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# The level of context dependence of engagement markers in Peninsular Spanish and US business websites



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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of Spaniards' and North-Americans' level of context dependence (Hall, 1976) on the engagement markers (Hyland & Tse, 2004) used on the presentation page of 100 business websites from the toy sector (50 from Spain and 50 from the US). Following an observational and a quantitative analysis, the findings reveal remarkable statistical differences in the interactional discourse of this digital genre, which may be a valuable source of information for export companies to introduce their products abroad by means of their business websites. In addition, we believe that the business website can be used in the teaching and learning of Spanish and English for professional purposes, with a special focus on the way interactional discourse is produced and interpreted in this digital genre cross-culturally.

### RESUMEN

En este estudio se examina el impacto del nivel de dependencia contextual de hablantes de español peninsular y hablantes norteamericanos (Hall, 1976) en los marcadores de compromiso que se emplean en la página de presentación de 100 páginas web de negocios procedentes del sector del juguete (50 de España y 50 de Estados Unidos). De igual modo, se ha seguido un análisis observacional y cuantitativo. Los resultados arrojan diferencias estadísticas notables en el discurso interaccional de este género digital, los cuales pueden resultar de gran interés para las empresas exportadoras que desean introducir sus productos en el mercado exterior por medio de sus páginas web de negocios. Además, la página web de negocios puede ser de aplicación en la enseñanza y aprendizaje del español e inglés con fines profesionales, en especial el modo en que se produce e interpreta el discurso interaccional en este género digital desde una perspectiva intercultural.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the last fifteen years the council of Europe (2002) has put great emphasis on the significance of 'interculturality' in language learning, and insisted that users of a foreign language must be able to correlate their culture with that of the new one to become multilingual speakers. However, the concept of 'culture' is so complex that it has given rise to numerous definitions and has been analysed from multiple viewpoints.

From the perspective of intercultural communication studies, 'culture' has been defined by Singer (1998, p.107) as "a pattern of learned, group-related perceptions -including both verbal and nonverbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, and behaviours- that is accepted and expected by an identity group". The term has also been defined by Hofstede (1991, p.4) as "the collective mental programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others". In most of these definitions there is a prevalent agreement on the fact that 'culture' and 'identity group' are interdependent concepts. As such, culture makes reference to the way a group of people has been trained from a very early age to internalise the behaviour and attitudes of the community.

The notion of 'identity group' or 'discourse community' was developed by Swales' (1990) traditional approach to genre study, which involves three important issues: discourse community, communicative purpose and genre. In this line, he defines discourse community as "having a broadly agreed set of common public goals" (Swales 1990, p. 24-27). These goals form the basis for shared communicative purposes, with genres, as intercommunication tools embedded in social contexts, enabling their members to achieve a set of communicative purposes in a particular communicative situation. In addition, they share a specific terminology and a set of dynamic genres. These are easily recognisable and identifiable because they have in common a set of communicative purposes, form, structure, and similar audience socio-cultural expectations.

In our study the discourse community is made up of US and Peninsular Spanish product-selling websites designers from the toy sector, whose companies attempt to persuade visitors to make a purchase of the products manufactured. The understanding and transfer of the language used by these professionals from the students' mother tongue to a second language, and vice versa, may generate significant problems in the L2/FL classroom. If learners are involved in the task of understanding and/or writing this digital type of persuasive genre in the target language, mastering the grammar and the specific terminology of the text may not be enough. They should be able to learn the general layout, the different communicative moves making up the microstructure as well as the set of interactive and interactional metadiscourse patterns through which companies organise the genre discourse, show their stance towards the information they transmit and interact with potential customers. And last but not least, L2/FL learners ought to familiarise themselves with the influence the cultural framework of each society may have in the way genres are produced and interpreted in different languages.

The domain of all these factors is linked to a key notion for language learning and professional communication: socio-cultural competence, which is triggered from the interdependence between culture, identity group or discourse community, and also socio-cultural context. According to experts such as Giovannini, Martín, Rodríguez & Simón (1996, p. 29), to get this competence, "speakers need

to acquire the knowledge of the socio-cultural context where the target language is spoken and the ability to adopt the appropriate social strategies used by the target group or community". In other words, as speakers of a language we belong to a particular cultural context deeply rooted in ourselves and very difficult to get rid of when we are exposed to the culture of a new language.

A pioneer researcher on the effect of context on meaning was the North-American anthropologist and pioneer in the interdisciplinary field of intercultural communication Edward T. Hall. In his salient work *Beyond Culture* (1976) he observed that the dependence of a message on its context varies between two poles of a continuum, between *high-context* and *low-context* dependence. According to Hall (1976, p.101):

While high-context transactions feature pre-programmed information in the receiver and in the setting, with only minimal information in the transmitted message, the information in low context transactions must be in the transmitted message in order to make up for what is missing in the context

Hall observed that Spain, for instance, tends to appreciate a moderately high-context culture. As fairly high-context communicators, Spaniards are more prone to value an implicit communicative style which relies on the audience's ability to grasp the main message. In contrast, North-Americans are more in favour of low-context communication in which detailed and explicit messages have more importance than information that is conveyed by means of context.

Later on, the Dutch engineer and social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1991) proposed a model to analyse national cultures consisting of six main dimensions: *power distance*, *individualism*, *masculinity*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *term orientation* and *indulgence*. Although Hofstede's model has had many followers and also detractors, he has established a major research tradition in cross-cultural studies and has had a great influence on professional communication. The present investigation will mainly focus on the line established by Hall (1976). Therefore, in order to investigate the level of context-dependence in our corpus, we must first identify the linguistic indicators of this socio-cultural reliance in previous studies.

## 2. Literature Review

The amount of publications in major journals and publishing houses in the last 20 years on Intercultural Rhetoric shows that this research area has become one of the priorities of Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies. During the last two decades we have witnessed an interest in the study of academic and professional genres (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Connor, 2008). More particularly, in the last few years Connor (2008, p.299-315) points out:

Studies examining the influence of culture in the rhetorical conventions in a wide variety of genres have spread in intercultural rhetoric, applied linguistics to languages for academic and professional purposes, and translation studies.

Advances in social anthropology and social psychology in the final decades of the twentieth century paralleled the reaction against the alleged universalism of certain linguistic theories of Anglo-Saxon origin (Grice, 1975; Brown and Levinson, 1987). In the 1970s this resulted in the emergence of the new discipline of *intercultural pragmatics*, which focuses on the description and contrastive analysis of the

culture-specific pragmalinguistic conventions ruling speech acts, social interaction, and discourse strategies across languages (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991; Trosborg, 1995; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Díaz-Pérez, 2003). Nevertheless, these studies do not seem to explain why the principles of interaction that speakers from different societies hold might be motivated by the cultural values through which they solve many of the cultural dimensions shared by all human beings. In fact, from the 1990s onwards there has been increasing academic interest in this research question (Kaplan, 1966; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Prykarpatska, 2008; Loukianenko-Wolfe, 2008; Guillén-Nieto, 2009; Ivorra-Pérez, 2012, 2014, 2015).

For this reason, within this field interdisciplinary studies are progressively taking a dominant position, as experts find difficulties to determine exactly the connexion between culture and discourse in social and professional contexts. Despite the usual constraints of this research field, their results point out that this connexion often seems to depend on educational, corporate and communicative issues. For example, Kaplan (1966) was one of the leading researchers who observed that the differences in the rhetorical patterns of texts across cultures are more likely to reflect cultural and educational training factors which help shape the writing conventions learned in a culture. Later on, Clyne (1994) also pioneered interdisciplinary research on the influence of cultural values in professional oral and written discourse.

Within this research umbrella, recent research has focused on analysing the different types of culture in professional settings and the influence of cultural factors and dimensions on the communication produced in these environments. For example, in their studies on Spanish, British and Polish business emails and letters

to shareholders, Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska (2013, 2016) show that corporate culture plays a significant role in some discursive aspects (e.g. in the move structure) but the national culture affects interpersonal markers, lexical formula, syntactical and register choices, cohesive devices, among others.

Also, Hall's (1976) and Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions have been analysed on the transactional and interactional discourse of business websites (Ivorra-Pérez, 2014, 2015), opinion essays written in British English by L2 Peninsular Spanish learners (Ivorra-Pérez, 2012), the design and communicative style of Peninsular Spanish press advertisements (García-Yeste, 2013) or the move structure of the business letter of introduction in Peninsular Spanish and British-English (Guillén-Nieto, 2013). Other pieces of research have also drawn their attention on examining the impact of cultural dimensions on the communication strategies used to perform some speech acts in British or American English in comparison with other languages like Russian or Ukrainian (Loukianenko-Wolfe, 2008; Prykarpatska, 2008).

Now, we are intending to take this research a step further by analysing how the impact of Spaniards' and North-Americans' level of 'context-dependence' (Hall, 1976) may be reflected on the engagement markers (Hyland & Tse, 2004) used in the presentation page of Peninsular Spanish and US toy-selling websites.

## 2.1. Engagement Markers in Academic and Professional Genres

Numerous intercultural and cross-cultural studies have concentrated on examining the use of metadiscourse strategies. Thanks to them we know that metadiscourse is often constrained by the conventions of the particular genre (Moreno, 1997; Dafouz-Milne, 2003; Mur-Deñás, 2010), and also that the major gaps and contrasts seem to be due to cultural factors (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993; Mauranen, 1993; Valero-Garcés, 1996; Vassileva, 2001; Shokouki & Talati, 2009; Suau, 2010, 2016; Junqueira & Cortés, 2014). The latter seem to be the ones that most affect our target professional genre.

As we see in many language learning course books, promotional and product-selling websites have proved to be a very useful digital genre for teaching persuasive communication not only to business students but to all English learners. However, this genre has an Achilles heel. Although after some training most L2/FL learners may not have difficulty in producing a correct persuasive text from a morpho-syntactic and lexical point of view in the target language, their communicative competence is prone to fail partly due to the inappropriate use of interpersonal markers as these may be transferred from their native language and the persuasion on the target reader may not be achieved at all. For this reason, experts such as Shokouhi & Talati (2009) claim that if a non-native learner wants to produce a more acceptable piece of writing should learn, besides the system of the L2/FL writing, conventions operating on the interpersonal level, which may be the result of a L2 speaker's culture and thought patterns. Training on how these interpersonal markers work in both languages would help these learners to better transfer these texts from their mother tongue into the L2.

With this objective, from all interpersonal devices, we are pointing at engagement markers, as they play a key role in this particular type of websites. Engagement markers play an important interpersonal function, as they build an explicit relationship between the sender and the receiver of any particular message. As such, these markers are used to establish a social interaction in the online encounter that is held between companies and potential customers who may wish to make a purchase of the former's products. These markers constitute an important rhetorical device not just in promotional discourse but in most types of texts since as Hyland (1999, p.5) says:

they allow writers to engage and influence readers in ways that conform to the norms of a discipline, values and ideology of a community, thus expressing textual and interpersonal meanings in a way to be credible and convincing to the audience of that community.

Despite some linguists limit the notion of metadiscourse to Halliday's (1975) textual metafunction of language by analysing text features that play the role of organising the text (Mauranen, 1993), others like Vande-Kopple (1985) and Hyland & Tse (2004) view metadiscourse from a double perspective: (a) *textual* and (b) *interpersonal*. Both perspectives are complementary. The former refers to those linguistic features which organise discourse, anticipate readers' knowledge and reflect the writer's assessment of what needs to be made explicit, to constraint and guide what can be recovered from the text; the latter involves readers in the argument by alerting them to the author's perspective towards both propositional information and readers themselves. It is important to note that precisely, among all metadiscourse markers, engagement markers tend to directly or indirectly cover most of these functions in our target genre. This substantiates the level of complexity and difficulty that their learning and transfer between L1 and L2 can reach.

For this reason, added to the main objective of the present research, other two subsequent targets arise: (a) to highlight some similarities, differences and potential difficulties that engagement markers show in this promotional genre, and (b) to see whether results can unveil some of the factors that seem to influence the existence of these differences and difficulties.

### 3. Corpus and Methodology

A sample of 100 business websites from the toy sector (50 from Spain and 50 from the USA) has been chosen for the analysis. These were collected during the year 2016 making use of different Internet directories, such as [www.aefj.es](http://www.aefj.es), [www.uschamber.co.uk](http://www.uschamber.co.uk), and [www.kompass.es](http://www.kompass.es). The decision for selecting toy companies is mainly due to the fact that they are one of the leading industrial sectors in export activities nowadays.

It must be pointed out that the main reason for choosing the Peninsular Spanish and the US culture is based on previous studies, such as the ELUCIDATE survey (Business Communication across Borders: A Study of Language Use and Practice in European Companies, 1996-1997) and the ELISE survey (European Language and International Strategy Development in SMES, 1999-2000) which revealed that Peninsular Spanish small and medium-sized companies from different industrial sectors show the largest percentage of loss in business turnover in the EU. In 2005, the findings of the ELAN project (Effects on the European Economy of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise, 2005-2007) unveiled that firms need to be encouraged to enhance their employees' linguistic and intercultural skills of their staff. In companies where these skills were applied, "they achieved an export sales promotion 44.5% higher than one without those investments" (CILT 2006, p.7). As such, cultural sensitization and communicative competence in English and/or Spanish in international business settings, as in the case of business websites, are two paramount social needs that capture our interest.

Our corpus selection methodology is based on Moreno (2008, p.26) who states that "it is necessary for the linguist to compare what is comparable across cultures". Therefore, the study aims at analysing whether the professional discourse of Peninsular Spanish and US toy selling websites is comparable regarding the engagement markers used on the presentation page of each company. One of the chief reasons for using this section of the website and not others such as forums, chats or blogs (though these are also worth interesting in terms of communication with customers) is because this is the page in which firms provide the most essential information about their main objectives and the type of products manufactured. Aside from that, it is important to highlight that the conventions of this digital genre can be used as text models for teaching online writing skills in L2/FL.

As for the analysis, the first stage has consisted in observing and classifying the most relevant types of engagement markers used on the presentation page of the websites selected for the corpora. Secondly, a quantitative analysis has been carried out with the help of the computer programme *Textworks 1.0* (Gil-Salom, Soler-Montreal, Stuart & Candela-Coderch, 2004), in order to count the absolute and relative frequency of each type of engagement marker on each presentation page. Then, the results have been submitted to statistical analysis through the Chi-square test of homogeneity in a contingency table by means of SPSS Statistics Software 18. If one compares the frequency of the different types of engagement markers used at a  $p < .05$  level and  $p < .01$  level, it makes it possible to

decide whether the frequency of engagement markers in both data set is significant or highly significant from a statistical point of view.

With regard to the quantitative analysis, it should be noted that the information provided on this particular section of the websites analysed is not equivalent in terms of quantity, since a difference in lexical density between the Peninsular Spanish corpus (9,353 words) and the US one (12,247 words) has been found. Hence, the absolute frequency of each engagement marker is also computed per 1,000 words, which is a conventional way of standardising results of corpora of different sizes.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The three main types of engagement markers observed on the presentation page of the websites selected for this research are: (a) second-person pronouns; (b) verbs in imperative forms and (c) references to a third person in discourse. As regards the Spanish corpus, it must be pointed out that Spanish is a pro-drop language. So apart from the analysis of second-person pronouns, verbal phrases targeted at the second person have also been considered. Table 1 shows the absolute and relative frequency of engagement markers in the corpora analysed. In addition, the results stemming from the chi-square test are also provided:

Engagement markers	PenSp		US		Chi-square test
	AF n=12,247	RF (x 1,000 words)	AF n=9,353	RF (x 1,000 words)	
Second-person references	51	5.4	169	13.8	71.113 (.000)***
Verbs in imperative form	2	0.2	45	3.6	40.287 (.000)***
References to a third person in discourse	111	11.8	166	13.5	12.676 (.000)***

**Table 1.** Frequencies and chi-square test result of engagement markers in PenSp and US toy selling websites.

Generally speaking, the results indicate that US toy websites have higher frequencies of all three categories than their Peninsular Spanish counterparts, all of which are statistically significant.

As regards the use of second-person pronouns, higher frequencies have been found in the US corpus (169/13.8) than in the Peninsular Spanish one (51/5.4). These differences are even highlighted according to the results obtained from the chi-square test, where we can see highly significant statistical differences between both data sets ( $\chi^2=71.113$ ,  $p<.000$ ). If we turn our attention to the US toy selling websites, we can appreciate how the company deals with consumers, establishes a link with them and involves them in the discourse and the message in an explicit and direct way through the use of this type of pronoun. Some examples are:



- (1) At Real Wood Toys we know how to make *your* dreams come true! Our commitment to you is to place the highest level of quality possible into every price range and every wood dollhouse kit.  
<https://www.realgoodtoys.com/>
- (2) *You* may use any existing stuffed animal *you* see on our web site, or get a custom-designed product by our in-house design team that brings to life *your* specific vision and fills *your* specific needs. We provide *you* with a fast quote to prevent any delays with *your* projects.  
<http://www.stuffingtonbear.com/>
- (3) Princess Playhomes is an unbeatable choice for providing *your* children or grandchildren with the toys and safety of structured make-believe [...] So we know how important it is to have a safe, suitable, fun place for *your* children to let their imaginations soar [...]  
<http://www.princessplayhomes.com/index.htm>
- (4) From our family to *yours*, thank *you* for allowing us to help create lasting memories at *your* next birthday party, school carnival, or seasonal gathering <http://www.ustoy.com/mission/>

Even though the Peninsular-Spanish websites also resort to second-person references, the findings unveil that more implicit engagement markers, like references to a third person in discourse (111/11.8), are included so as to avoid addressing the consumer in an explicit way. Nevertheless, the frequency of these implicit engagement markers is also very high (166/13.5) in the US websites analysed, even more than in the Spanish corpus, revealing high statistical differences between both corpora ( $\chi^2=12.676$ ,  $p<.000$ ). From this finding we could say that in the US toy websites the inclusion of a third person in discourse so as not to address the consumer in a direct way is used in combination with explicit references through the use of second-person pronouns. The first four examples below are from the Peninsular-Spanish corpus whereas the last four are drawn from the US one:

- (5) MinilandGroup es líder en el mercado español de puericultura, así como un claro referente a nivel mundial en el sector del juguete educativo para todas las etapas del *desarrollo infantil*. Cuenta con diferentes líneas de negocio que trabajan todo el ciclo evolutivo *de los niños*, desde los 0 hasta los 14 años. [MinilandGroup is a Spanish holding company with four business lines including baby products, educational toys, and promotional items. Miniland Baby Childcare is the pinnacle of the market offering the most technologically advanced, healthy, and safe products *for baby*. In addition, Miniland Educational is a leading brand in the European market for toys and educational materials. Thus, Miniland Baby and Miniland Educational serve the life cycle of *children* from birth to 14 years old]<sup>2</sup> <http://www.minilandgroup.com/es/la-empresa/>
- (6) Cefatoys, compañía aragonesa creada en 1993, está especializada en la creación, distribución y comercialización de juguetes, con el claro objetivo de dar *al niño* el juego que espera y necesita. La calidad de nuestro producto y la satisfacción del *consumidor* son prioritarias para Cefatoys [Cefatoysis a Spanish company founded in 1993. Since its foundation, the company's aim has always been to provide *children* with the toys they want and need. Product quality and *customer* satisfaction are our main priority] <http://cefatoys.com/es/content/4-cefatoys-kd>
- (7) Elfin Toys nace en 1977. En 1984 la iniciativa se fortaleció y comenzó a dar sus frutos. Poco a poco el pequeño taller artesano fue creciendo y ofreciendo cada vez más productos a *sus clientes*. Con los años la capacidad de reacción y compromiso con *nuestros clientes* se ha visto reforzada gracias a nuestra seriedad y creatividad [...] Nuestra filosofía se centra en ofrecer a *nuestros clientes* un producto de calidad, artesano y diferente. [Elfin Toys was born in 1977. In 1984 the initiative was strengthened and began to give good results. Gradually the small artisan workshop grew and increasingly began to offer more products to *their customers*. Over the years responsiveness and

<sup>2</sup> The English translated version has been drawn from the Peninsular-Spanish websites analysed.



- commitment to *our customers* has been strengthened thanks to our seriousness and creativity [...] Our philosophy is centered in offering to *our clients* a product of quality, different and artisan] <http://www.elfintoy.com/quienes.php>
- (8) Ya son tres las generaciones que han dirigido la compañía y confiamos en que sigamos gozando de la confianza de *las familias* durante mucho tiempo. En estos últimos años hemos transformado la filosofía de nuestra compañía, pretendiendo aportar a *los consumidores* una gama muy amplia de juegos y juguetes a un precio razonable. Nuestra gama de juegos abarca un gran abanico de categorías. Desde juegos educativos con los que *los peques* aprenden conceptos nuevos casi sin darse cuenta o que *les* enseñan a resolver problemas complejos [...]. [Three are the generations that have directed the company and we trust in continuing enjoying the confidence of *the families* during much time. In recent years we have transformed our company philosophy, pretending to offer *consumers* a wide range of games and toys at a reasonable price. Our range of toys includes a great range of categories, from educational games through which *kids* learn new concepts without being aware of that or teach *them* to resolve complex problems [...]] <http://www.falomirjuegos.com/web1/index.php/empresa/quienes-somos>
- (9) Hasbro is a global play and entertainment company committed to creating the World's Best Play Experiences. From toys and games to television, movies, digital gaming and consumer products, Hasbro offers a variety of ways for *audiences* to experience its iconic brands [...]. Through its commitment to corporate social responsibility and philanthropy, Hasbro is helping to make the world a better place for *children and their families* <http://corporate.hasbro.com/en-us/about-hasbro>
- (10) Today the US toy company sells through nationwide stores, print catalogues, and a website focused on *you*, our customers [...] Team focus is a collective effort to achieve "service excellence" for *our customers*. We maintain a dedicated staff to take *your* order, ship and deliver *your* package and resolve all of *your* questions/concerns [...] From our family to *yours*, thank *you* for allowing us to help create lasting memories at *your* next birthday party, school carnival, or seasonal gathering <http://www.ustoy.com/mission/>
- (11) And we hope, most of all, that eeBoo products inspire *parents* to get down on the floor to play with *their children* <http://eeboo.com/about>
- (12) In celebration, we are offering a special 30th Anniversary Collector Edition Farmall 450 tractor for *our customers*! We value *our customers* and wanted to make this Collector Edition tractor in appreciation of *them*. There are limited quantities available and case packs also offer a Special Edition Chase Unit. Contact us today to place *your* order for this one of a kind offer! <http://speccast.com/>

Concerning the use of verbs in imperative forms, the frequencies obtained in both corpora are much lower than in the case of second-person pronouns or references to a third person in discourse; despite this, we have also found differences. The findings reveal that the US websites analysed present higher frequencies (45/3.6) if they are compared with the ones obtained in the Peninsular-Spanish corpus (2/0.2). From a statistical point of view, these differences are also highly significant ( $\chi^2=40.287$ ,  $p<.000$ ). Apart from the second-person pronoun, the imperative is also used in the US business websites to interact with the consumer directly. The first two examples below are drawn from the US corpus whereas the last one is taken from the Peninsular-Spanish one:

- (13) *Teach* your students to problem solve, create and innovate with our classroom robotics [...] [...] *Encourage* creativity in your dramatic play learning centre by stocking it with dress-up clothes, *pretend* play kitchen sets, puppets, and more <https://www.kaplanco.com/>

- (14) *Ignore the schedule. Decline the call. Build-A-Bear Workshop is where your child grabs your hand and your heart and together you're inspired to create. Bring your loved ones, and see how building a furry friend is building so much more* <http://www.buildabear.com/>
- (15) *Encuentra todas nuestras novedades. Descúbrelo. [See all of our brands. Go]* <http://www.famosa.es/en/>

Through the extensive use of second-person pronouns and, in a more limited use, the presence of verbs in imperative forms, the US firms recognise the explicit presence of an audience on the other side of the screen: the consumer who wishes to know the main features associated with the company and its products. We may consider that the higher use of these interactional markers on the presentation page of US toy selling websites could be due to one fundamental reason: the direct communication style that characterises speakers from low-context cultures (Caillat & Mueller, 1996; De Mooij, 2000; Usunier & Lee, 2005). In the same way, it must be pointed out that low-context cultures are also considered 'individualistic' (Hofstede, 1991) where the free expression of one's own thoughts is a sign of sincerity and honesty (Hofstede, 1991; Walker, Walker & Schmidt, 2003).

The much lower frequency of engagement markers found on the Peninsular-Spanish toy business websites and their frequent incorporation of references to a third person in discourse could be related to a more implicit and indirect style by means of which speakers from cultures with a more high-context dependence communicate (Leaptrout, 1996; De Mooij, 2000).

By the same token, high-context cultures are also correlated with 'tribal' and 'collectivist' cultures, where people take into consideration the group to which an individual belongs (Hofstede, 1991; Walker, Walker & Schmidt, 2003). As such, people from these cultures know each other very well and have similar expectations and experiences, from which inferences are drawn.

We must argue that despite the frequency of second-person pronouns and imperatives in the US business websites, the latter share with their Peninsular-Spanish counterparts the use of references to a third person in discourse. Something similar occurs with the use of second-person pronouns. Although their use is higher in the US corpus, the Peninsular-Spanish websites do not discard the inclusion of second-person references. This may imply that apart from the level of contextual dependence held by Spaniards and North-Americans, the presence of both third and second-person references in discourse could also be due to the constraints imposed by this particular digital genre (Moreno, 1997; Garcés-Conejos, Lorenzo & Bou-Franch, 2010; Bou-Franch, 2015).

If we take into account politeness considerations, it may be assumed that the results stemming from our research would contradict previous studies on politeness that affirm that Spanish cultures use more direct strategies to convey 'positive politeness' and Anglo-Saxon cultures value the use of indirect strategies to express 'negative politeness' (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Vázquez-Orta, 1995; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Díaz-Pérez, 2003). As has been observed in the corpora analysed, Peninsular-Spanish websites include a more implicit communicative style to address potential customers whereas their North-Americans counterparts make use of a more direct communication style to express this same interaction. However, the politeness/impoliteness perspective is not within the scope of our study. Consequently, it would deserve to be examined in future studies.

Maybe the fact that selling on-line requires a different language from everyday language is another aspect to be taken into consideration (Garcés-Conejos, 2015). Therefore, more research is needed to observe whether the use of engagement markers in toy business websites from these two countries are due to culture or perhaps to the conventions of the particular genre under analysis.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings of our research yield important differences in the use of engagement markers in English and Peninsular Spanish, more particularly on the digital genre of the toy business website. It has been proved that the frequency of engagement markers established in the taxonomy of Hyland & Tse (2004) is especially relevant in the US corpus due to the North-Americans' low context level of communication and their preference for an explicit communicative style. This is reflected in the use of engagement markers that explicitly address the consumer who is visiting the website.

By contrast, Peninsular Spanish websites also use these types of engagement markers but in much lower frequencies than their US counterparts, revealing high statistical differences between both data sets. As such, the Peninsular Spanish corpus resorts to the use of references to a third person in discourse, promoting a more implicit communicative style. This could be in relation to the fact that Spain is regarded as a fairly high-context culture where its speakers use an implicit communicative style which relies on the audience's ability to grasp the main message, even if that message is not openly announced in the text, as observed in the Peninsular Spanish data examined. Nonetheless, in both corpora the findings reveal that references to a third person in discourse display an important role in the US toy websites and that second-person references are also included in the Peninsular-Spanish websites. This could imply that both culture and genre conventions are two essential aspects to be considered when studying interactional discourse in professional genres from a cross-cultural perspective.

From the results shown in this study we can say that globalisation plays an important role, requiring export manufacturers to choose which types of interactional metadiscourse strategies are appropriate in each intercultural written text. If export companies do not understand the correlation between the value orientations that are at the core of the culture and the speech community's patterns of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour, linguistic and cultural barriers could hinder their international business transactions. Particularly, these difficulties can appear in the internationalisation phase of the company when there is a need to translate and adapt business websites to the target language of the country in which export companies seek to introduce their products. That leads us to conclude that translators of industrial websites should pay attention to the different types of interactional metadiscourse strategies preferred by individuals at the collective level of their cultures and take them into account when translating and adapting these websites for international markets.

In relation to the pedagogical purpose of this research, we believe that L2/FL teachers and learners can benefit from the important role that metadiscourse plays in the successful outcome of a persuasive text. Hence, it is our view that L2/FL teachers should encourage their students to consider this linguistic issue as highly important to promote the learning of cultural values in their teaching syllabi and foster the use of intercultural competence in language teaching.

It goes without saying that L2/FL lecturers should not consider the use of cultural values as the only factors influencing the use of linguistic strategies in different languages. Within a culture, there could be many situational contexts in which the traditional dichotomy of cultural values may not be applied at all (Holliday, 1999, 2011; Osland & Bird, 2000). In this vein, Hall's theoretical paradigm on cultural dimensions may be a useful starting point to do research in cross-cultural communication. Yet, other influential contextual variables like the constraints imposed by the peculiarities of the genre, language or discipline should also be addressed when teaching writing skills in the second language.

We think that it would be appropriate in future research to conduct interviews with Peninsular Spanish and US manufacturers as well as L2/FL students learning English or Spanish for professional purposes and record their own impressions when they face the activity of processing and interpreting the message contained on the presentation page of websites from other countries. In our view, this would provide a more sociolinguistic perspective that would lead to a deeper understanding of our findings. Future researchers should also analyse whether the use of engagement markers in academic and professional genres may in fact be due to language, cultural values, genre conventions, or perhaps a combination of these three variables are worth revisiting (Suau, 2016).

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