

# TABOO RITUAL IN SPANISH: A STUDY OF PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** The aim of the present paper is to analyse the pragmatic structures that constitute the taboo ritual in Spanish colloquial conversations. The analysis is based on the assumption that, in the modern Spanish society, some of the topics are considered taboo and while speaking about them, a special ritual is required. I claim that this ritual is based on some pragmatic strategies that present important meanings and interactive functions. In order to confirm my hypothesis, a number of Spanish colloquial conversations are examined. By identifying the taboo topics and observing how they are introduced to the conversation, I present the pragmatic mechanisms that create the taboo ritual in modern Spanish.

**Keywords:** pragmatic strategies, interaction, taboo, ritual, Spanish

## 1. Introduction

Although in a different way that in the past, modern societies present a range of rituals that constitute an important element of our day-to-day interactions. Apart from the celebrations and special acts that used to be related to religious belief, there are numerous rituals based on some socially accepted values. As I have observed conducting my recent study, even though religion does not play as important a role as it used to in the past, new celebrations, traditions and rites have been created that reflect ideas, points of view and ideals of the modern world.

Among the rituals practised, there is a special one that considers the phenomena of taboo. The word *taboo*, borrowed from Tongan or Fijan, has been investigated mainly by anthropologists (see Frazer 1911 [1936], Douglas 1966, Wasilewski 2010), but also linguists (see Jay 2009, Cestero Mancera 2015a, 2015b, Jiménez Morales 2016, Guerrero Ramos 2021) who try to discover how we speak about the entities that sometimes belong to the sphere of *sacrum*, but also can refer to the most distasteful aspects of *profanum*. Many cultures and societies in the world conduct a special taboo ritual that usually presents both magical/religious and social meaning. The Spanish community is no exception. Based on the anthropological studies on taboo, as well as some linguistic theories, in this paper I analyse one particular aspect of taboo ritual in Spanish: the pragmatic strategies that creates it.

## 2. Taboo in anthropology

The first mention of the concept of taboo appears in the diaries of James Cook from 1779 in the Oceania Islands (Wasilewski 2010: 17). Cook observed, for example, that the local leaders invited for a tea, after drinking it, mashed the cups – by being touched by the leaders, they became *taboo* meaning they could harm someone and/or

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someone could use them to harm the leader. During many years the concept of taboo seemed unclear for the western investigators, mainly because of its ambiguity. On one hand, taboo seemed to protect the sacred entities, on the other hand, it was referring also to the impure aspects of human life. Different authors approached the concept of taboo from diverse methodological and ideological perspectives (Calvo Shadid 2011). For Frazer (1911 [1936]) the concept of taboo is characteristic for the less developed cultures that are guided by fear (the division between developed and undeveloped societies has been rejected by the investigators in the second part of 20<sup>th</sup> century). From a psychological perspective, taboo was investigated by Freud (1913 [1993]) who also focused his work on the exotic, non-western cultures. Such a view was strongly criticized by Mary Douglas (1966) for whom taboo is present in every culture, though in different ways. Douglas's famous work demonstrates that every society elaborates the *sacrum/profanum* dichotomy, though the notions attributed to each of these spheres can differ significantly. Douglas sustains that in every society some entities are considered "impure" and that is why, special prohibitions are created in order to help its members avoid the "contamination". In reality, the aim of the prohibitions is to sustain certain social order – it is not the fear, but the necessity of taboo that guides certain rituals.

Nowadays investigators agree that taboo is present in all the cultures, but the tabooed entities and the ways of mentioning them differ among societies. As has been observed, taboo is an ambiguous concept as it describes both the sacred and the repugnant aspects of life. In other words, among taboo topics we can encounter both the ones related to the matters of faith and religion and to the most repulsive parts of our daily life, like different types of secretions.

### 3. Taboo in linguistics

The concept of taboo has been introduced by the anthropological studies, nevertheless it has always interested linguists who try to determine how it is expressed in language. The taboo phenomena can be divided into two dimensions: the tabooed subjects, that is the topics that should not be mentioned (or, if mentioned, it should be done in a proper, special way) and the tabooed expressions, that is the ones that should not be pronounced (Leszczyński 1988: 28). When it comes to the subjects that should not be mentioned, they seem to concern four basic areas (Montero 1981: 23, Cestero Mancera 2015a, 2015b): sexual; moral; religious; scatological.

As Cestero Mancera (2015b) indicates, among the tabooed topics there are two major groups. The first one is represented by ancestral belief system and concerns the subjects of magic, religion, death and illness. The second group is based on the social constraints including such areas as sexual conduct, body parts, scatological acts, interpersonal relations, physical or psychological defects, etc. In other words, some of the tabooed topics are related to the human fear or admiration for *sacrum*, whereas the other ones refer to the socially accepted rules of conduct. The topics tabooed differ among societies and cultures, although some similarities can be detected.

The studies concerning the tabooed expressions are generally focused on the concepts of euphemisms and dysphemisms, that is, respectively, the expressions that refer to the tabooed entities in a socially accepted way and the ones that allude directly to the tabooed phenomena. There is a rich bibliography on the phenomena of euphemisms in diverse languages of the world explaining the meanings and functions of different units (for Spanish, see Montero 1981, Casas Gómez 1986, Lechado García 2000). Some of the recent studies focus on the sociolinguistic factors that influence the use of euphemisms while talking about taboo – Pizarro Pedraza (2013) and Cestero Mancera (2015a) conduct a sociolinguistic analysis of the community of Madrid, Jiménez Morales (2016) studies the community of Granada, Guerrero Ramos (2021) examines the community of Malaga and López Morales (2005) compares different Spanish speaking communities. All of the studies mentioned show that the frequency of use of the euphemistic expressions depends on many sociolinguistic factors, such as the age, sex, profession or education of the speakers.

#### **4. The study**

Taking under consideration all of the works mentioned, the aim of the present study is to analyse the interactive dimension of taboo ritual related to the interpersonal meaning created during this particular rite. It means that I will not analyse the lexical units that are used while speaking about taboo topics, but some pragmatic strategies that play a crucial role in the act of speaking about taboo.

##### **4.1 Hypotheses**

Listed below are my three working hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: In modern Spanish speaking society there are some conversational topics which require the application of a special ritual, which I call a taboo ritual.

Hypothesis 2: In modern Spanish society the tabooed entities are those related to some commonly accepted values.

Hypothesis 3: The taboo ritual is composed by pragmatic strategies based on linguistic units<sup>1</sup>.

I have noticed and confirmed my assumption that the modern western societies follow a special ritual while talking about taboo topics. As I have observed during my recent studies (see Urbaniak 2021), in modern societies there is a range of different rituals which seem of a great importance for the identity and social recognition of their members. Talking about taboo seems one of the situations that trigger a special ritual act. This particular interactive ritual does not express religious values, but the ideas and qualities appreciated by a certain society. What is more, the taboo ritual is created by a range of linguistic strategies that can be recognized by analysing the corpora.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief explanation of textual strategies appears also in Dąbrowska (2006: 373-376).

## 4.2 The method and the data

In order to study the hypotheses exposed above, I have examined the following corpora of oral colloquial Spanish: Corpus Val.Es.Co; Corpus Amaresco (transcriptions from Spain)<sup>2</sup>; Corpus ESLORA<sup>3</sup>.

In the corpora I have searched for the fragments in which taboo topics are raised. In order to gather such fragments, I have used the previously mentioned works that indicate mechanisms that are used while talking about tabooed entities (for example, if the speaker uses the neutral pronoun *lo* instead of naming a concept, behaviour or idea, I examined the whole fragment, deciding if it can be considered a taboo topic). The next step was to confront the first hypothesis, that is to see if discussing a taboo issue requires a specific ritual. The last step was to determine the pragmatic strategies that compose a taboo ritual. During the whole study I have also analysed the topics that are tabooed, confirming my observations that they are related to the commonly accepted values. In the next chapters of this paper I present the pragmatic strategies used by the Spanish speakers while practising the taboo ritual.

## 4.3 The analysis

### 4.3.1 The meaning of taboo

The second assumption of the present paper considers the concept of taboo. As has been mentioned by anthropologists, it consists of two dimensions (Wasilewski 2010: 44): preventing the sacred from contamination by the profane; protecting the profane from its “ugly”, “disrespectful” or “disgusting” aspects.

What may differentiate the modern western world from other cultures or even our ancestors is the perception of the *sacrum/profanum* entities and the possible disrespectful aspects of our everyday life. When it comes to the concept of *sacrum*, I believe that the traditional religious perspective, based on believing in supernatural forces like God, has been in some part substituted by some social values that seem to govern our behaviour. In other words, there are some values that are of a crucial importance and that are considered worth protecting. Such is the case, for example, of tolerance. Analysing numerous transcriptions of colloquial conversations, I have come across a variety of fragments in which, while talking about people that demonstrate the lack of tolerance towards LGBT+ community, the taboo ritual is applied.

Another example of the value that requires some kind of ritual are political views. In this respect, society seems to be divided in different groups that share some common values, frequently in conflict with the values of other members of society. That is why, while speaking about politics, especially when the interlocutors represent different points of view, the taboo ritual is very likely to appear.

Obviously, not all the members of society share equal respect for the same values. That is why, not always is the taboo ritual applied. Sometimes, even if the general social

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<sup>2</sup> <http://esvaratenuacion.es/amaresco>, accessed: 12/11/2021.

<sup>3</sup> <http://eslora.usc.es/>, accessed: 12/11/2021.

rules require a certain ritual, the speakers refer directly to the subject, ignoring the necessity of the taboo ritual. It seems, however, that such a situation is also common when it comes to the religious rituals – not all the members of society actively participate in religious celebrations, nor do they believe in the same supernatural forces. Nevertheless, as always when it comes to the socio-cultural-linguistic studies, we are talking about tendencies and not absolute norms. In other words, we observe a strong tendency to apply the taboo ritual while speaking about important values, although some exceptions can be encountered.

As already mentioned, investigators seem to point out four major topics that seem tabooed: sex, morality, religion and scatology. While studying the corpus, I have noticed that the members of modern Spanish society do talk about the topics mentioned, sometimes even in a very open, non-tabooed manner. I believe that the topics themselves are no longer taboo, but some of their aspects seem to require special ritual strategies. Such is the case, for example, of sexuality. In general, sexual orientation is no longer a taboo question, people do talk about it openly. What seems to be tabooed is the lack of tolerance towards people belonging to LGBT+ group. If one of the participants does not approve of someone's sexual orientation, it is not very well seen, so they apply specific ritual strategies. A similar situation occurs when it comes to racism – being a racist is a taboo question, so it requires some special strategies that mitigate the general interpretation, like in the fragment below:

- (1) 816 E: = igual es que soy racista↑ y aún noo// pero yo veo un negro↑/ y  
 817 m- me da vamos me da  
 818 G: ¿también eres racista↓ tía?/ no fastidies ¿qué te va a dar un  
 819 negro? §  
 820 E: §no lo sé/hombre/ yo ahora mismo veo un negro↑/y  
 821 estoy así// pero yoo no// no lo sé/ son cosas [((pero otras  
 822 veces→))=]

Translation:

- 816 E: = I may be a racist and still I don't... but when I see a black person and  
 817 I feel I feel  
 818 G: you're also a racist? come on what is your problem with  
 819 black people?  
 820 E: I don't know, dude, when I see a black person and  
 821 I'm like, but I don't know, it's just that  
 822 sometimes...

Participant E uses some strategies, described in the next part of the paper, such as the use of explicit first person or expressions like *no lo sé* ('I don't know') in order to mitigate the tabooed topic of expressing racist opinions.

### 4.3.2 Linguistic strategies

#### 4.3.2.1 Explicit *yo*

As Spanish verbal inflection contains person agreement, numerous sentences present the implicit subject, especially when it comes to the first and second person. As a result, Spanish is a null subject language and the use of the overt personal pronoun subject is governed by discourse rules. That is why, an explicit pronoun strikes the attention of many investigators who try to describe its grammatical and pragmatic motivation. Among the possible pragmatic motivations, García Salido (2011: 312) mentions the use of pronouns as contrastive focus (analysed by Enríquez 1984 and Luján 1999), as mechanism of emphasis (Gili Gaya 1961 and López García 1998) or, on the informative dimension, to outline the focus information, that is, the one that is crucial for the speaker's statement (see Luján 1999). It seems that the use of an explicit pronoun depends on a range of contextual factors related to the situation, the relation between the participants of the conversation, the conversational topic, etc.

Studying the taboo ritual in Spanish, I have observed that, while speaking about the taboo topics, the interlocutors frequently apply the first person pronoun, especially when they are explaining their position towards the tabooed behaviour. Such is the case in the examples below:

- (2) 365 E: sí / **yo** conozco gente/ parezco muy liberal pero// la verdad es  
 366 que soy muy conservadora  
 367 L: mujer/ en todo no↓ °(tía)°  
 368 E: **yo** sí/ liberaal- soy conservadora enn-/ pues en lo que interesa  
 369 como to'l mundo// pero vamos no soy nada liberal↓ lo contra-  
 370 rio/// lo que pasa↑ es que **yo** respeto mucho lo que dice la gen-  
 371 te↓ a mí- cuando uno que haga lo que quiera yy§  
 372 L: § **yo** por ejemplo  
 373 no lo haría  
 374 E: bien **yo** qué sé **yo** por ejemplo↑/no sée// a mí me parece muy  
 375 bien lo que hace cada uno↓ que **yo** no estoy de acuerdo↑ no  
 376 quiere decir que **yo** le critique ni que no/// °(¿entiendes?)°

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

- 365 E: yes, I know some people, I may appear very liberal, but the truth is  
 366 I am very conservative  
 367 L: dude, not in every aspect  
 368 E: I, yes, liberal I am conservative when it comes to  
 369 like everyone but, come on, I am not liberal, on the contrary  
 370 but I respect what people say  
 371 for me everyone can do what they want  
 372 L: I for example  
 373 I wouldn't do it

374 E: well, I don't know, I for example, I don't know, for me it's  
 375 ok what does every person, the fact that I am not approving it  
 376 doesn't mean I criticise it nor, do you know what I mean?

- (3) <ininteligible/> a mí me hace g <risa/>  
 es que a mí me da pena <pausa/> me da pena  
 ya <pausa/> **yo** la muerte ya <pausa/> ¡ buf ! <pausa/> la muerte <pausa/>  
 pobrecillo  
 <risa/> ¡ jolín ! pues **yo** cuando murió dije ¡ por fin !  
 no <pausa/> **yo** no hablo de la muerte pero hablo <pausa/> hablo de la  
 personalidad y de todo

(ESLORA)

Translation:

<unclear> for me <laugh>  
 for me it's sad <pause> it's  
 well <pause> I death <pause> buf! <pause> death <pause> poor man  
 <laugh> crap! well I when he died I said finally!  
 no <pause> I don't speak about death, but I speak <pause> about the personality  
 and everything

In the first fragment, the participants discuss two socio-political views that are considered opposite: liberal vs. conservative. The political views seem one of the taboo subjects as they reflect the general position towards different socially important values. In the second fragment we can observe a classic tabooed issue which is death. In this respect the interlocutors can also represent different attitudes, sometimes contradictory. What is more, the positions occupied in both situations may provoke a conflict, as in some ways, one excludes the other. That is why, a taboo ritual is applied in order to avoid the confrontation.

My assumption is that explicit *yo* plays a special role in the argumentative structure of the ritual. As we have mentioned above, nowadays taboo topics concern the general outlook on the values and ways of living. As it can be observed in the example (2), the contrast conservative/liberal as a general way of thinking seems to be a tabooed subject – the implications of assuming one of the points of view can influence negatively the speakers' relation, and that is why they approach this topic carefully, using special strategies that play an important role in the whole ritual. One of these strategies is to explicitly outline that the arguments that support one of the perspectives are not imposed on the others. In my view, such is the main role of the explicit personal pronoun: to stress that the tabooed issue concerns only the speaker. E, for example, states that she is a conservative person. Having conservative views is a tabooed question as it can offend those who assume liberal perspective causing a significant interpersonal conflict (which is one of the values that are undesired in the modern societies). As a result, the speakers use some argumentative strategies that attenuate the argument that can threaten the interactional balance. E, by outlining that that is only her point of view seems not to be willing to impose her perspective on other people. In my opinion, this is only an

impression that E wants to make, as every word said during a conversation has smaller or bigger impact on the interlocutors. Only by raising the topic one risks imposing their point of view on the others, despite their attempts to attenuate the strongest opinions. Nevertheless, in order to maintain the interactive balance, the taboo ritual is required. Associating the arguments with one speaker exclusively seems a significant mechanism.

The analysed situation reflects the notion of negative politeness strategy<sup>4</sup>. By referring to the personal experience, the speaker tries not to impose their views on other interlocutors, attenuating the Face Threatening Act, which is the exposure of one's opinions (not always shared by everyone). As the politeness rules are based on the social norms and values, a range of taboo mechanisms contain the notion of politeness. Nevertheless, I believe that the interpretation of such interactive units should be extended to the ritual level. Talking about taboo is strictly structured, the topics, the pragmatic mechanisms, the behaviour of every participant is organized and in most cases predictable. As a result, the taboo ritual requires using some mechanisms related to the politeness or argumentative dimension that prevent the sacred or profane from what in a certain society is considered impure or repugnant.

#### 4.3.2.2 Collaboration

The taboo ritual is based on a mutual collaboration between the participants, revealing the notion of positive politeness, that is the need of being accepted as a part of a group. Consider the fragment below:

- (4) 50 A: = cogía →/// se iba a la ducha→/// se duchaba↑/y se dejaba los cal-  
 51 zoncillos cagados↓ los calcetines y eso y en ese momento te  
 52 tocaba alguien§  
 53 B: §¡ayy!  
 54 A: [decía=]  
 55 C: [deprisa]  
 56 A: =(vecinos ¡ay!↑) ¿puedo entrar al váter? no te acordabas↑// de  
 57 que había entrao a la ducha/ allí estaban los calzoncillos//  
 58 [la camiseta/los calcetines]  
 59 C: [(RISAS)]  
 60 B: ¡ay! no te rías  
 61 A: con una olor y [((todo por ahí)) =]  
 62 C: [(RISAS)]  
 63 A: = y todo empastra/ [y yo que a esa hora no me acordaba→=]  
 64 B: [(O)]  
 65 A: = ¡claro! Porque si- a lo mejor es que→  
 66 B: ¡claro! [(O)]  
 67 A: [pues se había duchao] y estaba con esa persona hablan-

<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of linguistic politeness, introduced by Brown & Levinson (1987) based on the concept of "face" proposed by Goffman (1967 [2006]), has been widely studied by numerous linguists (see, among others, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1996, Hernández Flores 2002, Bravo 2002, 2004).



68 do [a lo mejor de- =]

69 B: [sí]

70 A: = pa- la familia o eso§

71 B: §sí

72 A: y yo decía ¡AYY!/ digo *te habrás encontrao*→ *¡uy! No hagas caso/ te*

73 *ha-* [¡QUÉ VERGÜENZA! =]

74 B: [¡VERGÜENZA!]

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

50 A: he used to take he used to take shower he was taking shower and he used to leave

51 the underpants and the socks all over the place and right in that moment

52 someone knocked on the door

53 B: ay!

54 A: I was saying

55 C: fast

56 A: *neighbours, ay! can I go to the bathroom?* you didn't remember

57 that he was in the bathroom, the underpants all over

58 the shirt, the socks

59 C: <laugh>

60 B: ay! don't laugh

61 A: with all this smell and everything

62 C: <laugh>

63 A: everything all over the place and I didn't remember

64 B: ()

65 A: right! because maybe if

66 B: that's right!

67 A: he was taking shower and I was speaking with this person

68 maybe about

69 B: yes

70 the family or something

71 B: yes

72 A: and I was saying *ay! you have found uyy! don't pay attention*

73 how EMBARRASING

74 B: EMBARRASING!

In the fragment presented, speaker A describes behaviour of her husband which violates the commonly accepted rules of social behaviour causing inconvenience for the rest of the society members. As we can observe, while A describes the taboo violating performance of her husband, both B and C collaborate actively participating in the conversation, by introducing emotional reactions (*¡ayy!*), demonstrating understanding (*¡claro!*) or repeating the words of A (*¡VERGÜENZA!*). Although the topic might seem repugnant for the interlocutors, instead of changing the subject or remaining silent (pretending that one

does not hear the things that are being said), B and C actively collaborate, helping A getting through the story.

In what follows I will present and describe the most common linguistic mechanisms of collaboration used in everyday conversations raising taboo issues. My assumption is that although the taboo topics may seem inconvenient for the interlocutors, once the subject is raised, the participants feel obligated to help the speaker in order to attenuate the possible negative effects. Applying different interactive mechanisms, the participants occupy common position towards the taboo subject or behaviour. In this way they consolidate their views and perspective on what is taboo in a certain community. Although there are some topics that seem to be considered taboo regardless of times, some of the aspects, factors and perceptions can change throughout the years. That is why, the participants show the mutual understanding: if some values and topics are considered repugnant, they emphasise they don't approve of them, if the values are commonly respected, they show that they share the same perception as the rest of the society.

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Collaboration through echo-repetitions

Another way to collaborate with other participants are the “echo-repetitions”, that is the exact or partial repetitions of the words pronounced by other interlocutor. Echo-repetitions are well analysed, as they seem to appear frequently during conversations among Spanish speaking community members (see Parker & Pickeral 1985, Moulton 1987, Dumitrescu 1992, 1993, Coates 1995, Herrero 1995, Vigara Tauste 1995, Bazzanella 1996, Agudo Ríos 2000, Casado 2013, Urbaniak 2020). All of the authors mentioned believe that the echo-repetitions play a crucial role in every interaction. Although they consist in repeating the exact (or nearly exact) words of the interlocutor (they do not present new semantic meaning), they do add some pragmatic notions, crucial for the interaction and the relation between the interlocutors, like the acceptance, the fact of paying attention to the conversation, a proper reaction, etc. (Vigara Tauste 1995: 205-208). What seems important for the arguments exposed in the present paper, the echo-repetitions show the involvement of the participants in the conversation (Coates 1995: 46). That means that by repeating the interlocutor's words, the speaker demonstrates not only a variety of pragmatic meanings, like excitement, surprise, agreement, etc., but also that they are interested in the interaction. Such an interest seems of a great importance for the mutual relations between the participants.

The study of the fragments of conversations that deal with some taboo topics has shown that the echo-repetitions also take part in the taboo ritual. Consider the fragment below:

- (5) 521 L: § YO NO LO HAGO §  
 522 E: § yo no lo hago por-  
 523 que mi postura sea contraria↑ sino por mí MISMA↓ porque yo/  
 524 personalmente ↑§  
 525 § YO NO LO HARÍA §

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

521 L: I DON'T DO IT

522 E: I don't do it not because

523 I present a contrary point of view, but for MYSELF because I

524 personally

525 I WOULD'N DO IT

In this conversation, the participants talk about having sexual relations with strangers or people who they know very little. As I have already observed, sex itself cannot be considered taboo in the same manner as it was in the past. Nowadays people do talk about sex, sometimes even very openly. The way they mention it and the level of “tabooeness”<sup>5</sup> depends on many socio-cultural factors, like age, sex of the participants or the closeness of the relation between them. Nevertheless, sex still remains one of the taboo questions, especially some of its aspects. In the fragment presented, the participants speak about sexual relations with strangers. The topic seems a taboo for the interlocutors as they refer to it using the neutral pronoun *lo* ‘this’. It means that, although they speak about it, they do not feel comfortable enough to use the exact expressions, they rather substitute them by a neutral pronoun.

Participant L, who is the most traditional one in the conversation, clearly states that she would never have sexual relations with strangers. The participant E uses the mechanism of echo-repetition in order to show solidarity with L. During the conversation we can observe that E seems far more tolerant than L who presents very strong opinions and negative attitude towards many of the socially tabooed acts. E, who does not present such radical views tries to maintain the interactional balance by sharing L’s opinions and then attenuating them. The echo-repetition demonstrates that they both share similar position towards the tabooed behaviour, but the following explanation indicates less conservative views of E.

#### 4.3.2.2.2 Collaboration through conversational markers

One of the categories that have attracted the attention of the contemporary linguists are the discourse markers (see, among others, Bazzanella 1996, Briz Gómez 1998, Boyero Rodríguez 2005, Portolés 2007, Porroche Ballesteros 2009, Loured Lamasa & Acín Villa 2010). Portolés (2007: 25) defines them as linguistic invariable units that does not represent a syntactic function within the sentence, but which possess a special discourse meaning – to guide the inferences that take place during communication. In other words, the discourse markers play a crucial role in the interaction by showing a range of pragmatic meanings and establishing relations between the participants.

Numerous works in the field of Spanish linguistics present the richness of pragmatic meanings of discourse markers. It has been observed that discourse markers can appear in different types of discourse, so that their meaning and functions can change

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<sup>5</sup> I believe that the topics and mechanism can be considered taboo to a different extent. It means that some topics are more tabooed than others. That is why, I use the term “tabooeness” as a gradual characteristic of being a taboo.

depending on the contextual factors (López Serena & Borreguero Zuloaga 2010). That is why, some of the linguists propose a term “conversational markers” in order to outline some specific behaviour of certain units during oral conversations. As the corpora used in the present analysis is composed of oral conversations, all of the units can be considered conversational markers.

I would like to demonstrate that the discourse markers play a crucial role in the taboo ritual as one of the mechanisms of collaboration. Let us start with some examples, fragments of conversation previously mentioned in the chapter about echo-repetitions (the participants discuss the topic of having sexual relations with strangers):

- (6) 539 L: = además ¡yo noo lo haría!§  
540 E: §claro§

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

539 L: what’s more, I wouldn’t do it  
540 E: that’s right

- (7) 559 L: [sí y a lo mejor en un] momento de[terminado↑ pues  
560 puedes enrollarte con él]  
561 E: [sí/a lo mejor/**claro**]

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

559 L: yes and maybe in a certain moment well  
560 you can make out with him  
561 E: yes, maybe, that’s right

- (8) 656 L: = no te lo puedo negar si lo haría en un momento determinA-  
657 DO↑/ por cualquier locura↓ pero [AHORA↑/ conscientemen-  
658 te=]  
659 E: [**claro**/(())]

(Val.Es.Co.)

Translation:

656 L: I can’t deny that I wouldn’t do it in a certain moment  
657 going crazy, but NOW conscious-  
658 ly  
659 E: that’s right

As already mentioned, participant L seems to have very strong and conservative opinions. E is far less determined, nevertheless constantly tries to maintain the interactional balance. One of the mechanisms involved is the use of conversational markers that indicate acceptance of L’s views. In all of the examples, E uses the conversational marker *claro* showing collaboration and understanding for the point of view exposed by L (a

detailed study on the marker *claro* is presented in the work of Boyero Rodríguez 2005 and Torre Torre 2018). The topic of sex is not always easy to talk about, especially when it comes to some socially questionable behaviour. That is why, E helps L approaching the subject by showing the interest, acceptance and an active participation in the taboo ritual.

- (9) **claro** pero no te pagan <pausa/> **o sea** la estancia y eso te lo buscas <pausa\_larga/> obviamente  
 eeh  
 me busco es <pausa/> me bu **claro** me busco la estancia yo por mi cuenta <pausa/> y pero me dan un sueldo al mes  
 (ESLORA)

Translation:

right, but they don't pay you <pause> I mean a omm and everything you look for it by yourself <ling pause> obviously  
 I look <pause> right, I look for the room by myself <pause> but they give me a monthly salary

In (9), one participant explains the conditions of a scholarship they got. The question of money is still a taboo subject – neither it is appropriate asking about money, nor explaining one's financial situation. In formal contexts it is almost unacceptable talking about money. It is tolerable among family and friends, although it usually requires applying a specific ritual. In the fragment above we can observe that the speaker uses diverse discourse markers that helps him explain his financial position. The actual situation, that is that he gets a salary which covers at least some part of his expenses, is mitigated by explanations introduced by the conversational markers. The main purpose of such a pragmatic strategy is to avoid boasting about money, which is negatively seen by society.

In both situations exposed, the conversational marker *claro* demonstrates the notion of positive politeness. It shows that both interlocutors want to preserve their role as members of a certain group, they want to be accepted. By undertaking some taboo topics, like sex or money, they risk being negatively perceived by others. That is why, the other participants collaborate with them by applying conversational markers that reflect acceptance and understanding.

Many of the functions of conversational markers in the taboo ritual correspond to their pragmatic meaning in other conversational situations. In Spanish, this category is very productive and frequent in day-to-day conversations. The taboo ritual is no exception – diverse conversational markers play an important role in the act of speaking about taboo issues.

#### 4.3.2.2.3 Collaboration through swearwords

Among the mechanisms of collaboration, we have also detected an extended use of swearwords that demonstrate a range of important interactive meanings. The study of swearwords seems closely related to the concept of taboo, as they frequently refer to the

entities that are considered taboo (Ljung 2011). In the present work, we do not analyse the semantic meaning of the swearword, but their interactive functions, especially as mechanisms of collaboration.

In one of his recent works, Bergen (2019) demonstrates that the problematics of swearwords concerns a range of linguistic, anthropological and cognitive issues, as nowadays the act of swearing is not anymore considered as reflecting lack of education, but rather as an interesting strategy that reveals numerous socio-cultural and cognitive meanings. Jay & Janschewitz (2008) demonstrate that the act of swearing can be interpreted as both politeness or impoliteness phenomena, depending on a range of interactive and contextual aspects. Furthermore, different authors sustain that swearwords on many occasions are used to demonstrate the emotional state of the speaker and not to offend other interlocutors (see Beers Fägersten 2000, Jay 2009, Ljung 2011). In the present paper I claim that swearing plays an important role in the taboo ritual as a mechanism of collaboration.

When the taboo topic considers behaviour that violates the socially accepted values, the participants manifest two objectives: to show the contempt towards the actions described and to support the other interlocutor in the ritual. Such is the case in the example (10), in which the participants discuss the situation of married women that turn out to be homosexual and leave their husbands:

- (10) 714 G: § no no no no pero  
 715 yo- o s(e)a yo aún/ o s(e)a vengo en plan más fuerte ¿no?  
 716 gente que está casada durante diez u once años↑ yy al cabo  
 717 de ese tiempo ¿no? Ella descubre que que- los hombres no le  
 718 gustan§  
 719 L: § ¡ah! §  
 720 G: § que le gustan las mujeres  
 721 E: **¡hostia!** §  
 Val.Es.Co.

Translation:

- 714 G: no no no no but  
 715 I, I mean, I have a stronger example  
 716 of people who are married during ten or eleven years and then  
 717 she discovers that she doesn't  
 718 like men  
 719 L: ah!  
 720 G: that she likes women  
 721 fuck!

Although in modern societies homosexuality seems less tabooed that it used to be in the past, still some of its aspects are considered inappropriate and violate the socially accepted rules. In the fragment above, G mentions the situation of women who discover their sexual orientation after many years of marriage. E reacts with a swearword *hostia*

confirming that she disapproves such an action. In this way E takes part in the ritual by helping G establish a common position towards the tabooed behaviour.

- (11) 545 D: [hombre yo me iba] a los baños de primera clase si podía/ si había tiempo  
me iba a los baños de primera clase//(1.2) pero es que [si no<alargamiento/>]  
546 C: [pero] por lo menos  
547 D: [<risas/>]  
548 A: [cagar en primera clase]  
549 C: [<risas/> total]  
550 D: [<risas/>]/ hombre es que no [no es por nada] sino porque están más  
limpios **joder**

(Amaresco)

Translation:

- 545 D: dude, I would go to the first class bathroom, if I could, if I had time  
I would go to the first class bathroom, but if not  
546 C: but at least  
547 D <laugh>  
548 A: shit in the first class  
549 C <laugh> well  
550 <laugh> dude, it's not just that, it's that they are cleaner, damn!

In the fragment above, the participants speak about defecating in an airplane. The interactional meaning of the swearword *joder*<sup>6</sup> is slightly different from the previous example. In this case the participants use the strategy of transforming the taboo in the object of jokes (such an interpretation is possible, because of the mark [<risas/>] which indicates laughter – another strategy analysed in the next chapter). In some situations, especially if the taboo topic does not concern the most personal and intimate aspects of participants' life, the whole ritual obtains a humorous dimension. Probably, it is easier to talk about taboo when we joke about it, because in this way the seriousness or distastefulness of the subject seems mitigated. The use of a swearword *joder* seems a frequent component of the act of joking, because it shows that the whole topic appears ridiculous for the speaker. That is the other way of showing distance towards the tabooed issue.

#### 4.3.2.3 Laughter

The oral face-to-face interaction is a composition of two dimensions: the verbal dimension, which consists in applying specific linguistic units, and the non-verbal dimension, that is the gestures, facial expressions or any other voices that we produce that are not classified as words. The study of non-verbal strategies from conversations' transcriptions is difficult as not all the mechanisms used are explicitly marked.

<sup>6</sup> *Joder* is very frequently used swear word in Spanish. It originates from the verb *joder* which means 'to fuck', but has been pragmaticalised over the years, and nowadays does not present a very high level of vulgarity.

Nevertheless, there are some non-verbal strategies that can be observed in the corpora – one of them is laughter, frequently marked by the authors of the corpora.

While analysing the taboo rituals that appear in the corpora, I have observed that a significant number of the fragments is accompanied by laughter. It means that the participants, while talking about taboo entities, use laughter as a mechanism that helps speaking about the taboo topics. Such is the case in the fragment below (the participants are talking about defecating in an airplane):

- (12) 541 A: [(¿tú cagabas)) en el avión?  
 542 D: hombre claro/ eh [después del servicio que yo es cuando]  
 543 A: [qué incómodo ¿no?]  
 544 C: [<risas/>]  
 545 D: [hombre yo me iba] a los baños de primera clase si podía/ si había tiempo me iba a los baños de primera clase//(1.2) pero es que [si no<alargamiento/>]  
 546 C: [pero] por lo menos  
 547 D: [<risas/>]

(Amaresco)

Translation:

- 541 A: did you defecate in the airplane?  
 542 D: sure, man, after the service is when I  
 543 A: how uncomfortable, no?  
 544 C: (laughs)  
 545 D: I used to go to the first class bathroom, if I could, when I had time, I went to the first-class bathroom, but if not  
 546 C: but at least  
 547 D: (laughs)

As mentioned, it seems that by laughing, the unpleasant aspect of taboo is mitigated. By making jokes, the participants manifest distance towards the taboo topic. It is one of the strategies that enables them to show their disapproval for some values, ideas or types of behaviour by making them funny or ridiculous.

## 5. Conclusions

The results presented in this paper seem to confirm the preliminary hypotheses. Firstly, in the modern Spanish society there are some topics that require applying a special ritual, which we call a taboo ritual. The topics that are tabooed consider some important values, like politics, beliefs, interpersonal relations, etc. Secondly, the ritual applied is based on a number of pragmatic strategies which present some important interactive and sociopragmatic meanings. Not only do they form the whole ritual, but also they demonstrate the point of view of its participants.



It is important to underscore the fact that the strategies analysed in the present paper are not exclusive to the ritual studied. Mechanisms like laughter, collaboration by discourse markers, repetitions or swearwords and explicit first person are applied in numerous contexts that do not necessarily correspond to the taboo ritual. Nevertheless, the combination of the strategies exposed contributes to the creation of the taboo ritual, which constitutes an important element of the day-to-day conversations among the Spanish speakers.

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