferencia entre peticiones corteses y órdenes descorteses de la misma manera que los hablantes de español como L1, cuando la diferencia entre estas peticiones y órdenes se encuentra únicamente en el nivel prosódico. Para ello, 22 inmigrantes chinos y 26 hablantes de español L1 escucharon y juzgaron el nivel de cortesía de 20 pares de órdenes y peticiones producidas por 4 hablantes de español L1 de Madrid (2 hombres y 2 mujeres). Los pares de peticiones y órdenes se caracterizaban por ser iguales desde el punto de vista léxico-gramatical y por diferir únicamente en los niveles prosódico y pragmático. Los análisis estadísticos mostraron que, mientras las órdenes fueron percibidas de manera similar por los inmigrantes chinos y por los hablantes de español L1, los primeros tuvieron problemas para percibir la intención cortés en las peticiones corteses, que fueron consideradas más corteses por los hablantes de español L1 que por los inmigrantes chinos.

Palabras claves: español L2, cortesía, percepción, inmigrantes, peticiones, órdenes, pronunciación, entonación, prosodia.

1. Introduction

Knowledge about how to convey politeness is key to avoid interpersonal problems (Brunet et al. 2012; Huang 2008; Leech 2014; Izadi 2015; Ofuka et al. 2000), and thus to avoid misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009; Leech 2014). However, some studies have reported that speaking politely and

understanding whether a message is polite or not presents a major challenge to L2 learners, since even advanced learners sometimes fail in politeness realization (Harada 1996). This could be due to multiple reasons: first, the fact that (im)politeness is not a topic that foreign language teachers would want to address in their classes: either because they don't know how to tackle it, or because they believe it's unnecessary. The second reason is the lack of awareness of L2 speakers, who tend to believe that L2 politeness rules are similar to their L1.

Recently, some authors have pointed out that L2 users need to be prepared to interact in both polite and impolite situations (Takahashi, 2010). Mugford (2008) underlined that teachers should prepare learners to communicate in both contexts, which involves helping learners identify potentially impolite practices and offering ways of dealing with impoliteness. Therefore, the Council of Europe, among other institutions engaged in language policy development with immigrants, strongly suggests taking into account (im)politeness when developing curricula and learning programs based on the CEFR, in order to equip learners with the ability to communicate appropriately (Beacco et al. 2014).

There is a growing interest in the acquisition of politeness strategies in second languages. Nevertheless, most studies have focused only on written politeness, mainly obtaining data from written discourse completion tests. The speech act of requesting has been widely examined both in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics. It has been always considered one of the most threatening speech acts (Brown and Levinson 1987), and thus one of those where the use of mitigating politeness strategies is more necessary. Several authors (Tanaka and Kawade 1982; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Harada 1996; Kitao 1990) have paid attention and studied second language learners' pragmatic awareness with perception tests of L2 written requests. Usually, authors attempt to test whether native and non-native speakers agree on politeness ratings. However, for these studies only written corpora were built and analyzed. As Miura states, these studies' corpora "lack audio data, which might be useful contextual information for judging the politeness of the produced requests, and it is only available as written transcripts of oral interview tests with few extra-linguistics tags" (2017: 189).

Most early politeness theories relied mainly on grammatical cues when stating which are the politeness strategies in one language. As an example, Lakoff's scale (1977) suggested that, in making requests, imperatives are less polite than declaratives, and these less polite than questions. Consequently, most studies on (im)politeness have mainly focused on the role of other grammatical or lexical strategies and neglected the contribution of acoustic cues while communicating politeness. Even though researchers had already noticed (Ambady et al. 1996) the

great contribution prosody makes to impressions of (im)politeness, only recently prosodic cues conveying politeness in L1 and L2 have been systematically studied (Hidalgo and Cabedo 2014; Brown and Prieto 2017). Nevertheless, authors still not agree on the prosodic cues conveying politeness in the different languages. As Nadeu and Prieto (2011: 841) state: “it is known that certain prosodic aspects of speech play a role in the expression of paralinguistic meaning, yet the concrete mechanisms of how this is implemented have not yet been fleshed out”.

To date, few studies have focused on the specific acoustic cues for communicating politeness and its relationship with perception in each language. One of the reasons might be the theory of the Frequency Code (Ohala 1983; Gussenhoven 2004), which claims that a high pitch is a universal correlate of politeness. Several studies have found a correlation between a high F0 and the perception of politeness in different languages (Chen et al. 2004; Orozco 2010; Tsuji 2004). However, recent studies question the Frequency Code and suggest that politeness might not always be correlated with high F0 and that it may be conveyed by different prosodic cues in different languages (Ito 2004; Winter and Grawunder 2012; Brown et al. 2015; Idemaru et al. 2015). Recent studies have focused on the role of prosody when expressing and judging politeness (Borràs-Comes et al. 2015; Brown and Prieto 2017; Culpeper 2005, 2011; Culpeper et al. 2017; Hidalgo and Cabedo 2014; Hübscher et al. 2017; McKinnon and Prieto 2014; Nadeu and Prieto 2011; Albelda 2012). Consequently, studies examining the perception and production of the prosodic cues conveying politeness in a second language seem to be necessary.

In the case of requests, the role of prosody when expressing politeness has been proven to be significant. Vergis et al. (in press) found out that the effect of prosody on politeness rating of requests was much more robust than the effect of linguistic structure. Caballero et al. (2018) analyzed verbal polite and impolite requests and concluded that, while there may be no “prosody of politeness”, prosodic cues interact with other cues to allow listeners to know whether the request is polite or impolite. Request was also one of the speech acts analyzed by Devís (2011), who realized which melodic features made mitigating politeness possible in these heavily imposing speech act.

However, not many researchers have paid attention to mitigating politeness perception and production in second language speakers. The perception-production link, relevant in phonology after Flege’s Speech Learning Model (Flege 1995) claims that there is no production without perception, which means that in order to accurately produce a sound, one must be able to accurately distinguish that same sound in reception. Although broadly accepted among scholars, this theory has recently

been questioned by some researchers (see Isbell, 2016). Even though some authors have observed this perception-production link in prosodic studies (Frota et al. 2011), to the best of our knowledge not much research has been done yet on the perception of paralinguistic prosodic features in polite requests and impolite commands, and the connection with the production of such speech acts by L2 students.

The present study aims to determine how Spanish commands and requests that only differ at a pragmatic and prosodic level are perceived by Chinese migrants living in Spain. The present study broadens current research by focusing on perception of politeness of spoken messages. Results of this study will give us a deeper understanding of the process of L2 politeness perception and acquisition.

2. Previous studies

Recent studies have focused on the prosodic cues conveying politeness in different languages. Some acoustic measures that have been studied are pitch-related measures (Orozco 2008), intensity (Brown et al. 2014), voice quality (Winter and Grawunder 2012) and speech rate (Lin et al., 2006). Even though intonation has also been studied, intonation contour, due to methodological obstacles, is the least studied feature. Intonation patterns are not easy to describe and authors still don't agree on the best way to describe them.

In order to describe intonation patterns of L2 Spanish, several researchers have used the Melodic Analysis of Speech, a model developed by the Laboratory of Applied Phonetics of the University of Barcelona. Liu (2005) used this model to describe the melodic characteristics of Taiwanese learner' L2 Spanish, Devís (2011) described the melodic characteristics of Italian learners' L2 Spanish, Fonseca (2014), researched Brazilian learners' L2 Spanish and Baditzné Pálvölgy (2012), described Hungarian learners' L2 Spanish.

Following these studies, some scholars focused on the possible misunderstandings that could be caused by prosodic transfer from L1 to L2 Spanish. Cantero and Devís (in press), for example, not only described the melodic characteristics of the Spanish spoken by Italian speakers but also concluded that some of the intonational patterns used by them could be responsible for misunderstandings when talking to Spanish L1 speakers, since neutral patterns could be perceived as suspended, suspended patterns could be perceived as interrogative and interrogative with a descend-ascend end could be perceived as emphatic utterances. In another study, Devís et al. (2017) observed that the melodic features that characterize the prelinguistic intonation of L2 Spanish

spoken by Brazilians, such as the absence of the first peak, very flat melodies with a lot of internal inflections and the prominence in unstressed vowels (Fonseca and Cantero, 2011), are the same features that characterize the mitigated polite utterances in colloquial Spanish. These features, according to Devís et al. (2017), make Brazilians be perceived as polite, amiable and friendly people in Spanish society. Although this might a priori seem advantageous for the Spanish-speaking Brazilian community, it can also be detrimental in formal situations that demand a high level of seriousness, especially in the professional and academic fields. Although several of these studies are complemented with L2 activities that seek to lighten the effects of the melodic transfer from L1 to L2 (Devís 2014; Devís and Bartolí 2014; Devís, Cantero and Fonseca 2017), few authors

However, despite being obvious, the pragmatic effects of melodic transfer from L1 have still not been studied systematically in detail.

Several authors have pointed out that in Spanish, intonation is, to a great extent, able to mitigate utterances that could otherwise be perceived as impolite (Quilis 1993; Haverkate 1994; Hidalgo 2009; Álvarez and Blondet 2003; Waltereit 2005; Briz and Hidalgo 2008). Recently, Devís (2011) conducted an in-depth study as part of the FONOCORTESÍA project (the acoustic component in the expression of verbal courtesy and impoliteness in colloquial Spanish) on the intonational features that characterize the mitigating politeness in peninsular Spanish. According to the results of this study, the melodic features that, by themselves, can make a statement with some degree of lexical-grammatical aggressiveness be perceived as more polite and can, therefore, be considered mitigating melodic features are the final inflections circumflexes, internal inflections and prominence in unstressed vowels. The final ascending interrogative inflections and the suspended final inflections can also, by interacting with internal inflections and unstressed prominences, mitigate statements with some degree of aggressiveness from the lexical-grammatical point of view.

As for Chinese, Gu et al. (2011) and Fan and Gu (2016) suggest that speech rate has a more significant effect on polite judgments than features related to the F0, such as the average F0 or F0 range. Fan and Gu (2016) found out that tonal range does not affect politeness judgments and the average F0 appeared to have a minimal effect, since it is only able to slightly neutralize the (im)polite speech when the F0 is low. This leads to think that Chinese speakers of Spanish may not rely, at least in early stages of acquisition, on intonation contours when expressing and judging (im)politeness.

As far as acquisition of phonopragmatic competence in L2 is concerned, Ohara (2001) observed that advanced Japanese learners, who had

lived in Japan raised the tone (F0) when speaking Japanese in order to show greater femininity and to express politeness. However, Tsurutani (2009, 2010) observed that, when expressing politeness, L1 speakers of Japanese used a narrower tonal range and a lower speed (speech rate), while L2 speakers only modified the speed in polite productions.

Astruc and Vanrell (2016) carried out what, according to them, is the first study on the phonopragmatic acquisition of Spanish. They compared the prosodic politeness strategies used in L2 Spanish by British beginner-level learners and Mexican L1 Spanish L1 speakers. The main objective was to analyze and compare the politeness strategies in a corpus of L1 Mexican Spanish offerings and requests in and samples of L2 speakers. In order to do this, a corpus of invitations and petitions was produced by 14 initial level learners and by 12 L1 speakers of Spanish. Results have shown that L1 speakers combine the use of different lexical and morphosyntactic strategies with certain intonational patterns. Also, although beginner-level learners already use some politeness strategies typical of their level, they frequently transfer the intonational patterns of the L1. For example, they used descending intonational patterns typical of English, but not polite Spanish. However, no studies to our knowledge have still focused on trying to find the origin of this lack of adequacy or phonopragmatic errors.

Perception has been claimed to be crucial in phonetic/phonological acquisition (Flege 1995; Bradlow et al. 1997; Iruela 2004; Baker and Trofimovich 2006; Best and Tyler 2007; Kissling 2014). Some authors (Santamaría 2007) assume that perception precedes production and, thus that perceptive failure might affect production. However, after analyzing phonetic perception skills in L2 Spanish students from 10 different L1s and levels of linguistic domain, Blanco (2016, 2017) concluded that the development of perception skills in L2 Spanish follows a different temporal pattern from that of production. According to Blanco, neither student' L1 (2016), nor their L2 language proficiency level (2017) is determinant in their ability to perceive the intonational patterns and other phonetic-phonological features in a second language.

As for Chinese speakers of Spanish, Cortés (1997), in a perception study conducted with 84 native Mandarin Chinese speakers, found that the most difficult intonational patterns for them to identify in Spanish were the emphatic ones. Consequently, he established what, according to him, would be the order of acquisition of the intonational patterns in Spanish as a foreign language by speakers whose L1 is Mandarin: first, the declarative intonation; secondly, the intonation of questions with grammar mark; thirdly, the intonation of the questions without grammatical mark and finally, the intonation of the emphatic statements.

However, these studies are limited to observing the learners' ability to perceive intonational patterns from the linguistic level, neglecting the paralinguistic level of intonation. We, therefore, believe that it is worth it observing whether in the case of Chinese speakers of Spanish there is a difficulty in the perception of mitigating polite intonation when they listen to mitigated commands, that is, polite requests.

3. The current study

The present study poses the following research questions:

- (a) Do Chinese immigrants in Spain perceive polite requests by prosodic ways the same way Spanish L1 speakers do?
- (b) Do Chinese immigrants in Spain perceive impolite commands by prosodic ways the same way Spanish L1 speakers do?

4. Method

Participants included 4 L1 Spanish speakers from Madrid (2 male, 2 female) who provided audio recordings of speech (40 stimuli), as well as 48 listeners: 22 Chinese speakers of L2 Spanish and 26 L1 Spanish speakers who listened and rated the level of politeness of the stimuli.

Chinese participants (Mage 37,5 years, range 24–55) were taking part in a B1 level Spanish language course specifically designed for Chinese immigrants working in Madrid (Comunicate B1). All Chinese participants had lived for at least 3 years in Spain before the study took place.

All L1 Spanish listeners were students at Universidad Nebrija (age range 18-25), and the L1 Spanish speakers who provided audio recordings of speech were teachers who were born, raised and currently living in Madrid.

Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, one speech act was selected for the study. According to the authors, requesting is an intrinsic face threatening act (FTA), which needs to be mitigated when realized in order to minimize threat and imposition. Prosodic strategies are some of the linguistic strategies proposed by the authors mentioned before (Devís 2011) to mitigate impoliteness and realize nonthreatening requests.

In order to collect the stimuli for the perception test, 4 L1 Spanish speakers were asked to read 10 sentences in two different given settings, since using naturalistic data makes data collection process time consuming and inefficient (Tracy 2017). Moreover, we needed pairs of utterances to be exactly equal at the lexico-grammatical level, that is to say,

to contain the same words, and to be produced as commands and requests, being the difference between each pair of sentences just at the prosodic level. According to Niebuhr and Michaud (2015: 16), “when eliciting monologues, it is useful for the speaker to have an addressee. Even if s/he does not say anything, subjects feel more comfortable and produce speech in a different way when the act of speaking is a social activity”. Therefore, in order to make speech production more naturalistic, we followed Niebuhr and Michaud’s suggestions (2015) and made the researchers act as addressees.

Taking into account Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, we controlled all three socio-pragmatic factors that determine the proper level of politeness (Power, Distance and Ranking of imposition) when contextualizing the target sentences. All target sentences could be produced as commands and requests, so we gave participants two possible scenarios. Scenarios were carefully constructed and adapted to each participant to ensure that the artificiality of the task was minimized. First, subjects were asked to imagine they had to ask for a favor in a very polite way or that they were requesting somebody very politely to do something for them. Secondly, we asked them to imagine they were giving a command to someone they were very familiar with, hence to produce the sentences as commands. Sentences were written taking into account the grammatical and lexical competence of participants, who were studying Spanish in a B1 course specifically designed for Chinese migrant workers. Appendix 1 contains the sentences participants were asked to produce in a natural way.

The recording took place in a quiet room at Universidad Nebrija, in Madrid. The participants’ responses were digitally recorded using a handheld Olympus WS-852 digital recorder. Out of the 160 utterances recorded, 5 pairs of command-requests (same lexical-grammatical features, different speech acts) were selected for the perceptive test. Sentences which sounded more natural in a first perceptive test conducted by the authors were selected. 40 utterances (20 command-request pairs) were selected using this method.

The final perception test was composed of 40 utterances (10 from each speaker) which had to be rated by the listeners in a 5-point Likert scale according to their degree of politeness, being 1 the most impolite command and 5 the most-polite request. Participants first gave written consent followed by instructions. They were able to ask any question they had after the researchers explained the procedure and gave clear instructions about their task. Listeners were asked to imagine the speaker was talking to them, that is that they were the intended addressees while listening to the audios and rating the degree of politeness of the commands and requests. Before rating the utterances, listeners were

trained with three practice trial recordings. Stimuli were presented in different randomized orders for every participant. The researchers controlled the pace of the experiment and played every message twice. After the experiment, listeners were asked to provide demographic information.

The aim of this experiment was to examine whether Chinese immigrants in Spain perceive (a) polite requests and (b) impolite commands the same way L1 Spanish speakers do. Basic results of a descriptive statistical analysis are presented in Table 1. As we can see, Spanish participants mean politeness score for requests is 3.57 (Sta Dev=0.477), while Chinese graded politeness in Spanish requests with a 3.25 (Sta Dev=0.466). Spanish commands, on the other hand, were graded more similarly, since Spanish speakers gave them a 1.82 politeness mark (Sta Dev=0.22) and Chinese graded them with a 1.94 (Sta Dev=0.37). As expected, requests received higher mean politeness scores than commands. However, Spanish speakers gave higher politeness scores to requests than their Chinese counterparts, as well as lower politeness scores to commands. The difference is especially remarkable in the case of requests, suggesting that Chinese speakers don't perceive requests as politely as Spanish speakers do. It's interesting to note that in the Chinese ratings, the standard deviation for commands is slightly higher than for Spanish.

	Group	COMMAND	REQUEST
N	SPANISH	26	26
	CHINESE	22	22
Missing	SPANISH	0	0
	CHINESE	0	0
Mean	SPANISH	1.82	3.57
	CHINESE	1.94	3.25
Median	SPANISH	1.83	3.60
	CHINESE	1.95	3.38
Standard deviation	SPANISH	0.229	0.477
	CHINESE	0.371	0.465

Table 1. *Politeness ratings given by Chinese and Spanish participants*

In order to answer our second research question, we conducted a two-way repeated measures ANOVA with requests, and responses as within-groups factors yielded a significant main effect of L1 on politeness ratings $F(9.91) 482.32 p, .003$. Repeated measures analyses of variance revealed no significant between-subjects effect ($p, 0.31$). [See Table 2 and Table 3 for details].

Between Subjects Effects

		Sum Squares	of	df	Mean Square	F	p
RM Factor 1		55.84		1	55.837	482.32	< .001
RM	Factor 1 GROUP *	1.15		1	1.147	9.91	0.003
Residual		5.33		46	0.116		

Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares

Table 2. *Statistical analysis on difference of politeness ratings given by Chinese and L1 Spanish participants to Spanish requests.*

As we can see in Figure 1 and 2, Chinese participants gave lower politeness ratings to requests than Spanish participants, thus suggesting that Chinese participants don't perceive the prosodic differences between commands and requests as clearly as L1 Spanish speakers do. Moreover, Figure 1 shows us that many Chinese participants in the study gave different ratings to messages, showing less agreement and coherence in the ratings.

Within Subjects Effects

		Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
GROUP		0.208	1	0.208	1.05	0.310
Between Subjects Effects						
		Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Residual		9.103	46	0.198		

Note. Type 3 Sums of Squares

Table 3. *Between subjects effects*

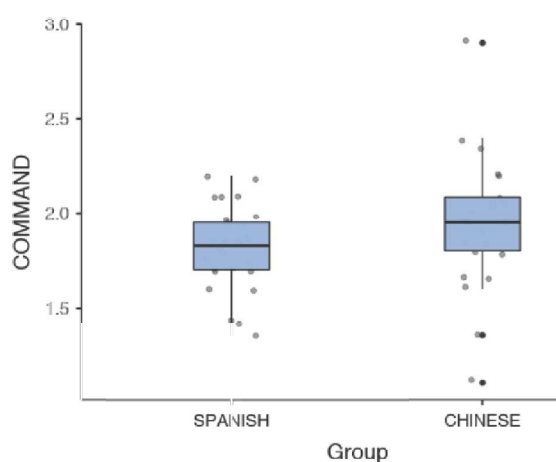


Figure 1. *Politeness ratings given by Chinese and L1 Spanish participants to Spanish commands*

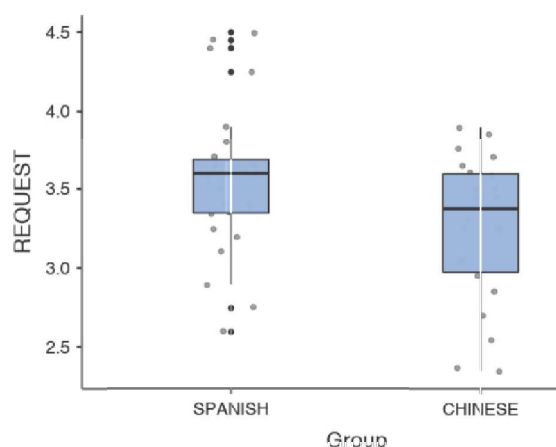


Figure 2. *Politeness ratings given by Chinese and Spanish participants to Spanish requests.*

Post hoc (Holm adjusted) analyses revealed that Spanish native speakers rated significantly more polite requests than Chinese speakers did ($p = p, .015$). However, commands ratings didn't differ significantly between groups ($p = p, 0.276$).

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether Chinese immigrants, living in Spain for at least 3 years, working in Madrid, and taking part in a B1 level Spanish language course perceived the degree of (im)politeness in Spanish commands and requests the same way Spanish L1 speakers did. We built a corpus of 20 pairs of commands and requests (40 utterances). Pairs of utterances had the same lexico-grammatical content and only differed at the prosodic level, since speakers from Madrid were asked to pronounce them as polite requests and impolite commands in different given scenarios, where power, familiarity and ranking were controlled to introduce the scenarios. All pairs of utterances (command-request) were randomly presented and rated by Chinese and native Spanish speakers.

In line with previous studies (Devís 2011; Caballero et al. 2018; Astruc et al. 2016; Borràs-Comes et al. 2015; Brown and Prieto 2017; Culpeper et al. 2003; Hübscher et al. 2017; Ofuka et al. 2000; Orozco 2008), prosody proved to play an essential role when judging politeness. Both Chinese and L1 Spanish speakers perceived the difference between impolite commands and polite requests when the only difference between the utterances lied at the prosodic level. However, as mentioned before, Spanish L1 speakers gave lower politeness scores to com-

mands and higher politeness scores to requests, thus suggesting that difference was for them clearer than for their Chinese counterparts.

When analyzing politeness judgements given by both groups, we observed that, while Chinese immigrants perceived Spanish commands (b) very similarly to L1 Spanish speakers, they did not perceive Spanish requests (a) as polite as Spanish L1 speakers did. After statistical analysis was conducted, data revealed that Chinese participants gave significantly lower politeness ratings to requests than Spanish participants, thus suggesting that Chinese participants don't perceive the prosodic differences between commands and requests as clearly as L1 Spanish speakers do. The groups were proven to be different in politeness perception, in consonance with previous studies, which focused on written politeness perception by L2 students (Tanaka and Kawade 1982; Olshtain and Blum-Kulka 1985; Harada 1996; Kitao 1990). According to these studies, L2 speakers have problems when rating politeness in L2 written messages. However, to our knowledge, no studies showed before whether L2 students have also problems when rating politeness in L2 oral messages, when the only difference between them was at the prosodic level.

Previous research has indicated that even though Chinese students don't seem to have big problems to identify the different intonational patterns in Spanish, emphatic patterns apparently are the most difficult to identify for them (Cortés 1997). Despite the fact that the current study focused on the paralinguistic level, instead of the linguistic level, we believe that the findings of both studies could be related, since our study results suggest that Chinese speakers do have a problem identifying the degree of politeness in pairs of requests and commands with the same lexical-grammatical content, but differences at the prosodic level.

The findings may support the idea that Chinese immigrant workers in Spain perceive requests differently than Spanish L1 speakers, since requests received lower politeness scores by Chinese listeners and the difference between groups was statistically significant.

We speculate that the reason for these findings is that Chinese speakers don't rely on prosodic cues as much as L1 Spanish speakers do when determining whether message is polite or not. Another reason might be that Chinese speakers make the wrong assumption that all imperative sentences are impolite, without taking into account the way they are produced and the melody characterizing it and, thus giving information about the speaker's intention. This might suggest that L2 learners may rely more on grammatical than prosodic cues when judging politeness, and they may make a wrong association between imperative sentence and impolite speech act, which is not the case for L1 Spanish speakers, who clearly perceive the difference between requests

and commands. One of the reasons for this L2 mistake could be a wrong teaching technique or the lack of pragmatic and prosodic contents in the Spanish as a second language class. Another explanation for the results might be the fact that Chinese is a tone language, while Spanish is a non-tone language. Although all spoken languages seem to use pitch and contour paralinguistically (Best 2019), there is a clear difference between tone languages and non-tone languages that might affect perception when listening to a second language. Even though the processing of tone and intonation in tone languages -such as Chinese- seems to be interdependent (Xu and Mok 2014), it is still unclear to what extent do tone language speakers rely on intonation when listening to a second language, especially when attitudes or emotions are involved. Further research should be conducted on this topic.

It is interesting to consider that, when rating politeness in commands, Chinese raters did not perform significantly different from L1 Spanish raters, suggesting that both groups perceive impoliteness in commands in a very similar way. Another conclusion we can draw from this result is that Chinese immigrants in Spain perceive native speakers from Madrid as less polite in general than L1 Spanish speakers do.

However, we have to be cautious with the results, since some limitations still exist in our study. One of the limitations of our study is the number of participants we were able to reach. Further research should be carried out with more informants in order to reach conclusions regarding this matter. Moreover, in order to try to understand the causes of such perceptive failure, we think it would be useful to conduct a contrastive intonational analysis of similar pairs of commands and requests using the robust method of Melodic Analysis of Speech. This analysis would help us understand whether intonation is as much important for differentiating impolite commands from polite requests in Mandarin Chinese, as previous studies (Devís 2011) have found in Spanish. Additionally, research should also be carried out with speakers of other languages.

Since perception seems to play a crucial role in L2 phonetic/phonological acquisition

(Flege 1995; Bradlow et al. 1997; Iruela 2004; Baker and Trofimovich 2006; Best and Tyler 2007; Kissling 2014), we considered necessary to undertake this study before doing research about production of polite requests in L2 Spanish by Chinese speakers. Future research should certainly test whether Chinese migrants living in Spain are able to produce polite requests in a way that they are perceived as such by Spanish L1 speakers. In general, further research is necessary to strengthen our understanding of the perception and production of mitigating politeness in L2, not only by Chinese L1 speakers, but by speakers of other

languages. In this respect, we consider crucial to investigate this phenomenon with L1 speakers from other tonal languages, in order shed some light on this issue.

6. Conclusion

This study is a contribution to research on acquisition of Spanish language politeness strategies by Chinese immigrants living in Spain. It provides insights into how Chinese migrant workers living in Spain perceive L1 Spanish (im)polite intention when making requests and commands. Taken together, the results of this study suggest that Chinese speakers do not perceive the prosodic difference between requests and commands the same way L1 Spanish speakers do. In particular, Chinese speakers might have a problem in perceiving politeness in polite requests, since they rated them as less polite than Spanish speakers did. The results do not reveal, though, a significant difference in the way Spanish speakers and Chinese speakers perceive impoliteness in commands.

This might show us that Chinese migrants in Spain do not perceive the difference between command and request in Spanish the same way L1 Spanish speakers do, when prosodic features are the only factor responsible for the difference between them. However, due to the small amount of data, it is imperative to emphasize the need for some caution in the interpretation of the findings. There is clearly a need for much more empirical research in this area. Further research should be conducted with more data and informants, in order to reach clearer conclusions. For example, it would be interesting to investigate whether Chinese immigrants in Spain rely more on lexical-grammatical cues than prosodic cues when judging politeness. Moreover, research on production of L2 Spanish requests by L1 Mandarin speakers could show which prosodic features does polite L2 Spanish spoken by L1 Mandarin speakers have and whether they differ from the features characterizing L1 Spanish speakers' polite speech.

In conclusion, perceiving the degree of politeness of a spoken message relying only on prosodic cues in a second language might not be as easy as expected, especially when the new language is very distant from a typological and cultural point of view. Such lack of knowledge or sociocultural inappropriateness could have important consequences and a great impact on intercultural communications and, as a consequence, in the integration of communities with a typological distant language such as Chinese migrants. This might affect the process of integration of this community and might not change until we consider it an important factor and address it in the L2 migrant worker's classroom. As many

researchers stated “lack of appropriateness and politeness can be judged more harshly than grammatical mistakes” (Krulatz 2015).

Pedagogical implications of this study are many. Similar to its predecessors, this study has important implications for second and foreign language instruction.—First of all, the results reported in the present paper may help curriculum designers of Spanish as a language of migration teaching centers understand the importance of adding contents about politeness and prosody of politeness in their curricula. Secondly, teachers might now be aware of the important consequences of partial pragmatic explanations that might lead students to make wrong associations when judging the level of politeness of a message. Linking pragmatics with grammatical structures, without taking into account prosodic features is a common mistake that foreign language teachers tend to make, which might lead to this kind of confusion for L2 learners. Also, many studies have shown the positive effects of the phonetic training in perception and production in a second language and that a short phonetic training treatment may enhance L2 pronunciation accuracy in the short term (Aliaga and Mora 2009). This leads us to think that teaching prosody in the Spanish classroom is not only advisable, but a duty that Spanish language teachers and curriculum designers should assume when teaching Spanish or designing courses, especially for Chinese immigrant learners of Spanish. If the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence and prosody is a challenging task, it is important we give it as much importance as possible in curriculum design and, in general, in the second language classroom.

Language proficiency surely influences the degree of success of an immigrant in a new community, not only by boosting immigrant’s success in destination countries’ labor markets, but also facilitating integration in the receiving society (Adserà and Pytliková 2016). Studies suggest that there is a great impact of Spanish language proficiency on immigrant earnings in many countries and Spain is one of them (Swedberg and Budría 2015) and we believe, knowledge about politeness in particular is an important linguistic content that, if properly taught, can be the key for Chinese migrant community to be integrated and better accepted-in the Spanish society.

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APPENDIX 1

Original Spanish read sentences and English translations:

Escucha.	Coge eso.
<i>Listen!</i>	<i>Take that!</i>
¿Cierras la puerta?	Entra.
<i>Could you close the door?</i>	<i>Come in!</i>
Ven.	Llame más tarde.
<i>Come!</i>	<i>Call me later!</i>
Di algo.	Limpia eso, por favor.
<i>Say something!</i>	<i>Clean that, please.</i>
Ven aquí.	Dame algo.
<i>Come here!</i>	<i>Give me something.</i>
¿Me puedes decir qué es esto?	Cierra bien la puerta.
<i>Could you tell me what is this?</i>	<i>Close the door properly!</i>
Pásame ese vaso.	Sal, por favor.
<i>Pass me the glass!</i>	<i>Go out, please! ¿Sales?</i>
Abre la ventana.	<i>Do you go out?</i>
<i>Open the window!</i>	¿Me pasas la leche?
¿Vienes?	<i>Could you pass me the milk?</i>
<i>Are you coming?</i>	No te vayas.
Dame 5 minutos.	<i>Don't leave!</i>
<i>Give me 5 minutes!</i>	

