

Gender and cool solidarity in Mexican Spanish colloquial phrases

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While Kiesling (2004) showed that the lexical item “dude,” indexes a stance of “cool solidarity” amongst men in American English, we present a study on the distribution of two contemporary Mexican colloquial phrases - “no mames” and “no manches” (translated roughly as “no shit” and “no way,” respectively) with a similar function but with unique properties. We collected data from both Twitter and anonymous online survey responses of Mexican Spanish speakers. We chose to use Twitter based on its accessibility and the similarity of Computer Mediated Conversation to spoken conversation (Herring, 2011).

We compiled a corpus of 1500 tweets using the Twitter API (Application Programming Interface), searching for tweets containing our target phrases. We then extracted a subcorpus of 600 of these tweets, coding them for location and gender. We performed a quantitative analysis to discover how these phrases vary in usage across gender, and supplemented this data with qualitative analysis of an online survey containing both open and closed response items (based on the “Dude” survey used in Kiesling 2004) asking speakers how they use these phrases in their everyday interactions. Results from the analysis of the Twitter corpus showed that while “no mames” was tweeted more often overall by both genders, men tweeted the non-vulgar “no manches” less frequently (23.0%) than women (37.4%) ($p < 0.001$).

The survey responses indicated that usage of variant was linked to the gender of and level of familiarity with their addressee. Men report using “no mames” the most when they are addressing male friends and female acquaintances, and “no manches” the most when they are addressing male friends. While women report using “no mames” less frequently than men, they report using this phrase the most when they are addressing male friends, and they report using “no manches” the most with male friends as well. We interpret the reported usage as indicative of the implicit stance of masculinity associated with these slang phrases, which explains why men use the phrases as a show of solidarity with other men, but also as a demonstration of masculinity with female acquaintances. This also explains why women tend to use the phrases more with male addressees, in order to show solidarity with them. Furthermore, in the open answer survey responses, speakers indicated that “no mames” expresses stances of vulgarity, informality, closeness, youth, and lack of education, while “no manches” expresses all of the same stances, with the notable exception of vulgarity.

These results lead us to conclude that men use these slang phrases as a way to show solidarity with other men and to index masculinity, while women use “no manches” as an acceptable way to also show solidarity with male addressees, without expressing a stance of vulgarity that is associated with “no mames.” This study shows similar trends in slang usage related to masculinity as those found in Kiesling (2004), as examined in a different linguistic and cultural setting.

References

- Herring, S. C. (2010). Computer-mediated conversation: Introduction and overview. *Language@Internet*, 7(2).
- Kiesling, S. F. (2004). Dude. *American Speech*, 79(3), 281-305.