Revisiting Politeness Theories: 
Advice in the setting of reality TV in Mexican Spanish 

Hye-yoon Chung 
Korea University 

Chung, Hye-yoon(2011), Advice in the setting of reality TV in Mexican Spanish: Revisiting Politeness Theories, 
EstudiosHispanicos, 61, 97-115. 
This paper will attempt to revisit and question traditional ‘politeness’ theories. One of the major criticisms of traditional politeness theories such as those of Lakoff (1973) and Brown & Levinson (1987) is that they are mostly based on westernized cultural behaviors. Therefore, they may not be applicable to other cultural communities, for example, the Latin (or Hispanic) community. In this study, we therefore attempt to examine whether traditional politeness theories are applicable to Mexican society examining a common speech act, the giving of advice, in a pseudo-realistic setting. 

1. Introduction 

Traditional ‘politeness’ theories such as those of Brown & Levinson (1987), Lakoff (1973), and Leech (1983) have been criticized by many scholars due to the limited applicability of these models. One of the most significant criticisms is that they draw little attention to cultural variance. The main assumption of this article is that it shares such critical views about traditional ‘politeness’ theories. In the current study,
'advice', which is one of the common speech acts in any community, is
dealt with. The definition of advice was taken from Goldsmith &
MacGeorge’s (2000) study, wherein advice is considered as “a common
but potentially problematic way to respond to someone who is in
distress.” To avoid possible variables that could damage our study’s
validity, we have chosen a specific pseudo-realistic setting in Mexican
society from which to analyze traditional politeness theories’
applicability. The data used for the current study was excerpted from a
Mexican reality television show (Azteca America’ 6:00~6:30am Daily). It
is predicted that the findings from our data will offer a few of
counterexamples to traditional “politeness” theories.

The outline of this article takes the following shape: in section 2, we
will review two fundamental ‘politeness’ theories and several criticisms
about them in the literature. We will also examine how so-called
‘Latinism’ has been described in the literature. In section 3, we will
present two research questions and will introduce our data. In section 4,
we will analyze and discuss our data. In the last section, we will draw
conclusions from our findings and discussion.

2. Previous work

2.1. Politeness theories

“Politeness theories” traditionally focus on how verbal expressions
embed ritual attitudes of approach and avoidance toward the personality
of the other (Green, 1996). More specifically, they deal with strategies
for maintaining or changing interpersonal relations. We can mention the
two most representative and important theories in this field: Lakoff
(1973) and Brown and Levinson (1978).