

**Debate on controversial issues in online focus groups in Spanish:
a case study on the role of mitigation and intensification strategies in the argumentation**

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This paper aims to analyse the use of mitigation and intensification strategies in online focus groups that bring together different actors involved in the organisation, celebration or promotion of a controversial Spanish tradition, the Moors and Christians festival. This tradition commemorates the confrontations of the Reconquest, and has been contested for its representation of the Muslim community and for the limits to the participation of women.

The analysis is based on the methodology developed by Albelda *et al.* (2014) for the pragmatic analysis of mitigation and adapted to the analysis of intensification. From a rhetorical and pragmatic perspective, Albelda and Briz (2020) define mitigation as a strategy used to reduce or compensate for threatening speech acts that challenge the speaker's or interlocutor's face, while intensification is regarded as a strategy used argumentatively to strengthen the propositional content or the speaker's intention. Based on three focus groups of six people discussing the controversial aspects of the tradition in Spanish, this paper first analyses the contexts in which mitigation and intensification strategies appear as well as the effects they have on the speaker's argumentation. That is to say, this research focuses on the role of the strategy used in relation to the speaker's stance (i.e. whether the strategy appears in the formulation of the stance or an argument), as well as the relationship between the speaker's intervention and the interlocutors' argumentation (i.e. whether the strategy is used to express agreement or disagreement, or to support or refute an interlocutor's argument).

Secondly, taking into account the interactional characteristics of each focus group, this contribution also looks into the different uses of these strategies according to the degree of interactivity determined on the basis of Briz' proposals concerning the number of turns as a criterion of dynamism (2007). Preliminary results suggest that the degree of interactivity between the speakers has an impact on the scope of the strategies used, that is to say, in more interactional discourse, the strategies combine interactional and argumentative effects, while in less interactional discourse, the argumentative role is prioritised even when the strategy is used to refer to another speaker's discourse.

Through the combination of these analyses, this paper aims to contribute to investigating how mitigation and intensification strategies are used at interactional and argumentative levels in oral discussions on controversial topics.

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