



Cecilia Rojas-Nieto 

Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México

Normative talk about talk in child-caregiver interaction in Mexican families

This article shares the current interest in characterizing family interaction with children in different communities. I have investigated one aspect of possible diversity that is rarely reported: the normative discourse that caregivers direct towards children's interventions that deviate from coding conventions, interactional commitments, or pragmatic expectations. Data collected from spontaneous conversations between young children and their caregivers in middle-class urban families in the Mexican highlands show that the motives for normative control in this community are very diverse. The most prominent normative targets relate to lexical conventionality and phonetic faithfulness, paying and showing attention to interlocutors, providing contingent interventions (especially answering questions), and making polite requests. Taken together, caregivers' normative interventions touch on aspects of the interactional foundations of language, the adequacy of meaning and form for intercomprehension and the social rituals of politeness.

Key words: diversity, interaction, normativity, metapragmatic discourse, Spanish acquisition

Address for correspondence: Cecilia Rojas-Nieto

Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Circuito Mario de la Cueva s/n, Cd. Universitaria, 04510, Ciudad de México.

E-mail: crojas@unam.mx

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Language, like any social behavior, is inherently a normative, conventional activity (H. H. Clark, 1996; Chater et al., 2022; Enfield & Sidnell, 2019; Itkonen, 2008; Tomasello, 2018). In language, norms and conventions are realized in languaging but can also be exhibited in spontaneous conversation through interventions that reflexively refer to particular aspects of language (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019; Gumperz, 1966; Lucy, 1993; Schegloff, 2006; Silverstein, 1993). Interventions that have language as its semiotic object employ signs and expressions that are said to function *metapragmatically*. They "have an inherently 'framing,' or 'regimenting,' or 'stipulative' character with respect to the expressions and activities to which they refer" (Silverstein, 1993, s. 33). When interlocutors engage in sequences that refer to language, they give evidence of the aspects of language that attract their conscious attention and evaluation: "beliefs, values and attitudes to language [are] in part socially transmitted but also in part overtly propagated [and] affect the evaluation of talk in everyday life" (Gumperz, 1966, s. 363).

Recent research on human normativity has established that when it comes to language matters, speakers can adopt and express vigilance over three fundamental domains of language: coding¹, interaction, and pragmatics (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019), for example, over a conventional phonetic form, an expected morphosyntactic arrangement, a right semantic coding, an expected move in dialogic interaction (Jefferson, 1983; Schegloff, 2007), or the performance of politeness in pragmatics (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In child-caregiver interaction, as in all types of interaction, "normative talk about talk" can emerge spontaneously in conversation, highlighting many aspects of language form and language use. With normative interventions that have language practices as a reflexive matter – technically: metapragmatic interventions (Silverstein, 1993)– the caregivers attempt to control the children's participation, by requesting, commenting on, evaluating, promoting, or rejecting certain formulations or interactional moves. The metapragmatic interventions that deploy or entail a normative stance selectively reveal the beliefs, social expectations, and conventions involved in the interaction, pragmatics, and language coding of the community, always within the space of the still largely unknown "limits of language awareness" (Silverstein, 2001).

Among the various perspectives that have considered language normativity directed at children, studies of language socialization and childrearing have shown that different communities, and even caregivers within the same community or family, may adopt and display different attitudes towards normative practices. On the one hand, the presence of normative talk about talk cannot be assumed everywhere. Caregivers in some communities adopt guided participation rather than overt control

1 Adopting the socio-anthropological perspective of Enfield and Sidnell (2019), I have chosen to use the generic term coding to refer to normative practices related to language as a system. There is no consensus on the adoption of this generic term. Studies of language awareness use different terms to refer to awareness of specific areas of language organization, such as metaphonological, metamorphological, metasyntactic, or metasemantic (Duncan et al., 2009; Gombert, 1990).

or explicit instruction, including the use of language (Gaskins, 2006; Ochs & Kramer-Sadlik, 2015; Rogoff, 2003, 2014). If guided interaction is prevalent in a community, normative interventions dealing with language may be absent. On the other hand, when caregivers do engage in metapragmatic activities, it is possible to find the usual diversity found in most aspects of parenting (Keller et al., 2018), including interaction and conversational practices (Casillas et al. 2021; Gaskins, 2006; Hart & Risley, 1985; Küntay et al., 2012; de León et al. 2021; Lieven, 1994; Rogoff, 2003; Rowe & Snow 2020; Shneidman et al., 2012; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Differences can be found in all dimensions. Caregivers may be indifferent, willing, or unwilling to engage in normative practices. They may focus on some issues and conventions, not necessarily sharing consensual recognition of which aspects of language deserve control and normative intervention. They may express and entail their normative concerns in a variety of ways: by requiring or prohibiting certain expressions, by formulating a rule, by indicating an obligation, by making positive or negative comments, by teasing and threatening the child, or even by physical contact, coercion, or punishment. They may provide normative interventions in certain contexts and activities and not in others. All these aspects may be relevant to understanding how caregivers intend to guide children to comply with norms, conventions, and rituals of language. It is therefore necessary to first consider whether or not normative practices exist in a given community. If this is the case, it is possible to observe which aspects of language deserve normative action in the community in which a child experiences language.

In preparation for a detailed exploration of the research space, the following set of episodes in (1), selected from my database for illustrative purposes, provides a "bird's eye-view" of the variety of normative concerns that caregivers may raise with their children.

(1) Caregivers' normative displays

- 1a. Te estoy hablando, **responde**.
'I'm talking to you, **answer**'.
- 1b. Pídemelo **bonito**.
'Ask me **nicely**'.
- 1c. No se llama **piedra**, se llama **gis**.
'It's not called **stone**, it's called **chalk**'.
- 1d. ¿**Rompida**?, noo, se dice **rota**.
'**Braked**? Noo, ones says **broken**'.
- 1e. ¿Cómo que **ete**!, se dice **essste**.
'How **tha**-, one says **thatttt**'.
- 1f. ¿Tú tocaste tambores? **No digas mentiras**.
'Did you play drums? **Don't tell lies**'
- 1g. Ya habla bien... **Ya no hables como niño**, eh?
'Speak well... **Don't speak like a child**, huh?'

- 1h. **Tú debes de entender... oyendo, escuchando, y haciendo** lo que uno te dice, ¿eh?
 ‘**You must understand... hearing, listening, and doing** what one says to you, right?’

In (1a), the caregiver asks the child to interact verbally when addressed verbally; in (1b), the caregiver asks for a “nice” way of asking for an object; she rejects an incorrect name in (1c), an incorrect verb form in (1d), and an immature pronunciation in (1e), offering the correct form as a model in each case; in (1f), she has doubts about the truth of a previous statement and forbids the child to lie; in (1g), she urges the child not to use a childish form of speech; and in (1h), she carefully instructs the child about the expected course of an interaction. So, even a preliminary look at some of the issues that lead caregivers to intervene and correct their children’s formulations clearly points to a relevant area of research.

Some Previous Approaches

To the best of my knowledge, with some exceptions, practices of language normativity in child-adult interaction have not received focused attention. Instead, they have been considered in relation to other research topics or embedded in general ethnographic research. In the first case, caregivers’ reactions to children’s errors and deviations have been linked to the problem of the lack of negative evidence (understood as the absence of explicit corrections for morpho-syntactic errors), and to the dilemma of how children avoid constructing an overgeneral grammar without direct instruction and corrective feedback. In fact, it is reported that caregivers do not address grammatical errors directly, but only give children “indirect negative evidence” when they ask them to clarify and/or reformulate their erroneous expressions (Bohannon & Stanowicz, 1988; Chouinard & Clark, 2003; Saxton, 2000). Conversation analysis also considers the interventions or expressions –not just coding errors– that pose a problem for the continuation of the interaction, and the reactions they receive from the interlocutors, including the caregivers who interact with children (Drew, 1981). Reframed as “problem sources,” interactional troubles are currently studied under the heading of conversational repairs (see Clark, 2020; Dingemanse et al., 2015; Forrester et al., 2009). Repairs are widely used between adults and, in child-adult conversations, by caregivers, when a problem source arises in conversation. As in adult conversation (Dingemanse et al., 2015), they have mainly an interrogative formulation, either as open questions (*hm? what? huh?*), restricted questions (*going where? do you want what?*), or try-interpretations of what the child has just said (*your slippers?*; Clark, 2020; Drew, 1981; Montes, 1991; Rojas Nieto, 2021). Like any move framed as a question, repairs have an inherent interactional nature: they expect an answer and commit the interactor to give it (Heritage 2012). After making a repair, caregivers usually leave the next turn for the child

to provide the necessary response to continue the interaction (Schegloff et al., 1977). The expected outcome from normative interventions is different. They are primarily designed to inform or control an (un)due expression or movement, then to achieve recognition or compliance, and they frequently include exposed corrections (Jefferson, 1983). They might be expected to have long-term learning effects on children's language practices.

As in the studies of language socialization that inspired this work, I expected to find in the interaction data to be analyzed evidence of family practices that lead children to become speakers of a culture, not just speakers of a language. This view does not focus solely on issues of syntactic coding, as research on indirect negative evidence does, nor focus only on "problem sources" that hinder successful interaction and invite repaired interventions. Normative interventions are expected to include what a community deems necessary or appropriate in children's language practices (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Any community may regulate and address certain aspects and not others in children's language –possibly coding or interactional aspects, and many more. The perspective of language socialization research prepares us to observe within the community of interest whether caregivers adopt a normative stance towards children's language, and to find differences and similarities between caregivers' attitudes, concerns and values in relation to language. Normative interventions could highlight many aspects of language and language use and reveal unexpected cross-cultural beliefs, differences, or similarities between communities or interactants.

Normative Interventions in Diverse Communities

Previous studies have contributed to our knowledge of the metapragmatic issues raised by the caregivers in different communities (Aukrust, 2001; Blum-Kulka, 1990, 1997; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer, 1993; Brown, 2012; Clancy, 1986; Cook & Burdelski, 2017; Ely et al., 2001; De Geer et al., 2002; Gaskins, 2006; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Tulviste, 2019). Although normative reactions to strictly coding aspects are rarely mentioned, with reference to some explicit instructions and corrections on morphosyntax (for instance, on subjunctive verb morphology in French, possibly related to politeness, Morgenstern et al., 2014, s. 29). On the other hand, a variety of interactional issues are repeatedly found to be the subject of normative control in different communities (Cook & Burdelski, 2017). The most prominent relate to the acceptable length of pauses, the organization of turns, the delivery of expected conversational moves, the fulfilment of interactional commitments, such as answering questions, and the adherence to Grice's (1975) maxims (be clear, be relevant, be sincere...; Blum-Kulka, 1990; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer, 1993; De Geer et al., 2002; Kita & Ide, 2007; Tatsumi & Sala, 2022; Tulviste et al., 2002). The control of politeness embraces targets in various normative domains and is a prominent and general source of socialization and normative

practice. While including concerns about specific and variable objectives in different communities, some interactional routines, such as thanking, greeting, and saying goodbye, are a widespread matter of control (Berko Gleason et al., 1984; Blum-Kulka, 1990; Clancy, 1986; Cook & Burdelski, 2017; Küntay et al., 2012). Language choice is a relevant issue in bilingual environments (Paugh, 2012), and many more and varied topics are normatively tagged here and there (Küntay et al., 2012; Duranti et al., 2012; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In addition to the selective focus on different normative targets, caregivers are also reported to be more attentive to norms during specific activities (Brown, 2012, p. 50, fn 9; Clark, 2018; Drew, 1981; Ochs et al., 2015; Rogoff, 2003, 2014; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Tulviste et al., 2002; Wooten, 1997). For instance, rather during dinner-table than in puzzle solving, rather in organized activities than in free play (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer, 1993). Furthermore, caregivers can frame normative interventions in different ways (Blum-Kulka & Scheffer, 1993; Drew, 1981), such as normative comments, control interventions and requests, or adopt a humorous or mocking attitudes towards children's inappropriate expressions (Schieffelin, 1986; Silva, 2011; Callanan & Siegel 2014).

Normative interventions of this kind have been documented over a wide geographical area. Studies on Scandinavia report that Finnish, Swedish, and Estonian caregivers make comments on language to influence children to behave or speak in a certain way, with an overt intent to control talk and silence, turn taking, and maxims on conversation (Aukrust, 2001; De Geer et al. 2002; Tulviste, 2019). Distribution of talk and silence is also an issue that is unevenly valued in different communities in the United States (Hart & Risley, 1986). Comparative studies of Israeli, American, and immigrant families in Israel (Blum-Kulka, 1990, 2017; Blum-Kulka & Sheffer, 1993) report that caregivers similarly attend to talk regulation and conversational maxims, and display metapragmatic comments about word meaning, but they find notable differences in the prominence of comments related to conversational behavior. Attention to formal correction (and hence to coding) is reported to be preferred in Israel, whereas turn-taking (an aspect of interaction management) is carefully attended to in a comparable segment of the US population (Blum-Kulka 2017). So far, little information on language normativity has been found in Spanish-speaking environments. Despite research interest in Hispanic immigrants to the United States –including Mexicans – researchers have focused mainly on cultural norms and values while language norms and practices have not reached a threshold of attention (but see Callanan & Siegel, 2014; Eisenberg, 1986; Silva, 2011). What is known about language normativity among Spanish-speaking caregivers comes from questionnaires or interviews, not from direct observation. Hernández Pina (1984) applied a questionnaire to Castilian caregivers – fathers and mothers – including an entry on "corrective feedback." She found a shared and unspecific concern for leading children "to speak well" (*hablar bien*), and a variable disposition – from null to selective – to correct some issues, with a preference for controlling phonetic

aspects and very little concern for lexical, semantic, and grammatical deviations. In the northwest of Mexico, a sociolinguistic interview with caregivers of two generations – mothers and grandmothers – revealed aspects of interaction that they consider important and explicitly regulate. They reported that they promote their children to adopt face-to-face alignment in conversation and to respect turn-taking, so as not to interrupt an ongoing interaction. They also commented on a generational divide regarding the use-acceptance (grandmothers) or not (mothers) of baby-words and childish speech (*habla chipilona*) as an appropriate style of interaction (Rojas-Nieto et al., 2001).

The Position and Focus in this Study

This work recognizes the social foundations of language (Enfield & Levinson, 2006; Levinson, 2019; Tomasello, 2014) as a human coordinated activity (Clark, 1996), and the relevance of normativity in most aspects of human social action, including language (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019; Itkonen, 2008; Li & Tomasello, 2021; Roughley & Bayerts, 2019; Schmidt & Rakoczy, 2019; Tomasello, 2018). With these premises, I will explore the normative discourse of caregivers. I assume that language activities are largely conventional in all possible domains: from lexical form and meaning to grammar; from interactional moves and sequential commitments to resource recruitment and adoption of pragmatic rituals (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019). Children's deviations from what is expected in any domain of language activity can result in control and normative interventions by caregivers. Aware of cultural and individual differences, I was prepared to find variable attitudes, normative performance, and selective attention to specific issues among families or family members, including primary caregivers. In contrast to studies that draw their data from questionnaires and interviews, this study provides direct evidence of metapragmatic normativity collected from spontaneous family interactions, whose existence is often mentioned without having been the focus of specific research. I have considered all normative interventions directed at children by their primary caregivers: mothers and fathers in this case. The normative data that I obtained were analyzed in detail, as was the distribution of metapragmatic interventions among caregivers. The analysis to be presented here was guided by the following objectives:

- Add evidence to current research on children's acquisition environment from normative talk about talk in Spanish-monolingual middle-class Mexican families.
- To characterize the domains and issues that deserve normative interventions in these families.
- To examine caregivers' preferences for addressing specific issues, their affinities and differences, and the community profile they jointly design.
- To identify the early reflections of the normative interventions of the caregivers on the interactional practices of the young children.

Method

Data and Ethical Compromise on Their Use

The episodes of normative talk about talk that are the subject of this analysis were obtained from *ETAL: Etapas Tempranas en la Adquisición del Lenguaje* (Early Stages in Language Acquisition), a longitudinal corpus from the Autonomous National University of Mexico: UNAM (Rojas-Nieto, 2007). The ETAL data were collected from Mexican, Spanish-monolingual, urban middle class families, in which one or both parents had a university education. Family members were informed of the purpose of the study (all aspects of language acquisition) and were assured of the confidentiality of their identity. The names of the children and caregivers have been changed for reasons of confidentiality, unless the parents have indicated that they would prefer the child's name to remain the same. Through regular visits (from five a week to ten days or a month apart for different children), spontaneous interactions between the child and the mother, father, close family members, and domestic employees were videotaped while they were involved in various activities such as bathing, dressing, eating, getting ready for naptime, playing with toys, pretend playing, reading books, drawing, coloring, and more. This paper focuses on data collected for three female (f) and two male (m) children from 2;00 to 3;02. These data cover approximately 15 to 22 hours of interaction for each family. Each corpus was manually explored to identify and extract every episode of normative talk about talk. I collected a total of 345 episodes of normative talk. Corpus details are shown in Table 1.

Method of Analysis and Aspects to Be Considered

I first adopted some criteria for identifying normative interventions and extracted all explicit attempts by caregivers to control what children have said or should say. A diagnosis of normative interventions needs to look at the possible components that convey a normative stance, not all of which are necessarily present in a single intervention, and to trace the interactional commitment of recognition and compliance with the normative goal that normative interventions convey.

Table 1. *Corpus Description and Normative Interventions by Main Caregivers*

Child	Records (hours)	Age range coverage	NE	No. NE per hour	% NE per hour
ELIA (f)*	11 (22)	2;00–3;02	34	0 ~ 4	1.5/ h
JULIO (m)	9 (18)	2;00–2;08	68	2 ~ 9	3.8/ h
FLOR (f)	10 (20)	2;00–2;08	89	0 ~ 10	4.5 / h
LUIS (m)	8 (16)	2;00–2;08	75	1 ~ 13	4.7 / h
NATA (f)	20 (15)	2;00–2;03	79	0 ~ 10	5.3 / h

Note. (f) = female, (m) = male, NE = normative events

Like control expressions in general (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Ervin-Trip, 1977; Rojas-Nieto, 2022), or repairs (Clark, 2020; Dingemanse et al., 2015; Rojas-Nieto, 2021; Schegloff, 1989; Schegloff et al., 1977), corrections and normative language are done in several ways (Drew, 1981).

The interventions that address language conventions, commitments, expectations, and rituals may be delivered as requests and prohibitions, refusals, criticisms or evaluations of forms and expressions, indications and regulatory comments, general impersonal statements, and rule-like expressions (Drew, 1981; Zinken et al., 2021). No strict and reduced formal criteria are adequate to identify normative episodes. Normative interventions may be general, brief, and direct (*habla bien* "speak well"), or specific and more characterized (*no hables como niño* "don't talk like a child"). They can be framed with speech-verbs and mental verbs (tell, don't tell, ask, answer, reply, understand, pay attention, etc.), with an imperative inflection when delivered as requests (*hazme caso* "pay attention to me," *respóndele* "answer him"); or an impersonal present tense to refer to general facts (*se dice...* / *no se dice...* "one says," "one doesn't say," what Callanan & Siegel, 2014, p. 134, call "generic language"). In some cases, a modal deontic auxiliary (*debes* "you must," *tienes que* "you have to") explicitly codes an obligation. Some expressions show that certain statements are frequently addressed (*acuérdate que...* "remember that...", *ya te he dicho que...* "I already told you that..."). Negative attitudes towards expressions are conveyed through prohibitions and negative rule-like statements (*no hables así* "don't talk like that", *no se dice ...* "one does not say...", Zinken et al., 2021). Children may also receive negative evaluations for their use of language (*feo* "ugly," *majadero* "rude", *mentiroso* "liar") and, only on rare occasions, positive ones: *¡qué bonito hablas!* "How beautifully you speak!").

Normative interventions may be independently expressed in a turn or be embedded in an extended sequence (Kendrick et al., 2020; Schegloff, 2007). The schema of a normative sequence may include, as a preface, a negation attributed to the unconventional expression, exhibit the normative comment or control expression, and continue with a model of the conventional form (*agua no, se llama mar* "not water, it is called sea"), with additional justifications or threats to reinforce the corrective indication (*no digas así, me voy a enojar* "don't say that, I'll get angry").

I have taken particular care to distinguish between normative interventions and repairs. Both repairs and normative interventions may occur in a sequence and share some contextual properties, but they are neither interactionally nor formally equivalent. Both address a language problem, but only normative interventions have a control component, expect recognition and compliance with the normative goal, and may have an immediate or distal effect beyond the instance to which they respond. Repairs are mainly formulated as a question and so commit to an answer; and they are designed for the here and now of conversation.

Each of the normative sequences identified in this way was coded for the following characteristics: (a) the particular interlocutor addressing the normative

claim: father, mother, or other family member; (b) the domain to which the normative utterance refers: language code, language interaction or pragmatics in general; and (c) the specific focus of the normative concern, for example, a wrong name, a mispronunciation, an impolite formulation, a lack of response, or inattention to speech. The variable normative foci I have documented will be presented in the following sections. They were identified from a fine-grained analysis of the interventions in our database, not from a predetermined set.

The results are presented in the following order: (a) an overview of normative interventions, (b) the identification and illustration of the normative domains and the specific targets within each domain, (c) the relative importance and distribution of different normative targets among primary caregivers (mother and fathers), and (d) a preliminary look at some effects of caregivers' interventions on children's language practice. The article concludes with a discussion of the main findings and some remaining questions.

Results

An Overview of Caregivers' Normative Interventions

Explicit normative interactions dealing with language issues are sparse. They are unevenly performed by caregivers and irregularly distributed across different data points. They can range from zero or one to ten or 13 normative episodes in one hour (see Table 1). Comparable work on conversation repair, both in adult interactions (Dingemanse et al., 2015) and with the same children I studied here (Rojas-Nieto, 2020), makes it clear that normative interventions are not the preferred response to children's expressions. Most problems that might deserve normative intervention and explicit correction are simply left aside, or are rather addressed with repairs (Clark, 2020; Drew, 1981), leaving the solution to the children themselves (Schegloff et al., 1977). Furthermore, in addition to the general paucity of normative interventions, some language problems are common and available for frequent intervention, while some problems are rare. Normative interventions do not have a regular distribution pattern, but rather depend on a variety of conditions that may bias the production of caregivers. Therefore, to track normative beliefs and attitudes towards language in this community, the domain and targets of caregivers' normative manifestations are more relevant than the mere number of normative interventions.

Normative Interventions: Domain and Targets

The full set of issues ($n = 345$) that deserved normative intervention by caregivers in the corpus includes targets in the three domains recognized as sources of normativity in language (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019): coding conventions ($n = 102$), interactional commitments ($n = 105$), and pragmatic expectations ($n = 138$).

Normativity in the Coding Domain

The more perspicuous and prominent focus of normativity in the coding domain is the use of conventional designation (Callanan & Siegel, 2014; Clark, 2007). Caregivers are very sensitive to designation errors, explicitly rejecting unconventional terms, and modelling conventional ones instead, as in (2a) and many similar cases: (*no, no es pasto, es árbol* "no, it's not grass, it's a tree"). Caregivers also see children's use of onomatopoeia as a designation problem, correcting it and asking children to use lexical terms instead (*perro, no guagua* "dog, not wow, wow," *pato, no cuacuá* "duck, not quack, quack," *pollo, no pío* "chicken, not peep"). They even complain about having used onomatopoeia themselves with their children ("I had the bad idea of saying 'wow wow'"). On the phonetic side, caregivers often ask children to produce faithful phonetic forms, correcting the omission or inaccuracy of certain segments or syllables (*se dice casa, not tasa* "one says house (casa), not cup (tasa)"; *cuela no, se dice escuela* "kul no, one says school") as in (2b), and they also react against the dislocation of syllables or segments (*cocholate!, noo! chocolate* "cocholate!, noo! chocolate"). Always in the coding domain, now on morphology, caregivers correct the regularization of irregular verbs (**rompido* "braked" vs. *roto* "broken," **sabo* vs. *sé* "I know") (2c), and the wrong gender and number of nouns and pronouns. They occasionally address agreement errors between a subject and the verb (2d), or between determiners and modifiers with the head-noun. But they rarely ask for more extensive adjustments in constructions (2e). In fact, few morphosyntactic anomalies receive corrective interventions, being rather the subject of repairs (Clark, 2020).

(2) Normative reactions related to coding conventions²

2a. Explicit correction of an incorrect designation

Julio (2;05) looking to TV screen

Julio: *ag-*, *aba* <agua> ← contestable designation

‘*wa-*, *wata* <water>

Mam: *no es agua* ← rejection of lexical designation

‘**It's not water** (looking at a bottle)

¡ah! agua ahí, agua

Oh! water there, water (reconsidering and looking at the TV screen)

se llama mar, eh! ← informing of conventional designation

‘**It is called sea, huh!**’

Julio: *ia abua, ida* <mira agua, mira> ← repeating the contestable designation

‘look, water, look’

Mam: *se llama mar.* ← insisting on conventional designation

‘**It is called sea!**’

² Children's expressions that are the subject of a normative reaction are in bold. The English versions are intended to reflect as closely as possible the problem that the caregivers are referring to.

2b. Explicit correction of an unfaithful phonetic form

Nata (2;00,25) looking at a book

Nata: *así aló Bami* ← error of syllable omission‘Bambi (**slip**)ped like this’Fat: ¿*así qué?* ← specific repair

‘like what?’

Nata: *así se baló Bami.* ← repeated error of syllable omission

‘Bambi (sli)pped like this’

Fat: *se dice, "así se resbaló".* ← impersonal regulation and offer of model‘**One says:** He **slipped** like this’Nata: *se ebaló Bami, se ebaló,* ← near-adoption of model

‘Bambi (s)lipped, he (s)lipped’

2c. Explicit correction of the regularization of an irregular verb

Luis (2;06)

Mot: *dime de qué color es mi caballo*

‘Tell me what’s the colour is my horse’

Luis: *no sabo!* ← verb regularization error‘I don’t **known**’Mot: ¿*no qué?* ← restricted repair

‘no what?’

Luis: *no shabo!* ← repeated error‘I don’t **known**’Mot: *no, ¡no se dice no sabo!* ← impersonal regulation pointing the error‘No, **one does not say** I don’t **known**!’¡*se dice no sé!* ← impersonal regulation with model‘**One has to say:** I don’t **know**!’

2d. Correction of improper Subject-Verb agreement

Nata (2;00,4)

Nata: *hola, flodes, ¿qué haces?* ← person agreement error‘Hi flowers, what **is** you doing?’Mot: *se dice ¿qué hacen?* ← impersonal regulation with model‘**One has to say:** what **are** you doing?’

2e. Correcting an anomalous construction of clitic pronouns

Nata (2;00,24)

Nata: *alímeme, salí meme*

‘go out.me, go-out me’

Fat: ¿*qué es eso de "salímeme"*! ← complaint about inappropriate expression

‘what’s that of "go out.me!"’

se dice salirme. ← impersonal regulation with model‘**one has to say** "to get out".’

These normative interventions reveal some aspects of coding that caregivers are ready to control. Most normative interventions are devoted to correcting designation errors and promoting conventional forms (for instance, mistakenly calling a bird "chicken," calling a tree "grass," calling a bull "bear"). Designation errors are common at this early age and are a major source of normative control. They account for 54 normative interventions in the coding domain, a half of the total of 102 interventions in coding. They often occur when the child sees previously unfamiliar animals or objects, without knowing the conventional name for them; a situation that arises from some regular activities and new experiences, such as reading books, watching television, going to the zoo, or walking in the countryside. Meanwhile, the demands for faithful phonetic forms rather depend on the child's immature articulation of segments or items. Normative control of immature phonetic form is not as common as might be expected, given the number of unfaithful forms that children produce. Most phonetically immature forms are ignored, as caregivers infer or guess what the child is trying to say and then continue with the ongoing interaction. Only when an expression is difficult to understand, caregivers recruit general or specific repairs (hm? what? you want what? going where?), indirectly leading the child to reformulate the expression, with no direct correction. There are even fewer normative interventions that address morphological and syntactic errors. Just as they are tolerant of phonetically immature productions, caregivers are very tolerant of the morphosyntactic problems that populate children's utterances. The number interventions on all the different morphosyntactic targets ($n = 21$) only approaches the number of interventions on the phonetic forms alone ($n = 27$). Most morphosyntactic errors are ignored, and only a few are explicitly corrected.

In summary, in the domain of coding, high normative attention is paid to the conventional designation and, to a lesser extent, to the phonetic form of lexical items. Only these failures deserve the shared concern of most caregivers and are frequent targets of normative control. Problems with verb morphology, syntactic properties of constructions – agreement, word order, or substitution of expected function words – are occasionally corrected, but mostly ignored or addressed only through repair interventions.

Normativity in the Interactional Domain

With regard to the interactional domain, caregivers make normative interventions on a number of aspects, keeping an eye on children's interactional commitments, both as speakers and as recipients. On the one hand, caregivers monitor and control children's utterances for compliance with a basic aspect of "recipient design" (Goodwin, 1981): the delivery of speech that can be heard and understood. Caregivers instruct the children to speak loudly referring to the interlocutor's perception of speech (3a) and survey the general intelligibility of expressions. To this end, caregivers repeatedly tell the children to speak well

(*habla bien*), referring to a clear oral formulation (cf. Hernández Pina, 1984).

From a listener's point of view, the main concern of caregivers is that children show that they are paying attention to the interlocutor, by adopting a face-to-face alignment and direct gaze, and by giving verbal evidence of reception and understanding (3b, 3c, 3d; Estigarribia & Clark, 2007; Rossano et al., 2009). This commitment is very strong, and caregivers often intervene to make the children comply with it. A single incident of inattention to speech may lead to repeated interventions by the same speaker or by several participants in the interaction, asking the child to pay attention to the message that one of them has directed to him (3c).

As the children's attention to speech is ratified and the interaction is underway, sequential commitments become the focus of concern. Caregivers then monitor the development of the interaction and intervene to guide children to make the expected conversational moves: responding to calls, acknowledging comments, accepting or refusing an offer and, in particular, answering questions (3d). The absence of an answer to a question generates a strong and repeated demand to fulfil this interactional commitment, which is also highlighted as extremely important in other communities (Rossano et al., 2009; Schegloff, 2007; Sidnell, 2016; Stivers et al., 2018).

(3) Control of basic interactional commitments

3a. Recipient design: Control of loudness of messages

Flor (2;03)

Flor: *¿dónde va Nen?*

'Where is Nen going?'

GMot: *pregúntale.*

'Ask her'

Flor: *¿donde vas, Nen?*

'Where are you going, Nen?'

Mot: *no te oyó, habría que decirle más fuerte.* ← suggestion to speak louder

'She didn't hear, you should tell her louder.'

3b. Reaction to inattention: requests for attention to talk, direct gaze, and face-to-face alignment

Scene: When Flor (2;03) does not display attention to Mom's callings

Mot: *te estoy hablando, mírame, voltea.* ← controlling the interactional alignment

'I'm talking to you, look at me, turn around.'

Act: Flor turns around for a moment, and then continues playing.

3c. Reaction to inattention: both caregivers ask for attention to granny's offering

Nata (2;15) Having dinner with grandmother, mother and father

Nat: *miau, miau*

'meow, meow' (cat's voice)

- GMot: *ya nada más queda una cuchara* (del cereal)
 ‘There is only one spoon left (of cereal)
¿chococrispis? niña feroz! ← grandmother’s offering question
 ‘Choco krispis? fierce girl!’
 Nat: (silence) ← inattention
 Mot: *te hablan Natalia* ← mother’s calling for attention
 ‘Someone is talking to you’
 Fat: *te hablan,* ← father’s calling for attention
 ‘Someone is talking to you’
 Act:(Nata going to the sofa)
 Mot: *¿que si quieres chococrispis?* ← mother reports GMot question
 ‘Do you want chococrispis?’
 Nat: *no, (t)atito, ya* ← Nata responds to the offer
 ‘No, a little bit, now’

3d. Caregivers joint action to control of interactional commitments: pay attention and answer a question

- Scene: Nat (2;04) is playing with some toys
 Fat: *¿qué haces Natalia?*, ← unattended question
 ‘What are you doing Natalia? Natalia!’
¡Natalia! ← calling the child by name
 Activ: Nata turns to see her father, but doesn’t answer
 Mot: *te habla tu papá,* ← calling for attention
 ‘Dad is talking to you’
hazle caso a papa. ← calling for attention
 ‘Pay attention to Dad.’
 Fat: *te pregunto que qué haces.* ← rephrasing his original question
 ‘I’m asking you what happened.’
 Mot: *respóndele* ← request for an answer
 ‘Answer him.’

In summary, Mexican caregivers attach great importance to children's compliance with interactional commitments both as addressees and as speakers. The interactional domain is a prominent source of vigilance and normative control. Caregivers follow the flow of the conversation, from movement to movement and from beginning to end. They are primarily interested in asking children to pay explicit attention to speech, often requiring the child to do so and to give clear evidence of this in attitude, gaze, and face alignment. It is worth noting that this concern is widespread and has been documented in some communities in previous centuries.³ Once the interaction is set up and underway, caregivers monitor the sequence of expected interventions, asking children to show evidence

3 See the remarkable epigraph in Rossano et al., (2009), taken from a letter written by Lord Chesterfield to his son in 1752, which clearly expresses this strong interactional commitment.

of understanding and to make appropriate moves. Speech is seen and is explicitly established as an ostensible event that must be attended to, and children are led to recognize that language interaction requires specific interventions and creates specific commitments that need to be fulfilled.

Normativity in the Pragmatic Domain

The normativity of caregivers in the pragmatic domain stems from concerns about the act of speaking itself, regulating the compatibility of speaking and eating, voice volume and style, and the use of language and not just gestures. From these basic needs, the normativity extends to monitoring the adherence to conversational maxims and scales up to the sophisticated aspects of politeness.

Politeness issues are paramount and the most common and frequent source of normativity in this community. Caregivers make frequent and direct interventions to ensure that children make polite requests. They monitor and ask children to use a soft voice and add *por favor* "please" when making a request (4a), and to say *gracias* "thank you" after the request is granted. They ask children to replace strong imperative demands with "nice" mitigated requests (4b). Furthermore, when children make impolite requests, caregivers address the child with evaluative terms for being *majadero* "rude" (4c) and display the highest level of normative awareness when they tell the child: *tienes que aprender a pedir las cosas bien* "you have to learn to ask for things properly" (mother to Flor at 2;05).

(4) Politeness control addressed to children

4a. Sequence looking for a polite request

Luis (2;04) wants to get a paper for drawing

Luis: *(d)ame*

← direct request

‘Give me’

Tía: *¿por qué?*

← prompt for politeness

‘Why?’

Luis: *porque sí*

← impolite answer

‘Just because’

Tía: *¡eh! así no se piden las cosas.*

← negative comment

‘What! That’s not the way to ask for something’

Luis: *o sabor*. <por favor> ← the child complies and makes the expected form

‘Please.’

4b. Sequence looking for a polite request

Scene: Nata (2;02) taking a pencil from her father's desk, with an "expression of rights":

Nata: *¡a ola, e mía* <mira ahora, es mía>

← expression of ownership

‘Look now, this is mine’

- Fat: *¿cómo se dice?* ← prompting for politeness
 'How do you say?'
no se dice así ← negative comment
 'It is not said like that'
 Nata: *¿me lo petas, ola?* ← polite request
 'Will you lend it to me, now?'
 Fat: *a ver, toma.* ← granting
 'Let's see, have it'

4c. Sequence looking for a polite request

- Scene: Flor (2;02) fakes a tiger roar and mother laughs
 Flor: *¡no te rías!* ← direct negative request
 'Do not laugh!'
 Mot: *¿qué?, ¿por qué?* ← prompting for politeness
 'What?, why?'
 Flor: *porque sí* ← impolite answer
 'Just because'
 Mot: *noo, "porque sí" no.*
 'Noo, just because, not'
por favor. ← modelling a polite mark
 'Please'
y me lo pides bonito ← asking for a nice formulation
 'And ask me nicely'
 Eres *muy mandona y gritona*, eh? ← negative assessment
 'You are really bossy, and shouty, huh?'

The caregivers also control the rituals that frame the opening and closing of an interaction: greeting on arrival, goodbye on departure (5a). A politeness ritual expression *con permiso* "permission" must be used for requests to move or leave the interactional space (5b). Saying *vete* "go away" or *quítate* "get out" is not acceptable. If children make these stigmatized requests, they may receive a negative comment, a warning or a threat (5c), and the direct instruction: *no se le habla así a la gente* "that's not the way you talk to people."

(5) Controlling politeness in the management of the interactional space

5a. Controlling the use of interactional openings

- Scene: Mother arrives when Flor (2;01,12) is playing by herself in grandmother's presence
 Mot: *¿juego?*
 'May I play?'
 Flor: *no*
 'no'

- Mot: *bueno, no juego pero saludame* ← greeting request
 'Well, I don't play, but tell me hi.'
 GMot: *dile, hola mama* ← modelling a greeting
 'Tell her "hi Mom"
 Mot: *dime hola, no seas grosera* ← greeting request + recrimination
 'Tell me hi, don't be rude'

5b. Controlling the requests for displacement of the interactors

- Flor (2;05,0)
 Flor: *quítate* (to granfather) ← impolite request for displacement
 'Get off'
 Mot: *no le hables así!*, ← prohibition
 'Don't talk to him like this'
cuidado con eso! ← warning
 'Take care with this'
no se le habla así a la gente, Flor, ← negative comment
 'That's not the way you talk to people'
dile "compermiso por favor" ← modelling politeness
 'Tell him, permission please'
 Flor: *copemiso ofabo* ← adoption of polite model
 'Permission please'

5c. Warning reaction to an impolite request for displacement of the interactor

- Nata (2;00,18)
 Nata: *¡Ya!, ¡váyate!* ← impolite request for displacement
 'Now, go away!'
 Fat: *me voy a enojar si me dices así* ← warning~threat
 'I'm going to get mad if you tell me so'
 Nata: *e vayan* ← attempt to mitigate the request
 'May you go'

In addition to monitoring politeness in requesting for objects and services and in managing the interactional space, caregivers control some issues that parallel the maxims of cooperative interaction (Grice, 1975): manner ("be clear"), quality ("be truthful"), quantity ("be informative" enough), relation ("be relevant"). The cooperative aspects of interaction that caregivers intend children to observe appear in expressions such as: "don't talk in a childish way" (6a, manner), "don't tell lies" (6b, quality), corrections of redundant expressions (6c), or pleads for additional information (quantity), requests to "not change the subject" (relation, Blum-Kulka, 2007; de Geer et al., 2002). As in other communities, manner also touches lexical pragmatics as a motif of normativity. The use of some lexical items typical of a colloquial style, such as saying *agarrar* "grab" instead of *tomar* "hold," or *patas* "paws" (6d), instead of *pies* "feet" may receive a negative

comment or evaluation, not to mention the negative reactions to the use of dirty words or bad language (as talking of poo or swearing, Blum-Kulka, 2007).

(6) Normativity on pragmatic issues: quality, relation, manner, quantity, lexical pragmatics

(6a) Manner of speech delivery

Luis (2;06)

Mot: *¿no quieres ver lo que traje?*,

‘Don’t you like to see what I brought?’

Com: (Luis babbling)

Mot: *ya habla bien... ya no hables como niño, ¿eh?* ← request for a clear formulation

‘Speak well, don’t talk like a baby, right?’

(6b) Quality: Not telling "lies" in language playing.

Flor (2;00,26) is identifying animals in a book

GMot: *dónde está la vaca?*, la que hace muu?

‘Where is the cow?, the one that makes moo’

Flor: *eta. <esta>*

← false pairing of reference-designation (a lie)

‘This one’ (pointing)

GMot: *¿ese pájaro es una vaca?*

‘That bird is a cow?’

Flor: *sí.*

‘yes’

GMot: *¡qué mentirosa! ¡qué cuentera!*

← responding to a playful lie⁴

‘What a liar! what a storyteller!’

Flor: *e vaca.* ← intentional false designation

‘It is a cow’

(6c) Quantity: Not to be redundant

Luis (2;04)

Luis: *¿e das? <me das>*

‘Do you give me?’

Mam: *te doy*

‘I give you’

Luis: *mío*

‘mine’

Mam: *¡cómo que me das mío!*

‘How do you give me mine!’

nada más es me das o me das a mí,

← modelling an appropriate formulation (for Quantity)

4 I am grateful to Bert Hodges for his suggestion that in this case the child is lying in a playful way, which is also a deliberate breach of the manner convention. *Cuentera/o* "storyteller" is a gentle way of calling someone, a liar.

'It is only you give me, or give to me,'
pero no me das mío. ← rejecting previous formulation
 'But not you give me mine'

(6d) Making an issue about lexical pragmatics

Luis (2;04), when mother is dressing him.

Mot: *a ver, huélete tu piecito.*

'Let's see, smell your little foot'

Luis: *patas.*

'paws'

Mot: *¡oye!*

← claim⁵

'Hey!'

se llama pie.

← modeling an appropriate designation

'It is called foot'

Luis: *pe*

'Foot'

Mot: *¿pero por qué le dices patas?* ← asking for an account of the word used
 'But then why do you call it paws?'

patas tienen los animales. ← giving a cover argument for not using the term
 'Animals have paws'

¿eres animal? ← leading the child to reflect
 'Are you an animal?'

Luis: *no.*

'No.'

In sum, caregivers carry out normative control over many pragmatic aspects of their children's language, particularly the social rituals that organize polite interaction in the community. They openly express the intention to instruct the children to be polite for a variety of language practices, especially requests. Other pragmatic issues are also raised, but they are less common than politeness faults. They range from instructions on the "manner" of speaking (clear and loud, not childish), "quality" (telling the truth), "relation" (keeping issues contingent and acceptable) and "quantity" (taking care of redundancy or insufficiency). There may even be instructions to avoid certain words or expressions, probably because they are social indices or reflect bad manners.

Presence and Distribution of Normative Interventions Among Caregivers

I now move to the second objective of this work and to the possibility to drawing a profile of the normative stance of these educated middle-class Mexican caregivers. To do this, I have mapped all the interventions that caregivers produce (see Figure

5 *¡Oye!*, "hey," literally "listen," takes on the sense of claim with a specific intonation.

1). This provides an initial global view of each child's normative experience.

Although the raw number of interventions does not define a trend, it is clear that not all caregivers were equally involved in controlling their children's speech. The fact that most mothers produced more interventions than fathers is most likely due to the fact that the mothers were always present during the recordings, while the fathers were at work. When the fathers were equally present - as was the case with Elia's and Nata's father - they also proved to be very attentive and active in controlling their children's speech.

Regarding the preferences for normative domains addressed to children, the following distribution was obtained for each child (see Figure 2).

Although there are clear differences in the frequency and proportion of interventions in each domain for each child, the caregivers addressed the three domains that frame normativity: interaction, pragmatics, and coding. Luis, Julio, and Elia received the highest proportion of interventions in the coding domain (between 53% and 41% of all interventions directed at them), while coding requirements were less frequent for Nata (21%) and were virtually absent for Flor (only 3%). In contrast, pragmatic expectations and rituals were very important to Flor's caregivers, accounting for 70% of all normative interventions she received, while pragmatic issues were less prominent in the case of the other four children

Figure 1. *Normative interventions by primary caregivers.*

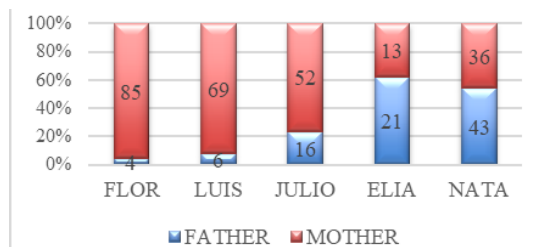
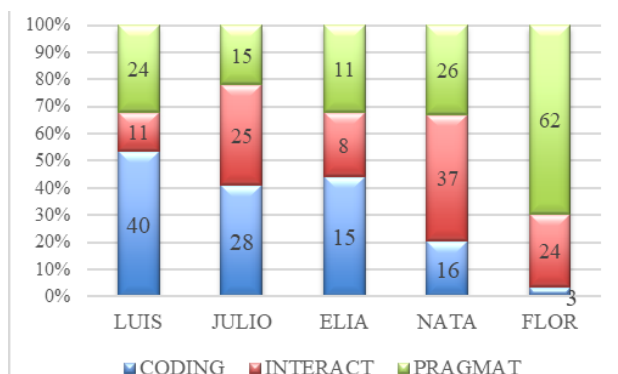


Figure 2. *Domains of normativity.*



(between 32% and 22%). Finally, the control of interactional commitments was very important for Nata (47%), less so for Julio (36%), Flor (27%), and Elia (23%), and even less so for Luis (14%).

To conclude this point, I have considered and compared the specific issues that caregivers addressed in each domain, the number of tokens of each target, and the group of interactors – mothers and fathers, independently and jointly – who control those particular aspects in the speech of their children (see Table 2).

Some generalizations can be drawn from the data and the distribution of targets between caregivers shown in Table 2. First, all caregivers were concerned with coding conventions, interactional commitments, and pragmatic expectations, and had a relative agreement and consensual disposition to control certain issues. But looking more closely, a few targets in each domain were strictly observed in this community. On the coding side, conventional designations and faithful phonetic forms were the most important issues for caregivers. On the interactional side, a key normative concern related to children's position as addressees and a precondition for communicative interaction: to pay attention to speech and to give explicit evidence of this, which is a commitment that caregivers insistently and jointly asked children to observe. The commitments for children as speakers are also present and very varied, led by the basic interactional requirement to speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard and understood, followed by the sequential commitment to perform the expected interactional move: in particular, answering questions. In the pragmatic domain, interventions that promote polite formulations, especially for making requests, were of primary importance; adherence to this represents the high values of "showing respect" and having "good manners." Politeness issues are so important that some interactional commitments, such as paying attention to speech and adopting direct gaze and face alignment, are not just a convention for proper interaction, but could be seen as part of a conglomerate of politeness expectations.

Taken together, the main shared concerns among caregivers design a community profile characterized by some beliefs and attitudes for the appropriate language use and action of very young children. The dice are loaded in favor of some conventions related to the very nature of language communication: paying attention to talk, recruiting conventional designations and faithful phonetic forms, making contingent interventions, proper to be heard and interpreted, and adorning some crucial interventions with the frames and markers that give an index of good manners and respect. So that even if the normative activities of some caregivers are scarce, as it is the case with some fathers, the most likely outcome will be that they would address these basic interventions. The remaining normative targets, selectively implemented by some caregivers, particularly mothers, provide evidence of individual preferences and varying degrees of concern for certain issues. They travel in family practices alongside the dominant concerns shared by fathers and mothers at this early age of children when the more basic language commitments are being cared and established.

Table 2. *Distribution and Frequency of Targets Between Caregivers*

Domain	Target	Mothers/ Σ tokens	Fathers/ Σ tokens	Caregivers/ Σ tokens
Coding	All types of coding interventions	5(69)	5 (33)	10 (102)
	Use conventional designation	4 (38)	4 (16)	8 (54)
	Be faithful to phonetic form	3 (16)	4 (11)	7 (27)
	Use proper verb and noun morphology	3 (8)	2 (3)	5 (11)
	Produce a proper construction frame	2 (5)	2 (3)	4 (8)
	Use a proper function word	1 (2)		1 (2)
Interaction	All types of interaction interventions	5(81)	5(23)	10 (105)
	Pay attention to talk	5 (39)	2 (7)	7 (46)
	Keep speech clear & loud	3 (11)	3 (7)	6 (18)
	Display hearing & understanding	3 (12)	2 (4)	5 (16)
	Continue sequences as expected:	3 (8)	2 (5)	5 (13)
	Participate with speech	2 (8)		2 (8)
	Control of face and gaze orientation	1 (3)		1 (3)
Pragmatics	All types of pragmatic interventions	5 (104)	5 (34)	10 (138)
	Control of polite marking & formulation	5 (40)	4 (15)	9 (55)
	Control of volume and voice style	4 (33)	1 (5)	5 (38)
	Control of utterance truth / world fit	2 (6)	2 (5)	4 (11)
	Control of socio-lexical pragmatics	4 (7)	1 (1)	5 (8)
	Control of greetings and farewells	2 (8)	1 (1)	3 (9)
	Control of information load: enough*	1 (3)	2 (3)	3 (6)
	Control of when it is not due to speak	1 (1)	2 (4)	3 (5)
	Use language, not gestures	2 (2)		2 (2)
	Control of the use of "bad" expressions	2 (2)		2 (2)
	Control of thematic continuity	1 (2)		1 (2)

Note. * Not redundant or insufficient.

A Birds' Eye View of the Effects of Normative Language on Young Children

Most of the time, children respond to the normative interventions from their caregivers and comply with them online. They reformulate the request or add the indicated politeness mark, they change the wrong designation to the suggested one, they at least try to comply with the request to "speak well" by repeating the expression that the caregiver has deemed unclear or inappropriate, they pay attention to previously unattended speech or provide the answer to a previously unanswered question.

In addition to the online effects just mentioned, children's emergent normativity can be observed in spontaneous interaction, as children themselves engage in directive activities and play the game of controlling some issues that have been previously and repeatedly raised by caregivers. This is the case of Nata, Flor, and Luis, who have a solid experience of parental regulations (but not for Elia and Jules). All three of these children correct and argue with their caregivers on issues of conventional designation. Luis corrects his mother when she calls his father *mi amor*, by saying: *No se llama mi amor, se llama Luis* "his name is not

my love, his name is Luis." Flor argues with her grandfather and grandmother about the name of a particular cactus (*sábila* "aloe vera"), which she calls either *nopalillos*, a family of domestic flowering cacti ("opuntia"), or *nopales* "cactus paddles" (i.e., leaves), a species edible in Mexican gastronomy (7a). Equally, Nata argues with her father about what to call the blocks she plays with (7b).

(7a) Flor (2;07,16) showing her mother a cactus in a pot.

Flor: *mila mamá, nopalillos* ← child's proposed designation

'Look, Mum, small-cactus'

GMot: *se llama sábila, Flor* ← contraposed designation

'It is called aloe vera, Flor'

GFat: *sábila, se llama sábila* ← contraposed designation

'Aloe vera, it is called aloe vera'

Flor: **no... se llaman nopales** ← disqualifying grandparents' designation

'No, they are called cactus'

(7b) (Nata 2,02,11) Arguing with father on a designation issue

Fat: *son los bloques*.

'They are blocks'

Nata: **no, no se llaman bloques**. ← disqualifying father's designation

'No, they are not called blocks'

Fat: *¿cómo se llaman?*

What's their name:

Nata: *se llama... bosas* (bolsas). ← proposing an alternative designation

'They are called purses'

Fat: *no, pero estos son los bloques mira*

'No, but these are the block, look

Nat: **no se llaman bloques** ← disqualifying again father's designation

'They are not called blocks'

Nata also reacts to a *sui generis* compliment from her aunt with the regulatory phrase *háblame bien*, "talk to me properly" (8).

(8) Nata (1;11,28) takes a compliment as a negative expression.

Aunt: *mis viejas, ¿por qué estás tan chulas?*

'My old ladies, why are you so beautiful' ← target utterance

Nata: **¡háblame mien!** ← control expression

'Talk to me properly!'

Aunt: *pues te estoy hablando bien*

'I'm talking to you properly'

háblame bien ...! ¿tú crees?

'"talk to me properly!" can you believe it?'

(told to the father)

Nata: *háblame bien* ← repeating control expression
 'Talk to me properly!'
 Aunt: *ah!, cállese!*
 'Oh!, shut up!'

In this survey, I found that Nata and Flor have included some control-corrective expressions in their construction inventory: *háblame bien* "talk well to me," *eso no se dice* "that is not to be said," (*son*) *mentiras* "that is a lie," which they recruit to argue about linguistic conventions and appropriate expressions (9).

(9) Flor (1;04,10) argues about a designation with her grandfather (GFat)
 GFat: *¿estas amasando la masa?* ← designation issue
 Are you kneading the dough?
 Flor: *no no no no, eso no se dice.* ← correction: rule like expression
 'This is not said'
 Mot: *¿eso no se dice?*
 'This is not said?'
 Flor: *eso no se dice,* ← rule like expression
 'This is not said',
e: patel! ← proposal of another designation
 'It is a cake'

Furthermore, Flor has coined the innovative phrases *traer caso*, *poner caso* "bring/put case/heed," close versions of the usual expression *hacer caso* "pay attention to me." These coinages show that Flor knows when her speech has not been attended to and that she feels entitled to ask the interlocutor to comply with this interactional obligation. Finally, given that politeness is prominent source of control by caregivers, it is to be expected that politeness issues would also be addressed by children. In fact, Nata and Flor ask their toys and caregivers to perform ritual greetings on arrival, either in symbolic play or real life (e.g., every time they go around on a carousel). Not to mention the ritual "thank you" and "please" that they ask to be added to requests.

Thus, I have found immediate sequential effects of caregivers' adjacent normative moves and some lasting effects, distant from any direct intervention (Schegloff, 1989, p. 145). The normative interventions that children produce reveal the conventions that children have already grasped and the importance they attach to them. Children feel entitled to argue with their interlocutors about these conventions and to ask them to respect them. The collection of episodes in which children address people – or toys – with such interventions is rather small, with only three out of five children providing this evidence. Although these episodes are few, they are sufficient to show that young children have become sensitive to linguistic norms, conventions, and rituals, especially to the most prominent ones in each normative domain, just as they are sensitive to

social normativity in nonlinguistic domains (Rakoczy & Schmidt, 2013). And they are so confident in their beliefs that they direct normative interventions to their caregivers about them.

Discussion

The current interest in characterizing caregiver-child interactions from around the world, and the different ways in which children experience language and are socialized into language practices, invited me to explore the presence, targets and distribution of normative language as a possible source of diversity. After a detailed search and characterization of the caregivers' normative instructions, I can revisit the objective of this work, namely, to assess the effective presence, variable foci and preference of caregivers for some normative interventions, as well as their emergent effects on children's language.

Normative practices related to language are certainly present in the Mexican families I have observed. All caregivers engage in explicit normative practices, even if they claim to reject normative attitudes. Interspersed in spontaneous interaction, caregivers provide children with potentially important information about the conventions and expectations that they should respect when interacting with others. The interactional space is inhabited by metapragmatic comments, statements, requests, evaluations, and recriminations about very different aspects of the use and form of language. They touch on the conventions and commitments that caregivers consider necessary or desirable for children to observe. The previous dominant attention to coding issues led to the conclusion that direct instruction in grammar was largely absent in most communities. Attention to politeness led to the belief that politeness was a common source of vigilance and control. In the spontaneous metapragmatic discourse I studied, there was not a sharp division between a focus on politeness and a disregard for coding, but a more balanced landscape. Caregivers, albeit with unequal strength, paid attention to the three fronts that the normativity framework proposes as sources of language normativity: coding, interaction, and pragmatics. Most caregivers raised pragmatic issues, demanded compliance with interactional commitments, and at least some of them pointed out critical violations of coding.

Despite the common vigilance to issues in each domain, the diversity of human practices already known led me to expect that metapragmatic interventions in the Mexican families I observed could reveal both general human concerns and social or individual expectations. Some aspects of these expectations have been confirmed in the data.

On the one hand, I observed a consensual control of the conventions that determine the construction of signs (both in form and meaning): conventional designation and faithful phonetic form. But all caregivers were clearly less concerned with morphosyntactic problems, perhaps less aware of them, or more tolerant of such errors. Caregivers were also very attentive and promoted

compliance with the basic interactional foundations of language: they insistently asked children to pay attention to speech, gave clear evidence of this verbally and attitudinally, and then maintained sequential contingent participation, which at this early age operates in the short range on adjacency pairs, mainly question-answer pairs. Caregivers are particularly concerned with children's social engagement (Ochs, 1990; Ochs, et al., 2015), promoting adherence to social rituals and polite interventions (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Cook & Burdelski 2017; Ely et al., 2001). Among educated, middle-class caregivers in the Mexican highlands, issues of politeness are an important source of vigilance, but they are also concerned with interactional commitments and conventions that govern the form and meaning of signs. There are not many surprises in terms of previous findings. These basic aspects of language, which form the normativity profile in these families, are expected to be generally respected, even if they are not a matter of explicit normative control everywhere.

On the other hand, for the most part, I have found that most of the conventions in the inventory of normative focus in these urban, educated Mexican families are also relevant in other communities. "Talk about talk" reported in socialization studies and cross-cultural pragmatics refers to paying and showing attention to language as a required action, either in the United States (Schegloff, 2007), Japan (Kita & Ide, 2007; Tatsumi & Sala 2022), England (Rossano et al., 2009), or Israel (Blum-Kulka, 1993). Questions strongly and generally commit the addressee to give an answer (Filipi, 2009; Heritage, 2012; Stivers et al., 2018), politeness issues are a prominent and generalized matter of control, even if the targets may be specific (Blum-Kulka, 1990, 1993; Clancy, 1986; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), and lexicon is widely controlled for faithful form and conventional designation, but also for social indexicality (Blum-Kulka, 1993). These expected moves, constructional aspects and the proper production and use of resources by children are valuable in Mexico, where not paying attention to what the interlocutor is saying, not answering a question, not making a kind request, using an unconventional term, deserves the normative intervention of the caregiver, with the explicit intention of driving the child to comply with the expected commitment and convention in case. Some of these shared conventions and commitments are a part of the principles that govern any language system and of the foundations of human interaction, and not surprisingly are a matter of common and widespread control and concern in many places.

What might be in the realm of the specific normative concern of Mexican families is not as evident as I had expected, but the general emphasis on politeness calls for a comment on its significance. What is most striking in our data is the wide set of issues that are included in the caregivers' politeness checklist and the very attentive eye that mothers, and some fathers, direct to politeness issues. They have it on the educational agenda, driving their children to display good manners, not to be rude or vociferous, to manage the interactional floor carefully and kindly, to perform the rituals of thanking and greeting on due occasions

and, overall, to learn to ask properly. This goal goes beyond the use of thanks and please and enters the syntactic pole of selecting a proper construction, one that could be considered as a mild, indirect request and a verb inflection with a mitigated directive force (as Morgenstern et al., 2014, found in French). It might be possible to add to the politeness checklist the interactional commitments of paying attention to the interactor, acknowledging the reception of a message, and giving a contingent response, with questions as the most conspicuous case of normative control of these expectations. They are primarily a matter of normativity in the interactional domain since they must be fulfilled for the interaction to proceed, but at the same time, they are highly valuable indices of good manners. In short, the conventions involved in politeness can come from any of the domains that nourish normative practices: coding, interaction, and pragmatics proper. When conventions acquire the property of being indexical for politeness, they can become a matter of accountability (Enfield & Sidnell, 2019; Silverstein, 1976), control, and socialization, as is the case with other sociolinguistic indexes. The prominent control of politeness in these families, the targets that are and can be included in the politeness checklist, the levelling of awareness and hence control, of issues that are an index of politeness, and the beliefs that support their inclusion open a window to new descriptive and theoretical questions that have yet to be answered.⁶

Regarding our last question about the effects of the caregivers' normative interventions on the children's language, such effects clearly appeared through the interactional window when the children complied and tried to follow the caregivers' demands, somehow adapting their interventions to follow their indications. What I did not expect was the striking evidence of early children's enactment of normativity that I found in role-playing activities, when the children took on the role of an adult and addressed normative interventions to their toys and interactors, as I registered with Luis, Nata, and Flor.

The normative moves that caregivers exchange with their children not only provided me with the opportunity to answer the research questions I have set for this work, but also are a source of different kinds of information. On the one hand, and mediated by the caregivers' selective attention, normative interventions reveal which linguistic regularities, interactional and pragmatic commitments are not yet fully recognized and enacted by young children. On the other hand, given that not all aspects of normative concern are addressed by the caregivers, looking at the aspects of language in which they do intervene normatively, provides an additional clue, a kind of glimpse into their metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness (Duncan et al., 2009). Finally, by considering the aspects of language in which the caregivers normatively intervene when they talk about talking, it is possible to observe a natural pedagogy in action (Csibra & Gergely, 2009). As in the frames of a slow film, the enactment of normative interventions shows

6 I would like to thank the reviewers for their insightful comments, which are an invitation to work at the interfaces of politeness, normativity and awareness.

the caregivers' agency and their desire to guide their children to act within the normative frameworks of their community, their willingness to correct and instruct them so that they become speakers of the interactional culture of the Mexican middle class. Not without surprise, I have found that the normative concerns of this socio-cultural segment of Mexico, of educated urban middle-class caregivers, are not very different from the globalized culture whose current expansion is being witnessed worldwide (de León & García-Sánchez, 2021).

Remaining Questions

Throughout this work, I have highlighted the conventions that caregivers refer to most frequently and that are agreed upon by all: sharing conventional designations and phonetic forms, paying attention to talk, displaying evidence of reception and understanding, and contributing with contingent sequences in the interaction, as all of these are fundamental and necessary supports for communicative interaction, for being recognized as "speakers of the same language" and achieving mutual understanding. In parallel, I have also found that different caregivers make unequal use of language interventions, emphasizing the pragmatic, interactional or coding domain of normativity, and showing normative interest on different goals. I do not have sufficient evidence to conclude on the significance of their preferences, but their different concerns open a window on individual differences in metapragmatic interests within the same community and argue for further research on such differences between caregivers and their possible effects on children. The emerging affinities and differences of mothers and fathers point to the widespread assumption that attitudes towards language and linguistic norms are divided by gender, which still needs to be confirmed. There is also an invitation to contrast these findings with the normative practices in other Spanish speaking communities, inside or outside Mexico, which have not yet been studied. The scattered incidental findings of normative interventions performed by toddlers themselves open a window to what might be considered evidence of early metapragmatic awareness, which is not always recognized. Language awareness has received widespread attention mainly as a late developmental achievement, and the early emergence of metapragmatic activity attested here provides a thread for future research, to connect with the pioneering work of Clark (1978) and Slobin (1978).

Since this research has focused exclusively on interaction with young children, I expect that once the basic normative commitments I have observed are firmly in place, caregivers will exhibit a new set of conventions and a different ranking among the targets of their normative attention. What I do not expect, however, is that interactants will set aside the basic issues in each normative domain. Rather, they will somehow target them whenever they are forgotten by children, as they are building blocks of culturally informed interaction.

So far, I have analyzed caregivers' normative interventions, focusing on targets

and distribution without considering their embodied multimodal constitution. However, normativity is conveyed through language, gesture, expression, and action, which calls for the adoption of the multimodal constitution of normativity as a major and prospective objective in our research agenda. Finally, further questions to be considered could explore the impact of normative language on young children's self-regulation of language, as reflected in the monitoring that self-repairs attest to (Lara et al. 2015), and compare children's self-regulation targets with caregivers' normative goals. In the long term, I envision a trajectory, a kind of relational map, and a developmental-experiential model that takes into account the emerging network between caregivers' normative interventions, children's agentic control over their language practices, and children's incursions into the dark side of the language-awareness moon... ⁷

⁷ This last point is but a mild attempt to consider the insightful suggestions of one reviewer, so far unattainable and left on our growing agenda for the future.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

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Research Ethics Statement

We recruited friends and family members of the research group to access more intimate aspects of family interaction and willingness to accept more than a year of periodic visits to form a longitudinal corpus. The families were informed of the objectives of the study: related to language acquisition, and they were guaranteed the confidentiality of the records. A family member or a close friend was in charge of making the visits and video-recording. Our Institution did not have by the time any regulation nor required any specific agreement document.

We tried not to interfere in family daily life and adopted the position of observer-participant. Video recordings have been kept private in our Lab, and no sensible aspect has been or will be used as a subject of any study.

We described to the family the objectives of the studies that we will derive from the corpus to be collected: related to language acquisition. The confidentiality of the records was guaranteed. All children and family names were to be changed to maintain anonymity.

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