Assertiveness, Compliance and Politeness:
Pragmatic and Sociocultural Aspects of 'Brazilian English' and 'American English'

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Abstract

This paper showed the results of a qualitative investigation that looked into intracultural communication between Brazilian teachers and students of English, and intercultural communication between American teachers and Brazilian students of English. The aims were to identify and describe contextualization cues used by both Brazilian and American speakers of English, and to connect these cues with sociocultural differences. Data was collected through footage of English classes in Brazil and through interviews with American English teachers. The analyses of the footage and the interviews have shown that, while assertiveness could be related to the sociological dimension of individualism in the American culture, compliance, as perceived in verbal interactions, could be connected with the collectivist orientation of the Brazilian culture. Moreover, the higher-context communication style in the Brazilian culture and the lower-context communication style in the American culture (when contrasted with each other) were found to be able to account for differences in the use of politeness strategies. The results showed the importance of making English students aware of contextualization conventions.

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1. Introduction

Following the World Englishes' tradition (Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009), it is understood that English spoken as a first or second language in different regions will underlie different cultural conceptualizations. This is the reason for referring to the variety of English spoken in Brazil and influenced by the Brazilian culture as 'Brazilian English'.

English teaching in Brazil takes place predominantly in monolingual contexts with both the teacher and the students sharing their cultural background. However, the number of native speakers of English teaching in the country - many of whom are from the United States - has been growing considerably.

Even though greater attention is usually given to grammar and pronunciation in English classes, there are some subtle aspects of communication that can become the source of misinterpretations and even misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. These aspects are closely connected with the use of contextualization conventions (Gumperz, 1982, 1999) that can affect the course of conversations and, on a deeper level, the course of interpersonal relations.

Therefore, in this paper I aim at comparing American English and what I call 'Brazilian English' in terms of contextualization conventions connected with these two varieties of the language. This is how the paper is divided: in section 2, the theoretical framework of the study will be outlined. In section 3, the methodology will be described. Section 4 brings relevant results of the investigation and is followed by section 5, where the results are summarized and discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

Three theories served as the basis for this study, namely the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1991; Schütz, 1944/2010), linguistic relativity (Foley, 1997; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Kramsch, 1998, 2004; Palmer, 1996; Whorf, 1956; Wierzbicka, 2003), and contextualization conventions (Gumperz, 1982, 1999; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2007; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996). The social construction of reality and the linguistic relativity theory served as the epistemological departing point for the empirical study in which contextualization conventions were identified and discussed. Each of these fundamental theories will be briefly introduced below.

2.1. The Social Construction of Reality

Arguing against the existence of absolute truths and realities, Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) clarify that every common-sense knowledge comes from and is maintained by social interaction. The authors emphasize the fundamental role of language in the process of meaning construction given its ability to maintain and spread social reality.

In short, this is how Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) explain the social process of knowledge construction: as individuals interact, actions and motivations are exteriorized and many of them become typified. These typifications become progressively anonymous, i.e., the actions are not anymore attributed to specific individuals, but to groups of people. The actions which are frequently performed develop themselves into patterns, which can, in turn, be reproduced. The authors clarify that this objectification is beneficial to our minds, since it does not have to work so much in order to understand which action is going on at a certain time. The possibilities for performing an action are narrowed down. The same happens to language. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991), we can only speak about 'language' when linguistic expressions can lose their connection with the subjectivity of the 'here and now'. Moreover, the objectifications from our everyday lives can only be maintained through language.

Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) distinguish between two types of socialization: primary, which is the first to be experimented by individuals, in their infancy in interactions with significant others (father, mother, etc.); and secondary, which refers to subsequent processes where socialized individuals are introduced in new sectors of society. The authors argue that primary socialization is the most important one because it constrains the basic structure of the subsequent socialization.

Apart from getting a picture of an individual's socialization in his society of origin, it is also

important to consider the attempt of socialization of foreigners in new societies/cultures. According to Schütz (1944/2010), the knowledge acquired within a group is identified as coherent, clear, and consistent by its members; that is, this knowledge constitutes the objective reality of the group as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991). The foreigner, however, does not share - with the natives of the culture he is trying to get to know and to become part of – the same previous cultural knowledge. Therefore, he questions everything that seems to be unquestionable for the group. Even if he already knows the history of the group, he was never a part of it. Thus, the stranger frequently tries to look at the cultural and linguistic patterns of the new group as he would do in his group of origin, but will be able to find just some similarities (Schütz, 1944/2010).

A practical example of cultural/linguistic asymmetry that might lead to cultural clashes is related to the dimensions of individualism X collectivism (Triandis, 2001). Whereas in collectivist cultures individuals follow in-group norms when shaping their own behaviours and actions, people in individualist cultures prioritize individual goals and tend to act autonomously and independently (Triandis, 2001). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2007) argue that these dimensions haven proven relevant in intercultural communication research. As language is inseparable from culture, individualist and collectivist orientations can be easily detected in verbal interactions, as will be shown later.

Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991, p. 53) point out that language is "coercive in its effect" on individuals; that is, the language used in the primary socialization will have long lasting effects on individuals even when they get in contact with other languages and cultures. The fact that language is able to influence the pragmatic behaviours and perceptions of its speakers is closely related to the theory of linguistic relativity, which is the topic of the next section.

2.2. Linguistic Relativity

Benjamin Lee Whorf, who was responsible (together with Franz Boas and Edward Sapir) for the popularization of the concept of linguistic relativity, has defined it in the following way:

> (…) users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world (Whorf, 1956, p. 221).

Thus, several studies that endorse the existence of linguistic relativity attest the influence of semantic and grammatical structures on cognition (cf. Lucy, 1992; Slobin, 1996). An example is the study published by Whorf in the article *The relation of habitual thought and behaviour to language* (1956), in which he contrasts European languages (what he calls SAE, Standard Average European) with Hopi, a language spoken by an indigenous people living in the northwest of Arizona, in the United States. In this paper, he analyses the semantic domains of mass and time. To him, habitual categorizations in these languages are a result of their grammatical systems. In SAE, on the one hand, objective and subjective experiences can be quantified in the same way. Thus, it is possible to quantify time (e.g., 'ten days') following the same pattern as for concrete experience quantification (e.g., 'ten men'). The temporal experience is therefore objectified following the patterns of a concrete experience of seeing ten men together. In Hopi, on the other hand, plural nouns and cardinal numbers are used exclusively for things objectively experienced. In the case of imaginary plurals, as those found in expressions related to time, ordinal numbers and singular nouns are used. The expression 'ten days' would, therefore, be replaced by 'the eleventh day' in the Hopi language. This difference shows that people in these distinct cultures experience time differently. Foley (1997, p. 203) points out that: The gist of Whorf's argument is that these abstractions are not cognizable directly, but only through experience, and experience, as per the Principle of Linguistic Relativity, is interpreted through categorizations ultimately derived from the grammatical systems at work in the language.

The view about linguistic relativity was widened by theories that investigated the linguistic content of expressions in close interaction with the contexts in which they are used. Two areas of studies with such a focus are the Ethnography of Speaking (Hymes, 1962) and Interactional Sociolinguistics, (Gumperz, 1999; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2007). These theories assume that meaning depends partially on language use. That is what John Gumperz's studies, which will be mentioned in the next section, are about.

2.3. Contextualization Conventions

With the birth of Sociolinguistics in the 1960s, linguists could start investigating language in use, i.e., language embedded in a specific sociocultural context. The American scholar John Gumperz was one of the first linguists to perform microanalytic analyses of intercultural communication.

According to Gumperz (1982), conversationalists categorize events, make inferences and come up with expectations during the course of interaction. Channelling of interpretation is connected with conversationalists' knowledge of contextualization cues. Contextualization cues are, according to Gumperz (1982, p. 131), linguistic features that influence the "signalling of contextual presupposition". Some examples of contextualization cues are the choice of dialect, style, or code; prosodic contours; lexical and syntactic choices; and discourse sequencing strategies. Auer (1992) also includes kinaesthesia, eye behaviour, tempo, gestures, and proxemics in the repertoire of contextualization cues. These discourse features can be used as strategies through which interlocutors expect to understand and be understood in the interaction process.

Contextualization cues are indexical signs (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2007), since they produce an immediate association between sign and context. This indexical knowledge, according to Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2007), can only be acquired through interactive experience inside a cultural environment. Going back to Berger and Luckmann's (1966/1991) theory of knowledge construction, it is possible to hypothesize that the acquisition of contextualization cues

happens in the primary socialization and is, therefore, intuitive.

On the whole, the analytical interests of this study lie on the contextualization conventions used in intra and intercultural interactions in English. By reinforcing that these conventions are heavily dependent on the mother tongue and on the primary socialization of individuals in their home countries, this investigation detaches itself from other studies in the area of Pragmatics, especially the ones subscribing to the paradigm of English as a Lingua Franca (Seidlhofer, 2004), ELF. While ELF tries to find general patterns of English commonly used by speakers coming from different sociocultural backgrounds, the investigation described here proposes to understand the idiosyncrasies of 'Brazilian English' when compared to American English (for a full critique of functional approaches to the study of Intercultural Pragmatics, cf. Wolf & Polzenhagen, 2009).

By focusing on differences rather than commonalities, this study can help Brazilians and Americans in intercultural interactions, in and outside language classes, in their attempts to unveil their interlocutors' intentions. By paying attention at contextualization conventions, interactants might be better able to understand each other's pragmatic meanings in intercultural communication.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Twenty-five participants took part in this study: six teachers (three Brazilians and three Americans) and nineteen Brazilian students. The type of sampling adopted for student selection was the "maximum variation sampling" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.128), in which the researcher attempts to focus on different forms of experience. For this study, even though priority was given to students with intermediate and advanced English proficiency –given their more advanced speaking skills- basic level students were also selected. Moreover, the age and occupation ranges were broad. The reason for this sampling technique derives from the assumption that common patterns were to be found across the sampled diversity, which would go along with the assumption that students' common culture

would influence their L2 independently of age, occupation, and proficiency level. English classes were filmed in different language schools in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Participants' ages ranged from 24 to 52, except for one group of students, who were younger adults (18 years old).

3.2. Instrument

Two data-collection instruments were used for this study: the first was video and audio recording of the English classes mentioned above; the second was a semi-structured interview. By opting for the footage, the intention was to focus on authentic data. However, it should be said that such a type of data collection brings a series of limitations to the study, the most constraining of which being the fact that students and teachers are usually not willing to be filmed (for understandable reasons). I filmed all the classes I received consent to. The footage resulted in more than ten hours (six hundred and twenty-five minutes) of video recording.

The transcription of the selected video excerpts followed the guidelines from the discourse and conversation-analytic transcription system -in German, *Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem*- GAT 2 (Selting et al., 2011), whose details can be found in Appendix 1. The transcription editor utilized was FOLKER, which was developed by Thomas Schmidt (n.d.) at the University of Mannheim, Germany.

Semi-structured interviews were made by the author with the three American teachers whose classes had been recorded. For the interviews only the audio was recorded, so as to reduce the discomfort for the interviewees.

3.3. Procedure

The study was divided into two phases: the footage and the interviews. The footage was made by the researcher with a simple camera (Sony HDR-CX2E) placed on the corner of each of the classrooms. With just a few exceptions, it was possible to have a reasonable audio and image quality. After the footage was performed, the videos were carefully watched and pre-analysed by the author.

The pre-analysis consisted of watching the videos and selecting the most relevant excerpts for the purpose of the investigation. During this pre-analysis phase of intercultural interactions (American teacher and Brazilian students), the author selected all the speech events (Hymes, 1972) in which there were evident misunderstandings. For the pre-analysis of intracultural interactions (Brazilian teacher and Brazilian students), the researcher selected those speech events which presented contextualization cues that, according to the researcher's previous knowledge on the Brazilian and American cultures, could possibly become a source of misunderstanding in intercultural communication.

After that, the video excerpts, together with their transcriptions, were shown to the three American interviewees. Prior to watching the videos, the interviewees were explained what contextualization cues are and were asked to identify those that most called their attention while watching the excerpts. The analyses performed by the interviewees went from the micro level –in which the selected excerpts were analysed in terms of their contextualization cues– to the macro level, once interviewees were asked to link the micro level issues to macro level analyses of the Brazilian and American cultures.

The final analysis made by the author took into account: her own analyses of the video excerpts and their transcriptions; interviewees' reflections; and consultation of literature on American and Brazilian cultures. Some of the most relevant findings of the study are described below.

4. Results

Excerpt 1 was taken out of a 90-minute footage of an English class taught by a Brazilian teacher. Here, two students (S2 and S4) try to answer a question posed by the teacher (T) while pointing at a picture on the Eboard. Since there is a superposition of turns, S4 raises the volume of his voice, while S2 lowers the volume of hers.

EXCERPT 1

```
02      T     what do these IMages tell you?
(…)
09      S4    [communiCAtion.]
10      S2    [STAtue.]
11      S4    <<cresc> [communiCAtions.]>
12      S2    <<dim> [STAtue.]>
```

Excerpt 2 happens in the same interaction, right after the teacher says the image he was pointing to was that of a 'carrier pigeon'. S2 wants to check if it is common to say just 'pigeon' and asks the teacher:

EXCERPT 2

```
22      S2    it's common to say PIGeo:n [no?]
23      S3    [PIGeon]
24      T     (0.3) yes the animal is a <<pointing to the picture> PIGeon.>
25      S4    but this [KIND].
26      T     [beCAUSE]
27      S2    ah beCAUSE ((points her finger to her neck))
28      S4    <<makes a gesture indicating something tied to the neck> it
              carries a message.>
29      S2    a:::h [oKA::Y.]
30      T     [eXA:Ctly.]
```

Excerpts 1 and 2 were linked by the American interviewees to a passive behaviour from S2. In the first one, the fact that she lowers her voice was interpreted by the American interviewees as a sign of lack of confidence. In the second excerpt, even though the question posed by S2 is a direct translation from a type of tag question common in Portuguese (which is followed by the negation adverb 'no'), interviewees interpreted it as another sign of lack of confidence, since the student herself is pointing out, in her own question, that the answer will be probably negative.

In the corpus, there is also another example of compliance and lack of self-confidence, according to the interviewees. Excerpt 3 is a part of another ninety-minute English class. This time, the teacher is American. In this excerpt, two students, S1 and S2, immediately respond affirmatively to a question posed by the teacher, who was trying to clarify a misunderstanding:

EXCERPT 3

```
01      S1    Maisa LEFT arcelor.
02      T     ahm?
03      S2    [is not]
04      S1    [Maisa <<f> LEFT]arcelor.>
05            that's [WHY (.) she's not coming] with us.
06      S2    [is not WORKing.]
07            <<f> is NOT worKing.>
08      T     oh you weren't THERE and she was?
09      S2    <<p> yeah.>
10      S1    <<p> yeah. >
11      T     okay you had the day OFF?
12            (0.7)
13      S1    <<making the sign of no with the head> <<f> no,>
14      S2    no no she LEFT.
15            (0.3)
16      S1    she:: <<moving the right hand to represent the action of being
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```
            fired> FIRED.>
17    T     she got FIRED?
18    S1    [yeah]
19    S2    <<shaking the index finger as a sign of no> [NO:::;]>
20    S1    <<shaking the index finger as a sign of no> !NO! no.>
21    S1    she ASKED to leave.
22    T     [okay she] <<making the gesture for 'okay' with the left hand>
            QUIT. >
23    S2    [yes]
24    S2    <<pointing the index finger to the teacher> <<ff> yeah,>
25    S1    <<imitating the last hand gesture of the teacher> she QUIT.>
26    T     she QUIT.
```

It was possible to see that even though students responded affirmatively in turns 9 and 10, they did not mean it, because it was clear that the misunderstanding had not been solved at that point. Even though they answered affirmatively, the volume of their voice is lower considering the other turns. This, according to the interviewees, indicates that they agreed even though they were not sure the answer would be a 'yes'. As a response to this excerpt, one of the interviewees himself points to a sociological analysis when he refers to the Brazilian society as collectivist and the American society as individualist. Another American interviewee points out that, in the United States, children in schools are taught from a very early age to defend their points of view. She uses the expression "students should stand for themselves", which emphasizes the individualist stance encouraged in the American society.

Person and Stephan (1998) conducted an empirical comparative study of the American and Brazilian cultures on the topic of collectivism and individualism. Through questionnaire analysis they were able to confirm that Brazilians achieved a higher score on the dimension of collectivism, while Americans achieved a higher score on individualism.

Excerpt 4 below shows a discussion in a conversation class. Students were supposed to get a piece of paper, read a question written there, and start a discussion with their classmates about it. Here it is possible to see how a discussion with a collectivist orientation can take place.

EXCERPT 4

```
01    S3    <<reading a question in a piece of paper> what kind of
            problems can having a lot of MONey sometimes cause,>
02          (2.3)
03    S4    oh: i think that when when you have a lot of MONey you
            attract people's attention.
04          so eh:: so some bad people could get near you INTerested
            only in your money and not on your personality or could be
            your friend just to get your money.
05          o::r they could get eh mugged or suffer from some VIolence
            or something
06          eh::: and normally when you have a lot of money you (.)  so
            you just work for(.) work for the money and not for
            HAPpiness.
07    S3    yeah i agree and and i think we LOSE some of our old eh::
08          human being like,
09          <p> not human BEING.>
10          but as we WERE before eh: the:: the richest part.
11          eh:: you become another [PERson.]
12    S2    [ye:s.]
13    S3    for example when you ah get mi (.) millionaire
            You [lost] yourself;= you start a new LIFE.
14    S5    [yeah.]
15    S2    and you atTRACT not only like muggers and something but the::
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                 envious people-
                 [and bad] feelings.
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S2, S3, and S5 share their converging opinions and construct some turns as continuations of the previous ones uttered by one of their classmates. Words such as 'yeah' and 'and' mark this tendency.

However, after a while, there is a break in the collectivist atmosphere with an assertion from S1, in turn 17, that diverges from the other students' homogenous opinions. As will be shown below in excerpt 5, this causes the communication to take other directions.

EXCERPT 5

```
16    S1     [ah::],
17           <<looking at S2> i don't agree with you at ALL.>
18           ((the other students start to laugh))
19    S6     of COURSE
20    S1     [!NO! because]
21           [laughs from other students]
22    S1     !NO! just the::: like the:: the last soap opera and
             it (.) it has a::
23           ((the other students are still laughing and making
             comments simultaneously))
```

Here it is clear that S1's opinion, different from the other ones, is not well accepted by the other students, who, before turn 17, were behaving in a way that preserved group harmony. S1 gets teased by the other students. This probably happened due to the fact that individual statements that contrast with the group general orientation are not cherished in the Brazilian culture, since this can disrupt the harmonious social relationship that the members of the group have with each other.

Roberto DaMatta, an important Brazilian anthropologist who has conducted several comparative studies of the American and Brazilian cultures/societies, makes the following comparison:

> In the United States, the idea of community is founded on equality and homogeneity of its members, who are conceived of as citizens. That is, the community is conceived of as egalitarian, because it is not made of families, relatives or groups, who have different properties, styles, sizes, and interests, but of individuals and citizens. In Brazil, on the other hand, the community is necessarily heterogeneous, complementary, and hierarchical. Its basic unit is not based on individuals (or citizens), but rather on relationships and people, families and groups of relatives and friends. Therefore, in the United States, the isolated individual counts as a positive unit from the moral and political point of view; but, in Brazil, the isolated individual, without relations, the undivided political entity, is something considered extremely negative, because it reveals only the loneliness of a marginal human being in relation to other members of the community. (DaMatta, 1997, p. 78, translated).

I assume that Brazilian students can be seen as passive or lacking in self-confidence by American teachers exactly because of their collective orientation to prioritize group harmony instead of strong discussions that could end up threatening other people's face. For instance, students asking too many questions could constitute face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). They could threaten the positive face of the interlocutor at whom the questions are directed (in this case, the teacher could have explained certain concepts in a poor way, according to the point of view of the student who asks many questions, for example) or of the speaker who poses the questions (who might be seen by the rest of the group as somebody who can never understand what the teacher says).

Schröder (2011) points out that a society or culture can show traits related to individualism and collectivism that are dependent on the context. It is, therefore, the situation that will define the most appropriate linguistic style of a group. Nevertheless, even though the dichotomy individualism X collectivism has come under scrutiny in recent years, I assume it can be useful to use such a distinction when analyzing facework in different cultures in specific communicative situations.

The concept of facework brings us to the topic of politeness. Excerpt 6 below was taken out of an English class, where a Brazilian teacher is interacting with Brazilian basic-level students of English. Here, the teacher introduces a warm-up activity for the lesson. He asks questions about the city 'Belo Horizonte' in Brazil, where students live. There is a negative response given by S1 in turn 11:

EXCERPT 6

```
09    T     do you think belo horizonte is the BEST city in the world,
10    S2    i don't KNOW;
11    S1    <<shaking the head as a sign of negation> no.>
12    S2    but i i LOVE belo horizonte
13    T     <<looking at S1> no,>
14          <<looking at S2> you LOVE belo horizonte.>
```

Excerpt 7 is another part of the same class. It shows that S1 disagrees once again with S2 in a rather blunt way in turn 47.

EXCERPT 7

```
38    S2    my my BROther live eh::: live
39    T     LIVED.
40    S2    lived in rio de jaNEIro.
41    T     oKAY.
42    S2    he
43          (1.2)
((S2 turns the palms of his hands up as a sign of not knowing and looks at
the teacher waiting for his help))
44    T     he preFERS,
45    S2    he prefer belo horiZONte.
46    T     he prefers belo horiZONte.
47    S1    <<shaking the head as a sign of negation> i DISagree.>
```

In both excerpts 6 and 7, there was not an attempt from S1 to mitigate the disagreement in relation to S2's opinion. It should be pointed out that it is *not* a hypothesis from the author that the disagreement expressed by S1 is typical of the Brazilian culture. There was not, in this case, from S1, a concern about S2's face, and this caused a confrontation between S2 and S1 (as will be shown in excerpt 8 below).

In excerpt 8, still from the same class, S2 asks if S1 has lived in Rio de Janeiro apparently because he believes that only people who have lived in both cities (Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte) are able to make a fair judgment about the topic. S2's gesture with the hands after turn 51 works as a sign of conclusion (i.e., 'if you have not lived in a city, you cannot make appropriate judgments about it'). This can be seen below:

EXCERPT 8

```
48    T     how about you=what's your OPInion [about belo horizonte?]
49    S2    <<pointing the pencil to S1> [you lived]> i::n rio de
            jaNEIro?
50    S1    <<shaking the head as a sign of negation> !NO!> but i LIKE.
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```
51    T      you like RIo?
((S2 shows the palms of both hands))
52    S2     <<pointing to herself> i LIKE> rio de janeiro;
53           but LI:VE
54    S1     !YES!,
55    S2     anO:THER eh::
56    S1     !YEAH!,
57    S2     eh:: ((looks at the teacher))
58    S1     <<counting with her fingers> have (.) HAVE a>
59    T      it's another [THING.]
60    S2     <<shaking the head as a sign of negation> NO.>
61    T      you can say S2 it's anOTHER thing.
62           living is anOTHER thing.
63    S2     ah THING.
64    T      it's anOTHER thing.
```

Therefore, even though open disagreements are not encouraged in the Brazilian culture, they certainly exist and can, as was the case, be the result of the violation of a pragmalinguistic rule (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), which, as in the American culture, presupposes a mitigation of negation. The author believes that this mitigation in 'Brazilian English' can be done through prosodical and gestural contextualization cues (certain facial expressions, for instance), which, contrary to that utilized by S1 (as, for example, emphatic stress on certain words or syllables), do not threaten the hearer.

This point can be illustrated with a passage in one of the video excerpts analysed for this study. Here a Brazilian student asks her Brazilian teacher to repeat an example she had previously given. Excerpt 9 was the utterance used by the student.

EXCERPT 9

```
26    S1     Teacher rePEAT.
```

What followed was the repetition of the previously given example by the teacher. Therefore, there was no breakdown in communication, which could be expected if the teacher did not share with the student the knowledge that in Brazilian Portuguese the imperative can be used not only for orders, but also for requests. The difference between an order and a request lies exactly on the intonation contour given to the message. Thus, for both the teacher and the student it was clear that the latter was making a request (following the conventions of 'Brazilian English'). Moreover, calling the instructor 'teacher', instead of using her (first or last) name, is an appropriate social deictic reference in this communicative context in Brazil, whereas in the United States, for example, it could be considered inappropriate.

Sergio Buarque de Holanda (1936/1995), a late and very renowned Brazilian sociologist, associated politeness with individualism in modern societies. He stated that "politeness is a mask the individual uses in order to maintain his supremacy in relation to society" (Holanda, 1936/1995, p. 147). According to him, politeness is kept exterior to the individual and can serve, when necessary, as a resistance tool. By using it, individuals are able to preserve their sensitivity and their emotions. However, as the author argues, with a great influence of the primitive model of patriarchal family in the Brazilian society, urbanization took very unique characteristics that encouraged individuals to always refer to the domestic life in the creation of models of social relationships, and this includes relationships in the public sphere.

The "cordial man" is, according to Holanda (1936/1995), the epitome of the average Brazilian. Contrary to the meaning that could be expected from the expression, the cordial man refuses cordiality understood as ritualistic and formulaic notions of life (as those expected for the explicit use of politeness strategies). Cordiality is understood, by the author, in the following terms:

It was once said that the Brazilian contribution to civilization would be the cordiality. We will give the world "the cordial man". The generosity and hospitality, virtues which are frequently pointed out by foreigners who visit Brazil, represent a definite aspect of the Brazilian character, at least to the extent in which the ancestral influence, in human relationships from rural and patriarchal backgrounds, continues active. It would be a mistake to assume that these virtues can mean 'good manners', civilization. They are, more than anything, expressions of a legitimate and rich emotive background. In civilization there is something that is coercive – it can be expressed through orders and sentences. (Holanda, 1936/1995, p. 146-7, translated)

Therefore, Brazilian politeness – much more influenced by contextualization cues than by explicit expressions (as the expressions we would expect in American English, such as 'could you please…' or 'would you please…', for example) is more dependent on the hearer. This can lead to difficulties in terms of intercultural communication between Brazilians and Americans, since Brazilian politeness depends more on the previous knowledge of contextualization cues, which are usually learned in the primary socialization and cannot be easily interpreted by interlocutors who have not taken part in this socialization process.

Thus, the negation of politeness which Holanda (1936/1995) refers to is related to utterances in which politeness is expressed explicitly, that is, in its clearest level at the language surface. Thus, I assume that, for Brazilians, the use of expressions such as the "whimperatives" (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 77) (e.g., 'would you…?', 'could you…?,' etc.), for example, could be considered unnecessary in some contexts, given the fact that the contextualization cues themselves are generally able to express the intention of the speakers to their interlocutors. That is, an utterance like 'Ms. Smith, could you please repeat it?' in intracultural communication between Americans and an utterance like 'professora, repete' (teacher, repeat [it]?) – with a certain prosodical contextualization cue

appropriate for requests – in intracultural interaction between Brazilians have the same effect on the respective hearers from the same culture, but not necessarily on hearers from a different culture.

These observations are in agreement with the distinction made by Edward Hall (1976) between high-context cultures and low-context cultures. The former are the ones in which there is the possibility to leave many things unsaid, since the cultural context itself provides the explanation that was not verbalized in words; just a few words are able to convey a complex message in an efficient way to members of the group. The latter are cultures in which speakers should be more explicit to communicate their messages. In comparison with the American culture, the Brazilian culture is classified as having a higher context, according to Hall (1976), which corroborates the analysis of politeness in both cultures.

5. Discussion

The results of the abovementioned analyses point to the following conclusions: First of all, contextualization cues such as volume reduction and tag questions ending in 'no' in 'Brazilian English' can be interpreted by speakers of American English as a lack of assertiveness or a sign of compliance. It was found that this interpretation is very much in agreement with the fact that the American culture is more oriented towards individualism, whereas the Brazilian culture is more collectivist.

Moreover, it was also said that, given the fact that Brazilian culture is a higher context culture when compared to the American one, politeness rules in 'Brazilian English' are more implicit and more dependent on contextualization cues. In the American culture, in contrast, politeness is more explicit on the linguistic surface.

Even though the analyses provided some insights on contextualization cues in Brazilian and American Englishes, it should be pointed out that further studies are required so as to unveil other contextual aspects related to these varieties of the language. Moreover, a deeper sociological/anthropological perspective is in order and requires a more systematic

multidisciplinary work, where sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists are able to collaborate in the attempt to find further links between language, culture, and society.

However, despite the limited scope of this study, it was already possible to show that discrepancies in contextualization cues that go often unnoticed might cause difficulties in intercultural interactions. Given the cultural nature of contextualization conventions and their close relationship to the context, they are rarely reflected upon by native speakers of a given language. Contextualization cues are usually acquired as children learn their first language; during their primary socialization. These cues, as Levinson (1997, p. 28) put it, are not clearly formulatable; they lie, according to him, in an "informational penumbra". Nobody bothers to teach a child, for instance, the difference in intonation between an order and a polite request; this is learned intuitively through primary socialization.

The findings of this investigation suggest that studies that consider the pragmatics of English from an international standpoint, such as ELF, could profit from a perspective that takes culture into account. This culturally-informed approach could help researchers go beyond stating, for instance, what an acceptable request in English should look like; instead, they would attempt to understand how – and above all, why – certain cultures might make use of different pragmatic devices to accomplish similar functions in discourse.

In this fashion, Parvaresh and Dabghi (2013) argue that "the ELT [English Language Teaching] industry needs a more balanced methodology concerned with the relationship of language to social actions and to the socio-cultural worlds of those who use it". Since contextualization conventions are intricated with cultural practices, I propose a new sociological and anthropological orientation to the teaching of culture in L2. So as for teachers to reach this objective, I suggest that themes like 'individualism X collectivism' be presented in parallel with associated contextualization cues and linguistic content where these distinctions can be seen. When teaching how requests are made, for example, teachers could compare the linguistic and contextual information with anthropological/cultural aspects connected with Englishes used in different countries.

By doing so, what is being taken into account is the fact that different cultures assign different features to the same language, and this is not an attempt to usurp the language as it is used in the country(ies) it originally comes from. It points, on the contrary, to a new cultural perspective related to language, which results in a broadening and diversification of its system. Such a diversification allows it to meet the needs of various societies and various cultures.

It is important that teachers be encouraged to reflect upon such issues. By doing so, they themselves can encourage a critical behavior also from students. Moreover, reflecting upon linguistic aspects related to certain sociocultural characteristics promotes a constant (self) reflexive positioning that might make intercultural encounters – inside and outside the classroom – more inclined towards a real attempt of mutual comprehension.

Acknowledgment

Funding

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Appendix 1

GAT 2 (Selting *et al.*, 2011) – Summary of transcription conventions used in this article.

Sequential Structure	
[ ]	Simultaneous speech
=	immediate or fast continuation with a new turn or segment

Pauses	
(.)	Micropause
(-), (--), (---)	short (0.2-0.5 seg.), intermediate (0.5-0.8 seg.) and long pause (0.8-1.0 seg.), respectively.
:, ::, :::	short (0.2-0.5 seg.), intermediate (0.5-0.8 seg.) and long lengthening (0.8-1.0 seg.), respectively.
ah, eh, ahn	hesitation markers

Accentuation	
acCENT	focus accent
ac!CENT!	extra strong accent

Final Pitch Movements of Intonational Phrases	
?	*rising to high*
,	*rising to mid*
-	*level*
;	*falling to mid*
.	*falling to low*

Other conventions	
((cough))	description of non-vocal actions
<<coughing>> >	descrição de acontecimentos não-verbais e para-linguísticos with indication of scope (e.g., she was <<coughing> on the bus> at that time)
<<surprised>>	interpretive comment with scope (<<surprised> it is not POSsible>)
(xxx xxx)	part that was not comprehended by the transcriber. Each xxx stands for a syllable
(house)	supposed word
(house/mouse)	possible alternatives of supposed words
((...))	omission in the transcription

Pitch change	
↑	upwards
↓	downwards

Loudness and tempo changes, with scope	

<<f> >	= forte, loud
<<ff> >	= *fortissimo*, very loud
<<p> >	= piano, low
<<pp> >	= *pianissimo*, very soft
<<cresc> >	= *crescendo*, increasingly louder
<<dim> >	= *diminuendo*, increasingly lower