
LATINAS' BILINGUAL CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND THE REPORTING OF ABUSE IN US INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

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The ethnicity and sex of a judge may and will make a difference in our judging: I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experience would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.

Judge Sonia Sotomayor
(the first Latina justice on the United States Supreme Court)

Abstract

Against the background of momentous societal changes, including the emergence of the Hispanic (or Latino) minority that is transforming the landscape of the United States' population, the present study aims at investigating the outcomes of phenomena of bilingual and bicultural encounters in US institutional settings, where the victim-survivors of domestic violence narrate their experience of abuse either in (non-standard) English, or with the help of a Spanish-English interpreter. A qualitative selection of sanitized interviews, both from socio-legal protection order interviews* (Trinch 2006, 2007), and from non-legalistic interviews for socio-psychological research (Brabeck and Gunzman 2008) was analysed with a focus both on the communication accommodation strategies enacted and on the interplay of bilingual/cultural aspects from a lingua-cultural perspective (Riesager 2014. See *infra* 2.2.1).

In particular, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) allowed for a more accurate identification of the use of strategic forms of behaviour (convergence, divergence and maintenance) enacted by Latina interviewees in the two different settings – the protection order interview (POI) being the more face-threatening setting – to contrastively highlight their context-sensitive specificity.

Issues of language contact and cultural hurdles were considered in an attempt to describe and interpret aspects of the multifaceted scenario of Latinos' lingua-cultural interactions in the US, whose richness of cultural information – often transmitted through non-standard English varieties/accents – is often lost or ineffective in institutional settings.

Such issues entail the coexistence of elements of societal patriarchal conservatism, gender-based and ethnic discrimination, abuse-coping strategies, as well as efforts for self-empowerment and innovation. A major role appears to be played by the Catholic Church, which is rapidly changing its attitude towards gender roles.

Research outcomes both from field investigations and from a discourse analytical reframing of such data can be practically relevant for socio-legal professional practice in those circumstances of engagement, e.g. by helping professionals to focus on the protection order (PO) applicants' needs for special support and empathic advocacy in those bicultural and virtually bilingual settings.

* That is, court injunctions ordering that abusers stay away from plaintiffs for a specified period (see *infra*, section 4.1.).

1. Background

The growth of Hispanic or Latino minorities is transforming the landscape of the United States' population, raising questions about histories, immigration, politics, labour and language. According to the US Census Bureau, since 2003 the Hispanics have become the nation's largest minority, displacing African Americans. The increasing Latinization of the population was already a major phenomenon, especially in California. Nowadays, according to the present Census Bureau's official population estimates, the 54 million-strong Latino community has firmly consolidated its position. This entails a significant shift of perspective in considering the interplay of cultural identities and inter-group relationships and mutual influences.

1.1. *The emerging 'minority' in the USA*

The US Census Bureau statistics predict that in the next decade the majority of children (under the age of 18) in the US will come from 'minorities'. Hence, the word 'minorities' or phrases such as 'the largest US minority' will change their present meaning. For the time being, although US population diversity is seen on the whole as a positive asset by outsiders, such a perception is much less common among US Americans. The word 'minorities' still evokes unsolved issues, especially in relation to the notions of national unity and sameness. As the anthropologist Shonna Trinch (2006: 559-560) observed, a striking aspect of the World Trade Centre tragedy of September 11, 2001 from a sociolinguistic perspective was the fact that many of its survivors spoke English with an accent. In that nationally and nationalistically defining moment, the English-language media record of that 'attack on America' was marked by the sounds of non-native, or accented, American English. Indeed, while *what* was said on and about September 11 portrayed national unity and sameness, *how* it was said highlighted the inescapable fact of national diversity and multicultural difference, with its variety of growing 'minorities'.

In particular, the Hispanic or Latino situation has acquired new intercultural relevance and sociolinguistic interest: while the Blacks make up 14% of current US population, the percentage of Latinos in 2011 was 17%, and is predicted to rise to 29% by 2050¹.

Although they are commonly considered from a kind of 'Unitarian' perspective, the ethnographic composition of this fast-growing minority is far from simple: 'Hispanics' (or Latinos) are made up of different groups and generations of populations and the histories of their presence in the US date back to the early 19th century. Indeed, they have all shared stories of 'invisibility' and marginalization to varying extents (Bigler 2006), partly due to the double pressure of US Anglo vs. Latino cultural norms and religious identities. In particular, *familismo*, *marianismo* and *machismo*, together with low acculturation as measured by the preference for the Spanish language, are often considered as additional barriers, and the Catholic Church's new role also has to be taken into account in this complex and fast-changing political scenario which is not easy to define.

¹ "Recent research has revealed that when White American participants were presented with information regarding their soon-to-be numerical minority status, they expressed more anger and fear toward ethnic minority groups, an effect that was mediated by perceptions of the ingroup's status as threatened. Given that Latinos are the primary cause of these demographic changes that White Americans find threatening, Latinos may be a primary recipient of contemporary forms of intergroup bias" (Abad-Merino *et al.* 2013).

1.2. *Hispanic or Latino/a?*

The two terms are often used interchangeably in the US to refer to people of Latin American origin². While 'Hispanic' was adopted in the 1980s by the US census to refer to the large variety of residents whose ancestry could be traced back to Spanish-speaking countries, 'Latino' and its variations ('Latinos-Americanos', 'Latin-American') became popular in the 1990s, probably owing to its more perceptible political and ethnic-sensitive connotations, which appeared to better encompass both the different cultures, languages, and traditions that exist within Latino communities in the US and, in other terms, the mixed-identity aspects of *living on the hyphen*.

In this study the word 'Latino' was chosen to indicate this fast-growing minority mainly because, being a Spanish word, it has the feminine forms Latina/s, which are widely utilized in socio-psychological literature to indicate women of Latin American heritage or origins, and Latinas' narratives will be our focal point. The English (quasi-) synonym, 'Hispanic' is sometimes associated with Eurocentrism, and consequently disliked³; increasingly, the name "Hispanic American Studies" in university programs is being changed to "Latino Studies Program" (LSP).

However, 'Latina' may be perceived as an unpleasant hypostasis in itself: the many Latinas working menial jobs must put up with ethnic stereotypes, such as "They make good domestics", a stereotype engendered from the fact that the only occupations available especially to the first generation immigrant Latinas, with limited communication abilities in English and few skills, were domestics, waitressing and factory jobs. Their limited access to economic resources and their contrasting value systems, Latino and US American, have been recognized as the major causes of their socio-legal problems in US, and these are now relevant issues in contemporary socio-psychological research.

1.3. *Languages in contact – 'Spanglish', the popular Spanish of the USA, or Latino English?*

At the turn of the century, Spanish was the native language of 27 million people in the US (US Census Bureau 2000); in particular, 53% of the Californian US citizen population with somewhat limited English skills were Spanish speakers – the figure reaching 57% in Los Angeles County (Relaño Pastor 2004, 2005). Such a communicative context can be defined as *language contact*, i.e. two different groups of people living in the same geographic area and speaking different languages. The place of contact is construed in various ways (Berruto 2009) by the speakers who use the two languages in alternation. Bilingual speakers display different linguistic skills and their choice of using one language or the other can depend either on linguistic competence in each language, or on topics and situations, and is influenced by their attitudes towards the culture of each language, and by socio-political, ethnographic and psychological factors, not to mention tolerance towards language mixing (Weinreich 1963). Language contact typically generates borrowing, interference, simplification, overgeneralization, and grammatical convergence as related to the linguistic system, and code-switching, code-mixing, fused lects

² These umbrella definitions include people coming from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, and other parts of Latin America, and also their (great/grand) children who were born in the United States.

³ However, since it is gender-neutral, some people prefer it. By and large, Democrats use 'Latino' more often than Republicans, who prefer 'Hispanic'.

and hybridization as related to discourse. Very often such phenomena co-occur (Berruto 2005, 2009) along a communicative continuum which also includes changes based on sounds. The extent and the direction of such changes usually reflect the relative prestige of the languages involved, and the status of their speakers. In particular, *interference* can be considered both as a process, which develops through and in discourse, and as a product, i.e. the result of repeated and then stabilized changes in lexicon, grammar, and sound patterns. Spanish-English contact history has attracted the attention of Italian linguists, among others⁴. Apparently, so-called Spanglish cannot be defined as a mixed language, since a mixed language is codified and stabilized, and does not require the speakers' competence in the two languages, but rather as a bilingual discursive practice that produces a linguistic variety typical of a given community.

In his *Spanglish: An Anglicized Spanish Dialect*, Ardila (2005) argues that this very important contemporary linguistic phenomenon in the United States has barely been approached from a linguistic point of view. In his view, Spanglish may be interpreted in different ways: as a pidgin, a Creole language, an interlanguage, or an anglicized Spanish dialect with significant variations within the language, and its typical phenomena range from borrowing and code-switching to lexical-semantic and grammatical "equalization to English". To complicate matters even further, there is no one Spanglish, but a variety of Spanglishes that are defined by geographical location and country of origin, and to separate Spanish-speaking from non-Spanish-speaking Latinos and vestigial (Lipski 2004, 2008) or heritage speakers in the USA is no easy task.

However, the very term Spanglish is controversial (Fairclough 2003), since it reflects a range of different attitudes toward Spanish speakers in the US. While Spanglish is used as a positive expression of bicultural identity by some researchers (Stavans 2003; Zentella 1997, 2008), others feel that it is also used to disparage Latinos in the USA and their ways of speaking, so they prefer the definition *US popular Spanish* (see Otheguy and Stern 2010 among others). In their view, Spanglish is an inappropriate term, since the alternation, in oral discourse, between English and Spanish, is a common form of behaviour among bilinguals worldwide, hence, this does not justify the use of the term Spanglish, and neither do the syntactic simplifications that occur. They feel that adopting such a disparaging term would contribute to closing the doors of progress on speakers who would be more self-confident by considering themselves as speakers of Spanish.

Furthermore, studies abound on the different varieties of US Spanish and Latino English, on Spanish-English code-switching varieties and on the historical, economic, socio-ethnic, and attitudinal factors influencing US Latino shifts from Spanish to English and vice-versa. The problematic issue of defining US *Latino English* (LE) basically revolves around the question of whether LE is a legitimate variety of Standard American English or a second language imperfectly spoken by a large number of Spanish English bilinguals. Operationally, it can be defined as a non-standard variety of English, influ-

⁴ Language contact in Italy has some interesting similarities with the US context. No romance language has as many literary dialects as Italian, a nation where a kind of diglossia is widespread. The case of Italy is a very fertile territory for sociolinguistic studies, as Berruto (2005) highlighted in his article "Dialect/standard convergence, mixing, and models of language contact". According to recent ISTAT data, the alternate use of Italian and dialect in the same communicative event represents one of the major orientations in contemporary sociolinguistic situations in Italy and seems to predict the future configuration of dialect use, which is increasingly considered as a form of communicative enhancement rather than as a limitation (Cerruti 2009, 2011, forthcoming).

enced by contact with Spanish, and used in some communities as a native dialect by both bilingual and monolingual speakers.

By and large, it seems more practical to speak of the *US Latinos' various degrees of Spanish-English bilingualism*, which is a widely investigated phenomenon. Predictably, the future of these bilingual discursive practices, or language varieties, which are perhaps better represented as an intergroup and interpersonal communicative continuum, mainly depends on the policies concerning bilingualism and on the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the US, which entails considerations of the relative socioeconomic power of its speakers.

Possibly, in a few decades the terms 'multilingualism' and 'multiculturalism' will lose their present significance, as we also said of the term 'minorities', but for the time being they still have relevance especially where public spheres of communication are concerned, such as service encounters. We could say that a discursive multiculturalism is increasingly affecting the US legal system of institutional communication and service interactions, as many researchers have pointed out.

1.4. *Aspects of Latino culture, and religious (counter-)reformation*

While immigration into the US and the consequent contacts with different communities and individuals can positively enhance a process of acculturation, this can bring about risks for many Latino immigrant families. In such situations biculturalism may function as a useful protective buffer from the stress of the acculturation process (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005), which often results in a high prevalence of depression in Latinas, as well as in a high risk of suicide for Latino adolescents (Rivera Marano 2000, Del Castillo Guilbault 2006).

A significant, if controversial, component of Latino culture can be found in *marianismo* (Stevens 1973; Jezzini, Guzmán and Grayshield 2008), which basically refers to a strong tendency to consider the Latinas' gender role as based on a 'sanctified' interpretation of the values of Catholicism embodied by the Virgin Mary. Sacred duty to the family and to the function of the mother, subordination to men, selflessness, care-giving, chastity before marriage, sexual passivity after marriage and self-sacrifice were the salient features of such a naturalized myth. Its complementary face is *machismo* as the male-gender role, traditionally based on concepts of (imagined) physical prowess, dominance, patriarchal authority (Hunnicut 2009) and male chauvinism which, however, do not seem to be distinctively Latin American⁵. In the Latinas' original *pueblos*, traditions and mores of these kinds of Spanish/Catholic-based gender roles protected women by allowing them a measure of compensative sanctity and respect, which became virtually non-existent in the newly and partially acquired US-Latina identity.

As Brabeck and Gunzman (2008) highlighted, there is an extensive literature about

⁵ Obviously, instantiations of such and similar gender roles are not exclusively found in Latino culture; furthermore, it goes without saying that domestic and intimate partner violence repeatedly occurs across many cultures – and is as ancient as human history. However, the researchers in the field of Latino studies have utilized the term/notion 'marianismo' since the political scientist Evelyn P. Stevens (1973) published her influential essay 'Marianismo: the other face of machismo in Latin America'. Referring to the worship of the Virgin Mary, especially as practised in Mexico, 'marianismo' apparently became a kind of naturalized myth shaping women's role and behaviour in Latin America, and has evolved into a set of key notions in Latino studies. It would be interesting to investigate the degree of cultural specificity vs. commonality of such notions in a comparative anthropological perspective, since there is a variety of opinions on such issues.

the significant problem of domestic violence within the Latino population, with a higher risk of wife assault among Latino families as compared to other ethnic communities and with the tendency for Latinas to stay longer in abusive relationships. Apparently, this is due not only to economic stressors, but to cultural reasons as well, though there is no general agreement on this point. Some ethnographic approaches interpret sexual and gender identities differently (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005).

There is increasing awareness of the diversity that exists among the Latina/o population, and of the importance of its impact and contribution in the USA (Rodríguez, Sáenz and Méjivar 2008) and a variety of research strands, which make generalizations difficult. One research area has shown that in varying degrees *marianismo* acted as an invisible yoke for generations of otherwise intelligent and ambitious Latinas, preventing them from pursuing personal validation and constraining them to a no-win lifestyle (Jezzini, Guzmán and Grayshield 2008).

However, *marianismo* could also be used as a means of achieving personal power by those Latin American women who successfully extended the role of 'Mother' to the public arena (Gil and Vazquez 1996). Needless to say, both the imposition or (skilful) exploitation of such gender-role hypostases and naturalized myths are substantially affected by historical contexts, legislation, socio-economic class and education in this multifaceted and fast-evolving scenario. In particular, the intermediate immigrant generation that came to the States when they were very young has experienced a 'hyphenated life', through precarious balancing acts (Pérez Firmat 1994). While it would be reductionist and superficial to speak of a monolithic Latino identity – Latinas/os being a mosaic of people, representing different nationalities (Rodríguez, Sáenz and Méjivar 2008)⁶ – a distinctive Latino feature can be found in what Pérez Firmat defines as 'biculturation', which is neither assimilationist nor oppositional: 'life on the hyphen' is not an erasing act.

Nowadays, a momentous change in the domain of Latino religious belief is taking place and is increasingly affecting social identities as well: while Catholics constituted 81% of Latin America's population in 1996 and Protestants made up only 4%, by 2010 the Protestant ratio had soared to 13%, while the percentage of Catholics had dropped to 70%.

In the US, especially among young Latinos, the drift away from the Roman Catholic Church is even more rapid. More than two-thirds of the 54 million Latinos in the US are Catholic, but by 2030 that figure could be closer to half. Pursuing a quicker assimilation into the US middle class, willing to break free from the Catholicism of their Latin American past, and in search of a closer relationship with God, Latino Christians are swarming into Protestant churches across the US – evangelical Protestant congregations being their most frequent choice (Dias 2013). "Evangélicos", as these *Reformed* Latino Christians call themselves, represent the emerging segment among US churchgoers: they seem to see (evangelical) Protestantism as a form of upward mobility, i.e. as the path to a more affluent American way of life. From a political perspective, it is to be noted that the increase in the number of Evangélicos is correlated to the immigrant experience. Indeed, Latino evangelical church leaders lay the emphasis on the need for comprehensive immigration reform for families, since

⁶ To exhaustively outline the Latino cultures and (the related literature) lies outside the scope of this study as do the issues concerning 'culture' as a determining factor.

many in their congregations are undocumented immigrants. It is worth remembering that, amid the heterogeneity of Latino populations, their fervent responses to anti-immigration bills show a feeling of unity and a perfect display of Latina/o pan-ethnicity (Ochoa 2008). Hence, fine theological distinctions are definitely not relevant for this kind of church which is concerned, rather, with helping people with limited resources and health care benefits.

Apparently, such changes did not pass unnoticed by the Vatican, and in 2013 the Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected the first non-European Pope in more than 1,000 years, and the first Latin American pontiff ever; it would seem that a genuine *Counter-Reformation* strategy of some kind is being enacted. The Pope's Latino origin and his previous engagement as Archbishop of Buenos Aires – aiming to create open and brotherly communities, assist the poor, and to *re-evangelize* Buenos Aires, “taking into account *those who live there, its structure and its history*”⁷ – made him keenly aware, among many other things, of the intrinsic limitations of gender roles:

what I hear about the role of women is often inspired by an ideology of machismo. Women are asking deep questions that must be addressed. The church cannot be herself without the woman and her role. The woman is essential for the church. Mary, a woman, is more important than the bishops. I say this because we must not confuse function with dignity. We must therefore further investigate the role of women in the church. We have to work harder to develop a profound theology of the woman. Only by taking this step will it be possible to better reflect on their function within the church. The feminine genius is needed wherever we make important decisions. The challenge today is this: to think about the specific place of women also in those places where the authority of the church is exercised for various areas of the church.

[A. Spadaro, *A Big Heart Open to God* September 30, 2013. <http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview>. My italics]

These awareness-raising words of Pope Francis, explicitly rejecting *machismo*, represent a bold move away from the patriarchal roles, though obviously from a Catholic perspective. Also, Pope Francis appears to be well aware of the challenges presented by a ‘life on the hyphen’, maybe partly because of his Italian-Argentinian (or ‘Italian-Latino’) origin. His election can be interpreted as a sign of growing attention towards the ‘minorities’ and towards the US Latinos in particular⁸.

Indeed, while ‘majority’ cultures have historically attempted to dominate other cultures, nonetheless they are not impenetrable, and ‘minority’ cultures can transmit their own values and discourse by infiltrating them. In progressing towards outgrowing the minority status, Latino culture and discourse have permeated US standard culture to some extent, not so much through the influence and prestige occasionally acquired by successful Latinos/as, but mostly through daily interactions and language contacts, also in institutional and legal settings, where English is the official language and where monolingualism is generally assumed.

⁷ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Year LXIII, number 12. [My italics] Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/biography/documents/papa-francesco-biografia-bergoglio_en.html.

⁸ Pope Francis – a surprising and much needed new voice on the world stage – was also chosen as TIME's 2013 Person of the Year.

2. Methodology

The present study investigates qualitative samples of Latinas' ways of narrating their stories of violence and abuse in a comparative discourse analysis perspective, and how their narratives are variously represented in different institutional and social settings, with a focus on the communication accommodation strategies enacted, and on the interplay of bicultural and bilingual aspects.

2.1. *Corpus*

The corpus consists in a qualitative selection from anonymous interviews, both from socio-legal Protection Order Interviews (Trinch 2006, 2007), and from interviews for socio-psychological research (Brabeck and Gunzman 2008), conducted during field investigations by leading social and ethnographic researchers in the US in the field of Latinas Studies, with a major focus on the narration of abuse⁹. Such data from different field research have been reframed in a discourse-analytical perspective, based on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), since this framework (see 2.2.2.) can account both for socio-psychological and linguistic factors, also in relation to accents, and, under its purview, many studies on US Latino population have been accomplished.

2.2. *Methodological framework*

The interplay of different and sometimes contrasting value systems in social or legal settings, as well as interlingual contact/contamination require an *integrative analytical approach* and interpretative engagement with the meanings made in those institutional sites, involving all participants, and their (bi-)cultural identities. Notions of reciprocal non/accommodation, politeness and potential face-threats need to be taken into account also from a lingua-cultural perspective.

2.2.1. *Lingua-cultural perspectives*

Lingua-cultural approaches and perspectives were originally developed in the analysis of intercultural communication, either at societal or individual level, where English was used as a lingua franca (House 2008; Yano 2009; Alsagoff 2010; Mauranen 2010). The individuals' lingua-culture and the repertoire of their communicative resources (Cogo 2010) are tied to their life histories in specific socio-cultural contexts. By considering their interactions from this perspective, phenomena of lingua-cultural awareness (Hülmbauer, Böhringer and Seidlhofer 2008), or 'uneasiness' (such as face-threats), and/or specificity (Nauert 2008; Kramersch 1993, 2009) can be better understood, as in the present study.

2.2.2. *The Communication Accommodation Theory in discourse analysis*

When dealing with situated linguistic interactions requiring an integrated approach, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) can be particularly useful in facilitating a richer understanding of contextual aspects. Furthermore, CAT is compatible with

⁹ The difficulties of construing a representative corpus in these fields (where privacy is, understandably, a major concern) are not easily overvalued, and obtaining permission to witness similar interviews is virtually impossible if you are neither a psychologist nor a social worker, but 'just' an applied linguist. Thus, in these sensitive fields, applied linguists often have to work with data reported from non-linguist professionals.

discourse-based studies (Jaworski and Coupland 2008; Coupland and Jaworski 1997; Abbamonte 2012) and shares face-concerns with politeness theory.

A prominent and well-established framework in the social psychology of language (Giles, Taylor and Bourhis 1973; Bourhis 1979; Giles and Smith 1979; Giles and Ogay 2006; Giles, Willemyns, Gallois and Anderson 2007), CAT essentially assumes that interactants use strategic behaviours (*convergence*, *divergence* and *maintenance*), mainly based on language, to negotiate social distance between themselves and others, and also as markers of group membership and personal identity (Shepard, Giles and Le Poire 2001). More specifically, the speakers continually adjust their style in response to the other person/s by changing/reshaping their rate of speech and/or accents, pauses, register as well as a variety of non-verbal behaviour. Convergence strategies are directed at emphasizing similarity to interlocutors – being other-directed they are usually perceived favourably, and correlate with social competence, attractiveness and supportiveness. Contrarily, divergence strategies aim to accentuate differences from the interlocutor/s, and arise from the speaker's desire to emphasize social difference and independence (*divergence for dissociation*) and maintain intergroup distinctiveness. While divergence is also other-directed, maintenance is defined as a self-directed strategy aimed at preserving one's own linguistic style, even to the point of ignoring the accommodative attempts made by the interlocutor. However, speakers' accommodating, convergent strategies may also be perceived as *underaccommodating* or *overaccommodating* by interlocutors¹⁰. It is basically a question of social attribution which plays a significant role in enacting complementarity strategies as well. The latter consist of speech modifications that accentuate valued (social) role differences (Shepard, Giles and Le Poire 2001) and, accordingly, "conversants may opt to maintain an exchange of communicative dissimilarity" (Street 1991: 135). Complementarity strategies are found in contexts of interaction where neither convergence nor divergence would be the most suitable communicative style and, instead, dissimilar speech patterns are not only acceptable, but even expected (Giles, Mulac, Bradac and Johnson 1987; Street 1991). For example, in the field of criminal justice, a lawyer keeping his/her role and speaking as a lawyer, in order to help the client focus on his/her different role of defendant, is what everybody should reasonably expect and look for when resorting to legal advice.

The CAT framework provides a wide range of conceptual resources to analyse face and identity concerns in relation (though not exclusively) to issues of interethnic accommodation (Gallois and Callan 1991), the dynamics of intergroup and intercultural communication from a sociolinguistic perspective (Giles, Reid and Harwood 2010; McEwen and Coupland 2000), the role of social stereotypes in intergroup communication (Hewstone and Giles 1986) including parameters of non-accommodation (Giles and Gasiorek 2013) in sensitive contexts, and also the stigma of non-native accents in communication. From a CAT perspective, there is much ongoing research on the manner in which accents influence people and identify social and contextual factors related to accents (e.g. other native, regional, and ethnic accents) that affect the speaker, the listener, and the interaction between them (Gluszec and Dovidio 2010), with a particular focus on the US

¹⁰ In *Parameters of Non-accommodation*, Giles and Gasiorek (2013) further refine the tools for the analysis of 'non-accommodation' in a range of perceived behaviours, including divergence, maintenance, *underaccommodation*, e.g. inappropriate topic selection, and *overaccommodation*, e.g. misplaced "elder-speak", as in the case of reasonably healthy and not hard-of-hearing elderly people being unnecessarily spoken to more loudly and at a slower speech rate (Giles and Gasiorek 2013; Abbamonte 2012).

Latino population. Apparently, the dynamics of the Anglos' bias toward Latinos requires consideration of the distinctive elements of this form of intergroup relations – *accentedness* being a particular social identity cue which underlies the *bias against Latinos* (Dovidio, Gluszek, Dittmann and Lagunes 2010). Hence, CAT can be particularly useful when analysing bilingual, bicultural encounters as in the present study.

Furthermore, CAT is applicable to an array of organizational contexts and has the potential to incorporate the tenets of other theoretical frames, such as politeness theory, which revolves around the notion of face and facework. Taking its trajectory both from Goffman's (1967, 1955) and from Brown and Levinson's (1987) classic works, face is now more explicitly regarded as interactional, i.e. as participants' interpretations of relational connectedness and separateness, conjointly co-constituted in talk/conduct-in-interaction (Arundale 2010, 2009; Bargiela Chiappini 2003). Facework has also been reconceptualized as evaluations made by participants of face interpretation rather than a person-centred construct which, relevantly to this study, allows further exploration of face(work) across languages and cultures (Arundale 2006, 2009) in a communication-accommodation perspective.

From the CAT standpoint, qualitative samples of Latinas' self-narratives in Protection Order Interviews (POIs) were analysed and compared to self-narratives in non-legal settings to contrastively highlight their contextual specificity, which influenced the choice and enactment of non/accommodation strategies. Along these lines, research outcomes can be relevant for socio-legal professional practice in those circumstances of engagement, e.g. by helping professionals to focus on the applicants' needs for special support and empathic advocacy in those bicultural and virtually bilingual settings – biculturalism being the dimension where not only the interviews, but the entire lives of the applicants are lived.

3. CAT framing of the data

3.1. *Affidavits* for Protection Orders – Latinas' bicultural voices

In US protection orders (i.e. court injunctions ordering that abusers stay away from plaintiffs for a specified period) continue to be the primary form of protection for victim-survivors of domestic violence (Holt 2002). According to the data from the FBI National Crime Information Center (NCIC), which includes a national registry of restraining orders, each year 600,000 to 700,000 permanent orders are entered into the registry (De Jong and Burgess Proctor 2006)¹¹. Although complete and aggregated data are hard to obtain, much research has been done on access to this form of legal help by members of the minorities, the Latinas especially (Trinch 2001, 2006, 2010; Durfee 2009; Ko 2002, among others).

The initial step for victim-survivors of domestic violence – mainly battered women

¹¹ See www.saveservices.org/.../VAWA-Restraining-Order. However, complete data are hard to obtain: eight states do not participate in the NCIC registry, many other states have incomplete coverage, and courts do not easily grant access to their data. To give a more specific example, in 1992, 46,515 restraining orders were issued against offenders in Massachusetts; more than 10,000 protection orders were filed in Philadelphia in 1996, and 11,623 restraining orders were issued in Los Angeles County for the year 2000 (Ko 2002). See also: US Department of Justice <http://www.ovv.usdoj.gov/reports-congress.html> and <http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/inbriefs/domesticviolence/domesticviolence.html>.

– who decide to apply for a protective order is an interview in a socio-legal institutional setting (e.g. private or state agencies, police precincts, courts of law). The purpose of these interviews (POIs), conducted by (para-)legal professionals, is to re-shape the non-legalistic narratives of lay victims-applicants into legally and linguistically appropriate reports (affidavits) to meet formal procedural requirements, and this creates a dynamic context for interlingual/cultural contact in institutional settings. Indeed, these affidavits¹², which are composed by the interviewers and significantly influence the judges' decisions, constitute an official record of intimate-partner abuse, and leave much of the victims' own voices out of the account (Trinch 2010).

In particular, POIs, which partake both of the discursive conventions of interviews and of genderized (inter-ethnic) self-narrative¹³, are not far removed from the linguistic exchanges to be found in other domains of law, such as the cross-examination of witnesses in courts, and can be face-threatening speech events (Morocco 2010). In the case of Latinas, their bilingual/bicultural membership may result in a hard struggle, since they feel the double pressure of US Anglo vs. Latino cultural norms (see Section 1.4.). To give an example, in the following excerpt from an interview recorded during an ethnographic research (Trinch 2007)¹⁴, the paralegal professional's questions and statements entail face threats for the client, i.e. a Latina applicant. The paralegal has just come back from her consultation with the attorney and it is noticeable that she does not question the Latina applicant's credibility as a victim, but rather her eligibility as a client. Not much attention is given to her well-being either. The whole interview revolves around rather explicit questions: "Has your past weakness toward your abuser been overcome? Will you put this office's credibility at risk by changing your mind again?"

Under the CAT's purview, face and face-threats can be more explicitly regarded as interactional, and jointly construed in the exchange as long as face evaluations and interpretation are made by interactants (Table 1).

An adherence of some kind to *familismo* can be inferred from the Latina client's and her family's attitude towards the defendant (they allowed him to call as often as he wants) and this can be both an impediment in the procedure towards obtaining a protection order, and a hurdle in the itinerary towards self-empowerment. In the evaluations made by the professional, the Latina's face as a client is interpreted as legally unreliable, and her need for socio-psychological support is mostly disregarded, as is common in these procedures (Trinch 2006, 2007; Ko 2002; Durfee 2009; Logan 2005; Logan and Shannon 2006; Abbamonte 2012). Maintenance (of her role of gate-keeper) is the most common communicative option for the professional, whereas the Latina client tries to converge on the interaction. In the end they both display complementarity strategy (i.e. proper assumption of their respective roles) so that, by trying to keep the exchange on the right track, the interview can become fruitful – doubts concerning the client's reliability notwithstanding.

Also in the excerpt below the applicant's 'suitability' as a client is threatened. This

¹² Affidavits are declarations of facts written and sworn to by the declarants before authorized officers and are submitted as evidence especially in pre-trial phases.

¹³ Central genres in all cultures (Martin and Rose 2003, 2008), (self-)narratives are among the most important social resources for creating/maintaining personal identity, and are the most widely studied family of genres. However, a narratological analysis is beyond the scope of this study.

¹⁴ The anonymity of the participants in the research directed by Professor Trinch is fully protected (not even places and dates are specified).

| POI transcript | CAT interpreting |
|---|---|
| Professional (P): He still has his job then? | Yes/no question, <i>Maintenance</i> |
| Latina Client (LC): Yes. So far. And he's trying to get, talk to his lawyers to find out if he can get out on a work release. | Pertinent reply, Initiative of response, <i>Convergence</i> |
| P: Mhmh. | Non-committal reply |
| LC: And, I don't know how to handle that, you know. Um, he, he was, the only source of income we had . And I think it would be nice that, if he could work, but I also don't want him out. 'Cause if he gets out | Strength and initiative of response, <i>Convergence</i> |
| P: 'Cause it sounds like, let me make sure, there's a child, you have a child? | Statement + Potentially Face-threatening question, <i>Maintenance</i> |
| LC: Yeah. | Pertinent reply |
| P: 'Cause it sounds like you have a lot of communication with him. He's calling you from jail and you're talking to him | Face threatening statement, <i>Maintenance</i> |
| LC: He's calling every... | |
| P: exchanging information, so. | |
| LC: every other day just about. And I don't, I don't know how to handle that. Because | Initiative of response, <i>Convergence</i> |
| P: You can have your number changed | Statement, <i>Convergence</i> |
| LC: the way that ... See it's not my phone. | Elaboration, Limiting Face-threat |
| P: Oh, OK. | Non-committal reply, <i>Maintenance</i> |
| LC: That's that's why. And my parents told him to call as often as he wants and, but he's not stepping foot in my house so | Elaboration through reported speech, Initiative of response, Limiting Face-damage |
| P: So they won't let you, that number be blocked, so he can't call it. | Statement, <i>Complementarity</i> |
| LC: Probably not. | Pertinent reply |
| P: O.K., yeah, that just concerns me that there's still all this communication , and that when we go to court, you're gonna change your mind again . | Face-threatening statement, <i>Maintenance</i> |
| LC: No, I'm not. Not again. | Statement, Face-saving effort, <i>Complementarity</i> |
| P: OK, let me make a copy of this | |

Table 1. Excerpt from POI. *Whose credibility is at stake?*

is because in the middle of a narrative on abuse, the topic shifts to a discussion about an act of consensual sex between the victim and her abuser. Far from building common ground, the accompanying laughter of both interlocutors 'covers' an embarrassed awareness that the client's credibility as a victim is threatened, according to US ideology of the 'utmost resistance standard' (Abbamonte 2012) (Table 2).

Again, the paralegal professional's strategies have aligned with a gate-keeper attitude, mainly displaying maintenance and the client is hardly able to limit Face-damage to herself. The time-line is a relevant aspect in this excerpt. The abuses suffered by this Latina applicant take place in an intimate partner setting, over an extended time-span where cooperative activities also take place, e.g. parental activities, or shared tasks final-

| | |
|--|--|
| POI transcript | CAT interpreting |
| P: OK, have you heard from him since he was released? | <i>Maintenance</i> Yes/no question, Implicit Face-threat to client, gate-keeper attitude (GKA) |
| C: On Easter | <i>Convergence</i> , Pertinent reply |
| P: And what happened? Did something happen, or what did he want? Or did you want to see him or (paralegal giggles/snickers). | <i>Maintenance</i> Narrow wh-questions + yes/no questions, Face-threat : Expectancy of 'collusion' with the abuser, GKA |
| C: Oh, well we have two kids together so he came over to have Easter lunch. | <i>Maintenance</i> Elaboration Explanation/Justification – damage to the speaker |
| P: Easter dinner together. | <i>Maintenance</i> |
| C: Uhuh. | Non verbal pertinent reply |
| P: Was there any kind of confrontation? | <i>Maintenance</i> Face- threat to client |
| C: We, we ah, (5 second pause) we slept together (client laughs) | <i>Maintenance</i> Elaboration Explanation/implicit Justification – damage to the speaker |
| P: Umhum. Is this at your home, your? | <i>Maintenance</i> |
| C: Umhum. | Non verbal, pertinent reply |
| P: So he stayed the night. | <i>Maintenance</i> Statement, No effort to minimize Face-threat to client, GKA |
| C: No, he didn't stay the night. (client laughs) | <i>Maintenance</i> pertinent reply Explanation – damage to the speaker |

Table 2. Excerpt from POI. Admission of consensual sex within a domestic violence situation

ized to making a living. In this extended time, even consensual sexual intimacy may occur. However, in the concentrated time of the question-guided narratives of POIs, a kind of (virtual) co-occurrence of violence and sexual intimacy is construed, which undermines the Latina's credibility as a client. The US judicial system can be (unduly) tough on the victim-survivors of domestic violence who, by being involved in lives that include(d) the abusers, are regarded as collusive to a considerable extent (Abbamonte 2012).

Furthermore, in addition to the conflict between contrasting values and belief systems, low acculturation as measured by preference for the Spanish language can be an additional barrier (Hydén 1999, 2005). In such situations, misrepresentations can be expected, especially considering the imbalance of power between the expert English-speaking (or bilingual) interviewers and the lay interviewees with varied English skills and uncertain status, who have to deal also with issues of illegal immigration and threatened deportation.

However, although the US legal system assumes monolingualism, with Standard American English as its official language, the frequent contacts among speakers of different languages and varieties has an impact on the drawing up of legal documents, especially in areas where a societal bilingualism has been reached. By narrating their experiences of abuse, which are the raw material of the affidavits, these Latinas – whose ethnographic composition is far from homogeneous¹⁵ – bring a discursive multiculturalism of some kind to the US legal system, which the occasional presence of interpreters makes even more complex (Trinch 2006).

If we consider these interactions under the CAT purview, we notice how a variety of approximation/accommodation strategies are enacted, mainly convergent, often resulting in language variation¹⁶. In particular, language convergence implies a certain degree of reciprocity in mutual approximation between language varieties which, apart from specific loanwords and calques, generates phenomena of change, such as dialectization or koineization (Berruto 2005). In these affidavits phenomena of hybridization, accented English and syntactic blends are displayed. Examples (Trinch 2006: 576) include the occurrence of the verbs “to get *on* the car” and “to get *off* the car,” instead of standard forms “to get *in / out of* the car”.

Samuel stopped on the road and asked me to drive. I *got off* the car to go around to the driver’s side.

He tore my blouse as I was trying to *get off* the car.

I was finally trying to *get off* the car when we came to a stop sign [my italics].

Such calques possibly come from Spanish forms *subir al/ bajar del carro*, respectively. In the affidavits written for Latinas there are instances of non-standard uses of *to come* and *to go* as follows:

He kept calling for one hour and then *went* [came] to the house. When he got there, I told him to leave.

Miguel told Vicente to leave and *come* [go] back home or he was going to kill him.

When my daughter refused to see him, he became angry and ran to the bathroom to slap her face continuously. I *came* [went] into the bathroom to stop him and ... [my italics].

While the speakers implicitly agree on the need for the affidavits to be written in standard English, at the same time, Latino English is discernible in the language of these official records – mainly, but not exclusively, through a non-standard use of prepositions and of common verbs.

In the background lies the bigger question of the Latina interviewees using English to report violent arguments in Latino Spanish, with occasional code-switching – since their interviewers are often bilingual as well in these *loci* of social care – or with the help of an interpreter. From the CAT perspective we can say that using English to recount verbal (and physical) abuse in Spanish equates with enacting converging dis-

¹⁵ The Latina applicants come from the United States, and also from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Argentina.

¹⁶ Indeed, language contact is a powerful engine for change at several levels, insomuch as it brings about variation and new language uses as compared to the standard one, and phenomena of language blending and semantic or syntactic calques construe a kind of dynamic and varying continuum from Latino Spanish to Latino English.

course management and interpretability strategies¹⁷. An instantiation of ambivalent accommodation strategy is found in the intentional use of code-switching as a tool of abuse:

P: ¿Hizo alguna amenaza de golpearla durante ese incidente?

C: No. Porque no me acerco a él cuando anda así. Nomás, les estaba diciendo a los niños cosas feas de mí. (.04) Las amenazas, después, las hizo por teléfono. Cada vez me hablaba y me decía que me iba a arrepentir. Cuando el policía se lo llevó, me dijo en español porque el policía no hablaba en español, dijo, “esto lo vas a pagar muy caro.” Y fue cuando le dije a mi niña, “dile al policía que me está amenazando.”

Translation:

P: Did he ever threaten to hit you during this incident?

C: No, because I never get near him when he's like that. Except, he was saying ugly things about me to the children. Um, later, he made the threats by phone. Each time he talked to me he told me I was going to regret this. When the police took him away, **he told me in Spanish**, because the police officer did not speak Spanish here. He said, “**You're going to pay for this.**” And that was when I told my daughter, “**Tell the police that he is threatening me.**”

[Trinch 2006: 569-570. My emphases]

The abuser code-switched to Spanish in order to threaten the woman without being understood by the police, and thus enacted a divergence strategy towards the latter and at the same time a convergence (if ill-meant) strategy towards the former, by creating an asymmetry in the information available to the individual interactants in this communicative event. Such a ‘subtlety’, which was an aggravating factor, was lost in the simplified rendering of the events in the affidavit, which only reports the threat:

The police were called and [Abuser's name] was asked to leave the house. [Abuser's name] called me several times after he left and made threats to harm me, because I reported him to the police. [Abuser's name] said that I would be sorry and that he would harm me when he found me.

Affidavits are written through the professionals' conscious effort to reframe personal narratives into legally and linguistically important reports; the battered Latinas are thus effectively included in the legal process, though the immediacy of their narratives is lost to a considerable extent, as well as some of the events, for the sake of brevity and reportability.

Instead, the traces of language contact seem to occasionally escape the attention of the professional writers and, especially in areas where bilingualism reaches societal levels, the LE variety marks the official records. Thus, Latina women's language – a major phenomenon in terms of the United States' rich ethnolinguistic diversity – is inscribed into the national institutional memory. Indeed, although written records are more ‘respectful’ of standard forms, contamination through language contact is a recurring feature in the evolution of the English language.

¹⁷ For reasons of space we cannot deal here with the issues of reported speech, meta-language and (cultural) re-framing in a narratological perspective, or translational concerns, which also play a role in these situated exchanges.

3.2. *Non-legalistic interviews about Latinas' abuse survival strategies*

In the much-investigated scenario of domestic violence in Latino families, Brabeck and Gunzman (2008) addressed a less studied phenomenon, namely the strategies employed to cope with abuse by Latinas victim-survivors (more specifically women of Mexican origin). The 75 semi-structured interviews they conducted, unlike POIs, were not aimed at obtaining legally credible reports, but only insights into these victims' socio-cultural and psychological identities, so as to be able to better define their needs and to develop effective programs of intervention.

In a protected and non-(face-)threatening context, the Latinas felt free to narrate why they continued in an abusive relationship and how they repeatedly sought help from several sources (women's shelter, their families, lawyers, in-laws) and/or enacted personal strategies to survive abuse, either by resorting to faith/religion, or – the least effective – by trying to placate the batterer.

Not infrequently battered Latinas try to find support while still living in (physical, psychological, and/or sexual) abusive situations, since culture-specific barriers, isolation, limited English proficiency, as well as low economic resources, scanty information about the US legal system and shared societal values, and/or their uncertain immigration status make it more difficult for them to leave their abusive partners, as compared to their European American counterparts.

Brabeck and Gunzman's (2008) interviews were conducted either in English or in Spanish, so as to better accommodate the communicative needs of these voluntary participants who were assured that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and their identities anonymous – no legal requirement was posited. This protected situation made it easier for the Latina participants to provide more significant psychological insights into the dynamics of their abusive relationship, since they did not need to display coherent forms of behaviour, as is expected in POIs, to comply with (para-)legal professionals' needs of legally acceptable conduct. Hence, from these Latinas' stories, as shown in the excerpts in Table 3, more culture-specific suggestions emerged for improving services, inasmuch as both their points of strength and the hurdles in their itinerary towards self-empowerment emerged clearly (Table 3).

The variety of strategies of coping with abuse while staying in the relationship ranges from attempts to placate the abuser through over-accommodating, submissive behaviour to the endeavour to escape into a kind spiritual, *marianismo*-inspired dimension. Indeed, to seek help from the families of origin can clash with a tendency to normalize abuse within those families according to the shared belief that women need to be 'patient' sufferers and secrets must stay within the family (excerpt 11). However, *marianismo* – ambivalent as myths and religion can adroitly be – posits both the passivity of self-sacrifice (excerpts 5, 6 and 7), and the agentivity of the Mother, able to protect and inspire her children (excerpts 8 and 9). The mother identity is very strong in Latino culture, and for Latinas admitting to being unable to protect their children is a consistent face-threat, which in POIs is reinterpreted as a 'guilty' weakness, while in these and other non-legalistic contexts it is narrated/discussed empathically¹⁸.

¹⁸ For reasons of space no further examples are provided of how differently such issues are dealt with both in legal and in non-legalistic settings. Another relevant factor in these stories of abuse in ethnic minorities is the influence of gender on migration trajectories destinations and outcomes, which also entails issues of Latinas' identity as mothers (Casanueva 2009).

| Abuse survival strategies | CAT interpreting |
|---|--|
| 1. Staying to myself, doing things the way he wanted them to be done. I did that just to stay alive . It worked, and I stayed alive long enough to get away. 2. Whatever I did, I was still messing up I didn't do it quick enough, or right, or I'm just plain stupid. 3. I didn't realize how out of the ordinary all these things I was doing were ... hiding, disguising myself, pretending all the time ... <i>for me it was normal</i> . 4. This [placating] kept my hope alive; it was like a trap . I thought I could make him happy ... that I could change and then he would. But <i>that wasn't going to happen</i> . | <i>Over-accommodation</i> by acting submissively <i>Dysfunctional convergence</i> toward the batterer Self-inflicted face damage, acknowledged in these awareness-raising narratives |
| 5. I thought to myself, <i>the Virgin was able to raise her child</i> ; she will give me strength to go on. 6. I would just try and <i>forget</i> about it [abuse] and think it was going to get better. 7. Mainly, I would just <i>try to ignore</i> everything. If he hurt me, I tried to ignore it. | Psychological <i>over-accommodation</i> to culture-specific values, self-inflicted face damage, acknowledged in these awareness-raising narratives |
| 8. I didn't want <i>my son to see me as defeated</i> ; I'm an example for him. 9. What finally made me kick him [abuser] out was when <i>he went after my little boy</i> . If it had only been me, I'd have taken the hits. But ... all that matters to me is those kids. | <i>Divergence</i> from the abuser, Strength and initiative of <i>face-saving reaction</i> through cultural <i>convergence</i> with the protective mother image |
| 10. I couldn't get a job because I had no [legal] papers He [abuser] was very jealous and possessive and managed all the money . 11. My family wasn't going to help me ; they told me that a woman must tolerate and take everything her husband does. 12. I was the 'crazy' one who needed counseling – of course it wasn't him! 13. Compared to the damage a woman goes through, they [abusers] get nothing! We need to change the laws. Violence should be punished, not slapped with a misdemeanour. 14. Target him, not me. ... Change him! | Limiting face-threat through explaining economic and culture specific hurdles <i>Maintenance</i> of the role of the wronged one, which complementarily shifts the emphasis onto the felon |

Table 3. The personal strategies utilized to survive abuse – excerpts from Brabeck and Gunzman's (2008) interviews

Although the Catholic faith and the clergy undoubtedly play a role in such vicissitudes – both supportive and conservative, at least until Pope Bergoglio's recent influence (see 1.4.) – new ideas have also found expression to the effect that it is not so much the victim who needs to be changed as the offender (excerpts 12, 13, 14).

Unlike what usually happens in POI exchanges, the interviewees in this non-legalistic context do not hesitate to admit their past 'weaknesses' – mainly consisting in over-accommodation to the abusers' violent attitudes and to socio-familiar constraints – since there is no legal requirement to comply with, and in the course of their narratives they maintain the identity of the 'wronged ones'.

A few words may be spent on the overuse of socio-psychological common places in dealing with such abusive situations: an almost exclusive emphasis is laid on the importance of changing the victims' attitude and on the need to help them to recognize their 'agency' and 'strength', whereas, as has emerged from many of the victim-survivors' stories, an even more urgent need is to target the offender (excerpt 14), and to grant the victim access to socio-economic resources (excerpt 10).

4. Discussion

A major goal in the large number of socio-psychological and ethnographic studies on victims of domestic violence in ethnic minorities, and, from a different perspective, of the reframing of their data in a discourse analytical perspective, as in the present study, is to help to better define the key factors in these vicissitudes (low acculturation and penury, limited knowledge of English, isolation, uncertain immigration status, cultural hurdles, distant or unsupportive families, learned helplessness, etc.), so as to identify areas and methods of effective intervention. In particular, the results provided by studies on the resort to protection orders, which is the most direct means of obtaining legal protection for victims of intimate partner violence, clarified how the much-needed psychological support (Enander 2010) is not granted during the Protection Order Interviews and procedures (Ko 2002; Trinch 2001, 2006, 2007; Durfee 2009; Abbamonte 2012). The basic equivocation seems to be that institutional sites with limited time and human resources should be expected to give caring, discursive support to help-seeking applicants, in addition to legal assistance. Indeed, psychological support does not equate with legal advice, practices and proceedings, hence legal help and psychological support would be better administered separately. The inescapable problem is the lack of resources to administer both psychological and legal support. A possible solution could be to utilize bilingual, non-face-threatening *pro-bono* online forms¹⁹, which are becoming increasingly popular in several US states for various kinds of legal interviews, including POI (thus saving money and human resources). Indeed, face-threats are a consistent risk for Latinas in human-conducted POIs, inasmuch as they need to start the interviews with the admission of not being able to control their intimate partners, or protect their children: in other words, their identities as women and capable mothers are damaged (4.1.). So, the CAT strategy they mainly resort to is maintenance. Instead, no actual face-threat can be 'generated' through interfacing with a cost-free online Protection Order Guided Interview Form. Thus, the economic resources could be utilized for socio-psychological support provided by specialized professionals (Abbamonte forthcoming).

The dynamics are different in non-legalistic interviewing settings (4.2.), where it is easier for abused women to find their own voices – they feel free to adopt a greater variety of CAT strategies – thus helping professionals to outline solutions. In brief, the way out of abuse for these women necessitates passing through the recognition of the uselessness of coping with intimate partners' violence – survival strategies can only trap them into abusive relationships – and also through a reassessment of their agency and strengths (Meyer, Wagner and Dutton 2010). Furthermore, availability of economic resources and job opportunities would significantly help, which is obvious, but often goes unsaid.

Secondly, it should not be overlooked that the samples considered in this as well as in other studies on victims of domestic violence comprise only women who survived, recognized their situations as abusive, sought formal or informal help and – at least temporarily – left, or tried to leave their abusers: no voice can be given to the silent

¹⁹ Interactive websites for providing legal advice and for helping people fill out forms are proliferating, and are especially dedicated to low-income people, and to their non-profit advocates, e.g. the KANSAS SAFETY PLAN AND PROTECTION ORDER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR KANSAS. It is freely available online, displays a very user-friendly interface, and, most importantly, is completely bilingual (English, Spanish). See https://lawhelpinteractive.org/login_form.

majority from the broader community who, possibly in their lingua-cultural isolation, did not even consider their situations as abusive or, simply, did not survive.

5. Concluding remarks

As a whole, the relationship between proficiency in English, economic mobility and social visibility are by now acquired notions, as is the relationship between gender and migration (Casanueva 2009). In relation to men, Latina women play a foreground role in everyday social interactions in health, religious, and educational settings, in monolingual US institutions (not to mention shopping and the use of public and private financial support and socio-community activities): yet, not infrequently, they do not get an education because of their 'patriarchal' families' views on the role of women in society.

Indeed, a common feature of their lives on the hyphen with limited (linguistic) education is the frequent occurrence of discriminatory situations that make their Latino ethnicity vulnerable. The Latinas' linguistic experiences are thus marked both by discrimination because of their heavy accents and limited English skills, and by their continuous effort to make themselves understood, or, in other words, *defediéndose*, as Relaño Pastor (2001) explains by focusing on Mexican immigrant women's language experience in Southern California. In the words of one of her interviewees (*ibid.* 15, my emphases):

When I had the language I felt stronger and I was able to say how I felt. I started to feel better because I had the language but before that I was very angry because I felt that I was humiliated a lot, that I was discriminated against, I was ignored a lot but I moved forward by myself so that it didn't happen to me and I would say to my people "you know what? If you don't want to feel like that, you have to fight to understand the language, to be able to understand yourself wherever you go, because if you don't want to be treated like that, you have to do something for yourself right.

Apparently, to be able to speak English becomes a weapon to fight against humiliation and discrimination, even though *defediéndose* in a second language does not inevitably result in stories of discrimination and victimization. In the broader scenario, despite their often limited proficiency in English, Latinas are also able to effectively intervene in discriminatory situations by claiming their rights to be addressed in their own language when the interlocutors are bilingual (Relaño Pastor 2004, Relaño Pastor and De Fina 2005). Another paradox is the fact that while (especially in some areas of the US) the persons employed in stores, schools, clinics and offices etc. get their jobs also because they are bilingual, they often discriminate against Spanish or LE speakers by refusing to use any language other than English. In terms of CAT, they are enacting a divergent behaviour (divergence for dissociation), i.e. "speakers dissociate with or show disapproval of others by making their speech diverge from that of the other" (Street and Hopper 1982: 1), in order to emphasize social difference and independence. Such an attitude usually permeates the entire interaction (Street and Giles 1982) and elicits divergent responses as well. Divergence in speech style/code, often resulting in unstable or interrupted communication, is frequently utilized to maintain intergroup distinctiveness. In the exchanges mentioned the Latino employees may actually diverge to disempower the Latino clients by intentionally showing more expertise and power as

related to the use of the more prestigious linguistic variety, i.e. Standard American English, in order to emphasize the newly acquired and much desired US identity. However, many Latinas display strategies of resistance and self-empowerment both by claiming the right to be serviced in their own language and by making efforts to increase their English competence, thus acquiring greater discursive efficacy.

More quantitative data and more aggregate data from field research would be necessary to draw an exhaustive map of such multifaceted lingua-cultural encounters and of their impact on societal changes. Furthermore, the role of (applied socio-)linguists in research involving sensitive interactional issues, conjointly co-constituted in talk/conduct-in-interaction, should be fully acknowledged, and ‘sanitized’ (anonymous) data should be made more easily available to them. By reframing such data through CAT (or other linguistic frameworks and) perspective/s, contextual circumstances of engagement can also be accounted for, thereby helping professionals to focus on the applicants’ needs for special support and empathic advocacy in those bicultural and virtually bilingual settings, and thus making the outcomes of (socio-)linguistic research relevant for socio-legal professional practice – i.e. outside academia.

Looking at the broader picture of the US Latinos, it cannot be ignored that many Latinas have managed to lead successful lives and also to win influential and prestigious positions – judge Sonia Sotomayor being one notable example of these success stories²⁰ – thus realizing the so-called ‘Maria Paradox’, by merging old world traditions with new world self-esteem (Gil and Vazquez 1996). A topic for further research could be to investigate how and to what extent similar sets of beliefs and value systems lead some Latinas to successful or satisfying lives, while keeping many others trapped into a no-win life-style.

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²⁰ Not to mention show business, with its skilful exploitation of (intrinsically derogatory) stereotypes about “hot” Latinas.

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