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Abstract

The concept of sincerity has links to honesty, openness, and authenticity, including of feelings. As expressions of sincerity become formalized in epistolary practice, however, a tension arises between sincerity and the articulation of it. An examination of a corpus of private family letters in French and Spanish from the 18th and 19th centuries shows that use of the word ‘sincerity’ is much more common as an epistolary formula in French, where it had a broader semantic range, while authors writing in Spanish use other methods to index truth and emotional openness. The most frequent users of this formula are shown to be less skilled writers and bilinguals writing in their second language, suggesting a greater reliance on preconstructed formulae, especially in situations of increased linguistic and social distance. Finally, some bilingual authors transfer the pattern into Spanish, indicating that fixed phrases and formulae are available in a bilingual’s linguistic repertoire for pragmatic redeployment.

Keywords

historical bilingualism, private letters, epistolary formulae, French, Spanish

1 Introduction

Both intimate and formulaic to greater or lesser degrees, the private letter can be understood as a particular type of linguistic interaction which allows for communication and interpersonal identity construction within a framework constrained by generic and social convention. Letters arguably present similarities to spoken conversation in their interactional nature and closeness to the language of immediacy, which speakers manipulate for pragmatic and communicative purposes, including the building and maintenance of social bonds (Koch and Oesterreicher 2001: 586; Nurmi and Palander-Collin 2008: 22-23; Bergs 2004; Sairio 2013: 184). However, the epistolary genre is also characterized by the fact that it encompasses two worlds: the real world of the participants and the epistolary world in which the lives of the correspondents and these social bonds between them are described and negotiated on paper. The real world is referenced within a second relationship framework existing in the epistolary world: that of writer and addressee, understood as epistolary versions of, or stand-ins for, the real individuals (Stanley 2004).¹ This relationship is often encoded most explicitly in the chunks of more ‘formulaic’ language which accompany the communicative content and appear most frequently at the beginning and end of the text. These formulae should not be viewed as simply “empty envelopes” but as elements of the

¹ This is complicated by the fact that the person physically writing the letter may be another person entirely (Dossena 2012).

speaker's communicative repertoire that they can then exploit (Laitinen and Nordlund 2012: 66; Elspaß 2012), even if this is simply to "meet basic expectations of politeness in the course of the exchange" (Fitzmaurice 2002: 23).

One such formula is that of sincerity. From the 18th century, the concept was widespread across late modern Western Europe (cf. De Toni this volume; Shvanyukova this volume), and also began to appear as an epistolary closing formula, for example in English letters (Bijkerk 2004). During this period, sincerity gained its meaning of authenticity in relation to self-presentation as well as in the relationship between individuals and society. It came to be associated with honesty, spontaneity, openness, and lack of inhibition in the communication of truth (Williams 2002: 45, 71, 172). According to this idea, a sincere speaker not only expresses true thoughts and feelings - in that she tells the truth without engaging in deceit - but also expresses what she truly thinks and feels - she spontaneously shares information, without hiding anything of herself or lying through omission. Or, as Fitzmaurice (2016: 175) succinctly puts it, sincerity is "the identification of feeling with its avowal." It is when a speaker enters the meta-level of commenting on his behavior by declaring himself sincere, however, that difficulties of interpretation begin. Because at least the honesty component of sincerity can already be assumed to be part of cooperative communication (Grice 1975: 46), commenting on it is at the very least redundant, particularly as we do not state that we are *insincere* even - or perhaps especially - when this may be the case. Since it is otherwise unnecessary information, explicitly calling the interlocutor's attention to this assumption can have the unintended and paradoxical effect of suggesting that the communicative context is one where sincerity is in fact in doubt. The speaker's aim in using it can therefore be seen as a reminder or reassurance to the interlocutor that the normal rules do in fact apply. That is, this expression tells us that the speaker wishes to be perceived as sincere, but does not reveal anything about their actual condition (Aznárez Mauleón and González Ruiz 2006: 313-316; Gezundhajt 2000: 264). As these reminders become more prevalent, for example in epistolary communication, they are open both to formalization and reinterpretation, and in fact come to mark something else entirely. In this case, sincerity can begin to be understood to refer less to the speaker's honesty than to their "genuineness of feeling", that is, the door is open for claiming sincerity when one is being polite but not necessarily emotionally open or honest (Fitzmaurice 2016:198).

The questions I address here are the following: how is 'sincerity' used and expressed in French and Spanish letter-writing practice in the 18th and 19th centuries and to what extent can this be called an epistolary formula? Are there differences between the two languages, and if so, how do bilinguals navigate that difference? The corpus I examine is a collection of personal letters from the Boulogny family, whose correspondence network stretched between colonial Louisiana, France, and Spain from the mid-18th to mid-19th century (Thomas 2017).²

² These texts are held in the Boulogny-Baldwin, Boulogny-Genin, and Dauberville-Boulogny Family paper collections at the Historic New Orleans Collection [HNOC], and the Rosemonde E. & Emile Kuntz collection at the Louisiana Research Collection at Tulane University [LaRC]. The document source is classified as follows: location (HNOC or LaRC); collection number (MSS); Box number (if applicable, B); folder (F). Transcription of the letters was as faithful as possible and not edited for spelling, accents, word spacing, etc.; insertions are indicated with ^ and strikethroughs as ~~text~~. In the examples presented in this paper, I have not retained the original line spacing and abbreviations have been expanded in the translation, indicated with the relevant text enclosed in square brackets.

The central figure of the corpus, Francisco Bouligny, was a Spanish soldier of French heritage posted in New Orleans, where he married a francophone Creole woman. They and most of their family members and acquaintances were bilingual and exchanged letters in both French and Spanish. The range of topics covered is quite varied, including such subjects as congratulations, condolences, requests for money or interest, and family news and history as the correspondents maintain their social and familial connections across the Atlantic. Although the letters have all been classed by the archives as ‘private’ or ‘personal’, the relationships represented in the corpus range from spouse, parent/child and sibling relationships to more distant family members, colleagues, and acquaintances. The corpus itself consists of 117 letters exchanged within this social network over the course of 119 years: 59 in French and 58 in Spanish (approximately 47,100 words total: 21,500 in French and 25,600 in Spanish). 32 authors from five generations are represented.

I begin in Section 2 by discussing the development of the term ‘sincerity’ in late modern French and Spanish, first considering its relationship to the interconnected concepts of truth, emotional openness, and authenticity. I then examine its frequency (Section 3.1) and use in letters (Section 3.2). Finally, I discuss differences between the Spanish and French letters (Section 3.3) and conclude in Section 4 by considering cross-linguistic patterns of expressing sincerity and use of epistolary formulae.

2 Dictionary definitions of *sincérité* and *sinceridad*

The association of the word ‘sincerity’ in Romance with truth and genuineness dates as far back as Latin, but additional meanings of emotional openness and authenticity are later developments. SINCĒRUS, the Latin ancestor of modern French *sincère* and Spanish *sincero/a*, was defined as “clean, pure, sound, not spoiled, uninjured, whole, entire, real, natural, genuine, sincere,” and additional meanings of honesty, truthfulness, and lack of artifice are tied to the adverbial form SINCĒRĒ (Lewis and Short 1879). However, a look at French and Spanish dictionaries from the 17th-19th centuries shows several differences between Latin and the daughter languages as well as between French and Spanish. The meaning of the term can be seen to shift from concrete ideas of wholeness or purity applied to objects and towards more abstract descriptions of personal qualities, particularly in French.

The definitions for the French *sincère* and *sincèrement* offered in Furetière’s 1690 *Dictionnaire universel* are given in (1).³ Truth and genuineness still figure in his conception of sincerity, but reference to wholeness and soundness have been replaced by a focus on candid communication characterized by both emotional openness and a lack of deceit.

(1)

- a. *sincère [...] Qui est franc, qui parle à cœur ouvert, sans feinte ni dissimulation.*

Who is frank, who speaks with an open heart, without guile or dissimulation.

³ Emphasis is mine except where noted.

- b. *Parler **sincèrement**, c'est parler du fonds du cœur, le cœur sur les lèvres. Agir **sincèrement**, c'est agir de bonne foy.*

To speak **sincerely**, is to speak from the bottom of one's heart, the heart on the lips. To act **sincerely**, is to act in good faith.

Here there is an additional association of sincerity with emotion, especially with reference to the heart. Although this connotation is clearly available from at least the end of the 17th century, later dictionaries compiled by the Académie Française (1799) and Laveaux (1820) focus instead on truth, candor, and lack of artifice. Thesauruses such as that compiled by Girard (1740), however, do not eliminate the reference to the heart. In the entry for *sincérité*, he also highlights shared concepts of honesty, outspokenness, and a certain artlessness by comparing and contrasting sincerity with *franchise* 'frankness', *naïveté* 'naïveté', and *ingénuité* 'ingenuousness'. Girard's description of *sincérité*, also quoted verbatim by Laveaux (1826), is given in (2). His focus is on the lack of deceit, but he also stresses the positive value of sincerity in interpersonal relationships.

- (2) *La **sincérité** empeche de parler autrement qu'on ne pense [...] Un homme **sincere** ne veut point tromper[...] La **sincérité** fait le plus grand mérite dans le commerce du cœur.*

Sincerity prevents one from speaking that which he does not think [...] A **sincere** man does not want to deceive at all [...] **Sincerity** is the greatest merit in the business of the heart.

In French, then, *sincérité* is defined as a positive quality of emotional honesty and openness. In contrast, the Spanish definitions of *sincero* continue for much longer the Latin connotations of purity as well as those of lack of guise or guile. The word was rare in the Middle Ages - perhaps the reason it was not included in the first Spanish monolingual dictionary, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Covarrubias Horozco 1611) - but is increasingly attested from the 17th century (Corominas and Pascual 1980). The definition of *sincero* given in (3) appeared in the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1726-1739) produced by the Real Academia Española (RAE), and this same definition appears in the 1780 first edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana*.

- (3) *puro, sencillo, y sin dobléz*
pure, simple, and without duplicity

Like their French counterparts, the Spanish dictionaries reference the idea of transparency without deception, but do not explicitly mention truth, emotion (the heart), or faith. In fact, truth ("veracidad"/"veraz") does not appear in Spanish dictionaries until the 10th edition of the RAE's dictionary (1852). By the end of the 19th century, however, the Spanish definition shows more of a resemblance to that of its French cognate. Some of this may in fact be due to influence from the French; Olive's (1896) *Diccionario de sinónimos de la lengua Castellana* contains a word-for-word translation of the synonyms discussed by Girard

(1740) and presented above in (2). In this work, “le plus grand mérite dans le commerce du cœur” is translated as “el grande resorte del corazon” [the great resource of the heart].⁴

We see from these definitions that by the end of the 19th century the idea of sincerity as simple purity or incorruptness has been lost in both languages. Instead, it is conceived of as indexing unwillingness or incapability to engage in either outright deceit or concealment of any kind. The latter, when interpreted as emotional openness, is considered to be a positive attribute in interpersonal relationships and, by extension, communication of the type we might see in personal letters. This definition of sincerity, however, is elaborated much earlier in the French texts. While actual usage may not correspond exactly with dictionary definitions, it seems clear that up through the mid-19th century the French *sincérité* had a broader semantic range than its Spanish counterpart. This broader semantic range may be expected to correlate with increased frequency: less specialized terms are available for use in more contexts, and at the same time increased usage may lead to reinterpretation of meaning.

3 Sincerity in the Bouligny corpus

3.1 Frequency

Within the larger lexical field of terms associated with sincerity (Table 1), the most frequent by far in the Bouligny corpus are those relating to affection and the heart, with a number of additional references to truth. In French, tokens of ‘sincerity’ are more frequent than any other expression, whereas in Spanish this is not the case. This suggests a greater prominence of the term in French than in Spanish, where formulations using alternative lexical items may be preferred (see Section 3.3; see also Williams this volume on linguistic and cultural differences in performative sincerity).

Table 1: Frequency of lexical items related to ‘sincerity’ in the Bouligny corpus⁵

| Word | French (21486 words) | Spanish (25639 words) |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sincerity | | |
| sincère, sincérité, sincèrement | 18 | |
| sincero, sinceridad, sinceramente | | 6 |
| Authenticity | | |
| authentique, authenticité, authentiquement | 1 | |
| auténtico, autenticidad, auténticamente | | 0 |

⁴ Olive died after finishing the letter ‘e’ of the dictionary and the rest was written by Santos Lopez Pelegrin. In an author’s note, the latter mentions having read the works of other Europeans, but not specifically Girard. Regardless, both authors appear to have borrowed freely from Girard without attribution (e.g. for *apoyo/sostenimiento/columna, fatal/funesto*), although some entries are either original or sourced elsewhere (e.g. *familia/casa*). An additional argument for French influence comes from the fact that the thesaurus was published in Paris by Garnier.

⁵ Adjectives are presented in this table in the masculine singular form; counts include feminine and plural variants. *Ex corde* is Latin but appears in letters written in Spanish.

| Honesty/truth/frankness | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| honnête, honnêteté, honnêtement | 4 | |
| honesto, honestidad, honestamente | | 0 |
| vrai, vérité, véritable, véritablement | 13 | |
| de veras, (en) verdad, verdadero, verdaderamente | | 16 |
| franc, franchise, franchement | 2 | |
| franco, franqueza, francamente | | 0 |
| Purity/simplicity/ingenuousness/naïveté | | |
| pur, pureté, purement | 1 | |
| puro, pureza, puramente | | 1 |
| simple, simplicité, simplement | 1 | |
| sencillo, sencillez, sencillamente | | 0 |
| ingénu, ingénuité, ingénument | 1 | |
| ingenuo, ingenuidad, ingenuamente | | 2 |
| naïf, naïveté | 0 | |
| Affection/love/heart | | |
| affectionné, affectueux, affection, affectueusement | 11 | |
| afecto; afectuoso, afecto, afectuosamente | | 40 |
| tendre, tendresse, tendrement | 8 | |
| cariñoso, cariño, cariñosamente | | 15 |
| amour | 2 | |
| amor | | 9 |
| cœur | 14 | |
| corazón | | 33 |
| ex corde | | 7 |

Table 2 shows the frequency of ‘sincerity’ (FR *sincère(s)*, *sincérité*, *sincèrement*; SP *sincero/a(s)*, *sinceridad*, *sinceramente*)⁶ in the 18th and 19th centuries, comparing the Bouligny corpus to large databases of documents from the period and a contemporaneous epistolary manual from each language.⁷ More specifically, the first category comprises the French and Spanish databases FRANTEXT (ATILF) and Corpus Diacrónico del Español (CORDE) (Real Academia Española).⁸ The second set of comparative data comes from the

⁶ There also exists in Spanish the verb *sincerar* which I have not included here as it does not appear in the Bouligny corpus, but a few reflexes may appear in the CORDE data as there is syncretism with the adjectival forms.

⁷ Although I am using these corpora to give an idea of general language use of the period, these databases are not necessarily representative and in particular a large proportion of the data included is from literary texts. Similarly, the epistolary manuals are each only a single example of what was a fairly prescriptive approach to the epistolary genre, at once a window into daily use and a document for instruction in proper etiquette. Epistolary manuals were common in the Romance languages from at least the 16th century and were copied, edited, and republished frequently (Chartier et al. 1997; García-Godoy 2012; Castillo Gómez 2014). The texts had a wide distribution, but we cannot say for certain whether they impacted particular individuals’ style of writing (Dauphin 2000: 9-10). These particular texts were chosen for their publication date in the middle of the period under study and their accessibility in digitized form.

⁸ Accessible online: www.frantext.fr and <http://corpus.rae.es/cordenet.html>.

epistolary manuals *Le nouveau secrétaire de la cour et du cabinet* (19th century) and *Nuevo estilo y formulario de escribir cartas misivas* (Begas 1808). Due to differences in corpus size, a normalized frequency of appearances per 10,000 words is presented alongside the overall frequencies and log likelihood tests of the significance of difference between the languages.⁹

Table 2: Frequencies of ‘sincerity’

| Texts | Frequency (per 10,000 words; total) | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | French | Spanish |
| FRANTEXT (1750-1850) | 0.65 (3806 /58721213) | |
| CORDE (1750-1850) | | 0.52 (1045 /19941845) |
| log likelihood | 38.54*** | |
| <i>Le nouveau secrétaire de la cour et du cabinet</i> (18??) | 4.44 (21 /47288) | |
| <i>Nuevo estilo y formulario de escribir cartas misivas</i> (Begas 1808) | | 4.21 (24 /56997) |
| log likelihood | 0.03 | |
| Boulogny letters (1748-1867) | 8.37 (18 /21486) | 2.34 (6 /25639) |
| log likelihood | 8.59* | |

It appears that in overall usage during this time period, as represented in the general databases FRANTEXT and CORDE, use of ‘sincerity’ was significantly higher in French than in Spanish, as we might expect given the apparently broader semantic range of the French term. Additionally, there is a significant genre effect across both languages: ‘sincerity’ appears between 6 and 8 times as often in the model epistolary documents as in the multi-genre corpora.¹⁰ There is no significant difference between the French and Spanish epistolary manuals, which is perhaps a function of the fact that the Begas manual was one of the more innovative of its time (García-Godoy 2012: 372). However, the fact that in both these epistolary texts and the Boulogny corpus we see more frequent mentions of sincerity than in the more general set of texts in CORDE and FRANTEXT suggests that there is something particular about the epistolary genre which lends itself to expressions of sincerity. This could be a result of the inherently interactional nature of letter-writing as compared to literature, for example, so speakers have more reason to mention their sincerity as part of building and maintaining relationships, but it is also likely indicative of generic convention as

⁹ The word counts for the manuals were calculated in Python from digitized versions of the manuscripts; log likelihoods calculated using the Log-likelihood calculator (UCREL; <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>); * = p < 0.01; ** = p < 0.001; *** = p < 0.0001.

¹⁰ French LL 44.87***; Spanish 57.58***.

the aforementioned performance of sincerity becomes part of standard epistolary practice, semantically broader, and thus more frequent (see Section 3.2).¹¹

In contrast to the epistolary manuals, the frequency of ‘sincerity’ differs greatly in the Bouligny corpus depending on the language of the text. For the French documents, ‘sincerity’ appears much more frequently than it does even in the French epistolary manual, whereas the opposite is true in Spanish. Of the 24 tokens in the corpus, only six are in Spanish. There is also a certain amount of individual variation (Table 3): although about a third of the speakers represented in the corpus use ‘sincerity’, a single speaker is responsible for a third (8) of the tokens overall, and a larger percentage of the French tokens. However, this translates to a rate of use of nearly once per letter, similar to the usage of many other speakers. For Marie Madelaine de Jesus, as well as for many others, the mention of sincerity appears as part of a set formula repeated with minor variations (see Section 3.2), and, given its frequency, indicates a certain formulaic usage considered to be a requisite part of the letter.

Table 3: Tokens of ‘sincerity’ by author¹²

| Author | Tokens /number of letters | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| | French | Spanish |
| French monolingual | | |
| M. Madelaine | 8/9 | |
| Seigne, Augustin | 1/6 | |
| others | 0/15 | |
| total | 9/30 | |
| French-dominant bilingual | | |
| Countess Galvez | 1/1 | |
| Marie Louise | 0/2 | 1/2 |
| others | 0/11 | 0/2 |
| total | 1/13 | 1/4 |
| Spanish-dominant bilingual | | |
| Bruna | 2/3 | |
| Count Galvez | 1/1 | |
| Joseph (with Juan II) | 3/1 | 0/20 |
| Juan III | | 2/6 |
| Lorenzo | 1/1 | 0/1 |
| Prudencia | 1/1 | 1/1 |
| Francisco II | 0/1 | 1/2 |
| others | 0/8 | 0/13 |

¹¹ As an anonymous reviewer points out, the choice of ‘sincerity’ specifically is not inevitable; cross-linguistically we see various types of politeness strategies developing into fixed epistolary formulae; for example, health formulae in Dutch (Rutten and van der Wal 2012) or the Spanish formulations discussed below.

¹² Dominant language was determined by place of birth, residence and occupation, and language of correspondence, both received and produced (Thomas 2017: 30). This 4-way division does of course obscure some variability in linguistic competence, and given the cultural prestige of French at the time it is likely that even those classified as Spanish monolingual had some knowledge of French.

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| total | 8/16 | 4/43 |
| Spanish monolingual | | |
| Joaquin | | 1/9 |
| others | | 0/2 |
| total | | 1/11 |
| Total | 18 | 6 |

Marie Madelaine, however, is not the only speaker to use ‘sincerity’, and in fact the group most likely to use it is bilingual speakers, specifically Spanish-dominant bilinguals, accounting for eight of the French tokens and four of those in Spanish. That is, speakers are choosing to use *sincère(s)*, *sincérité*, and *sincèrement*, but rarely their Spanish counterparts. This indicates that for the writers in this corpus, especially Spanish-speakers, sincerity was a part of epistolary writing - but specifically of *French* epistolary writing.

The rarity of Spanish tokens may be a question of time: the first attestation in this corpus is from 1818, and the only monolingual example dates from 1861. As we saw above, the semantic range and overall frequency of *sinceridad* was more limited than its French cognate, especially in the 18th century. It may be that with these later tokens we are seeing an incipient upswing in usage in the 19th century tied to changing conceptions of the word’s meaning, an upswing reflected in, or conceivably driven by, epistolary manuals such as those by Begas.¹³ In this case, however, the high rate of usage by bilingual speakers suggests that they are transferring an available French pattern to Spanish, where the broad range of meanings was not as available to monolingual speakers.

3.2 Emotion, honesty, and formulae

As mentioned above, many of the uses of the term ‘sincerity’ are part of a very similar pattern. As can be seen in Table 4, which presents the most common collocations in the corpus, it is in fact the case that ‘sincerity’ appears in very specific contexts. ‘Sincerity’ is most often used as a modifier, as we might expect from the frequency of adjectival forms (18/24 tokens). The pattern that emerges is threefold: firstly, that it appears most frequently alongside emotional terms relating to the writer-interlocutor relationship, such as friendship and affection. Secondly, this connection is dependent on the interlocutor’s trust and belief, invoked by doxastic terminology such as *assurance* ‘assurance’, *croire* ‘believe’, or *être persuadé(e)* ‘to be persuaded’. Finally, it appears quite frequently alongside an intensifier or another modifier, highlighting the fact that sincerity on its own may be seen to lack discursive force.

¹³ In fact, there appears to be an increase of the term in Spanish in general dating from the first half of the 19th century onwards: while the overall frequencies of sincerity in CORDE (seen in Table 2) are low; this turns out to be unevenly distributed between the 18th and 19th centuries. The frequency of use from 1750 to 1800 is 0.45 per 10,000 words (391/8767915); whereas in the periods from 1800 to 1850 and 1850 to 1900, the frequency jumps to 0.63 per 10,000 words (752/11862759 and 2065/32736180, respectively).

Table 4: Collocations of ‘sincerity’

| | Collocation | French | Spanish |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Modifier | | | |
| | none (standalone) | 3 | 0 |
| | friendship | 8 | 1 |
| | attachment/affection | 4 | 2 |
| | compliments/respects/wishes | 2 | 2 |
| | feelings/sentiments | 2 | 0 |
| | recognition/gratitude | 1 | 1 |
| Modified | | | |
| | paired with another modifier (e.g. ‘perfect’) | 5 | 0 |
| | intensifier (e.g. <i>très</i>) | 5 | 0 |
| | assurance/proof/belief (e.g. <i>ne douter, croire</i>) | 12 | 1 |

These elements are not mutually exclusive and all can even be combined in a single phrase, as is the case in (4). In this example, the nun Marie Madelaine has referenced both attachment and friendship, describing them as both respectful and sincere. In so doing, she claims a certain type of relationship with Bouligny and his wife, one where she is humble and deferential as well as emotionally open. It is an offering of sorts, a positioning of the self as one who comes in good faith and with an open heart which may then be accepted by the interlocutor. At the same time, the way this is expressed appears to be fairly conventionalized in the French documents, for both Marie Madelaine and other authors in this corpus as well as the epistolary manual. The large degree of similarity of context across the tokens points to the existence of a stock phrase with a small number of elements which can be substituted or inserted to produce variations on a theme.

- (4) *Permettez que Madame votre chere Epouse reçoive ici les Assurance du plus respectueux et **Sincere** attachement et amitié pour elle*
 Permit that Madame your dear wife receives here the assurances of the most respectful and **sincere** attachment and friendship for her
 (M. Madelaine, 1792, HNOC MSS 171 F 70)

In addition to the fairly restricted semantic context, additional signs also point to the specialization, if not the fossilization, of this use of sincerity: its position within the letter, socio-pragmatic text type (Bergs 2004), and the writer-addressee relationship of the letters where it is used. Mentions of ‘sincerity’ in this corpus nearly always appear in the closing of the letter; the few exceptions appear in the opening formulae. If sincerity were part of the communicative content of the letter, we might expect to see it more frequently in the body of the letters. However, the fact that it only appears in the transition to or from the main content suggests that a claim of ‘sincerity’ is being used metalinguistically to draw attention to the presentation and authorial intention of the text rather than the information contained therein. This appeal to the trustworthiness and emotional openness of the interlocutor situates

sincerity not in the content or even the way the letter is written, but squarely in the communicative relationship between the author and the addressee. This separation is explicitly laid out in (5), where the author describes real-world feelings, makes a metalinguistic claim about the authenticity of those feelings, and separates both from the physical form of the letter or language used.

- (5) *je vous prie de ne pas faire attention à la manière dont j'écris, mais de croire à la **sincérité** des sentiments douloureux que nous éprouvons à cause de l'irréparable perte que vous venez de faire.*

I ask that you do not pay attention to the way that I write, but believe in the **sincerity** of the painful feelings that we are experiencing because of the irreparable loss you have just suffered.

(Prudencia, 1867, HNOC MSS 103 F22)

Second, the letters containing tokens of 'sincerity' are frequently those letters expressing condolence, as in (5), congratulations, thanks, or those making a request.¹⁴ This type of letter is more constrained as to both form and content than a descriptive letter relating family news might be. For example, Marie Madelaine's letters to her godson Ursino Boulogny and his parents, seen above in (4), tend to be short and somewhat repetitive, containing ritual expressions of goodwill for the new year, reminders to fulfil religious obligations, or requests for donations. The frequent presence of appeals to sincerity in this text type indicates a formalization in usage as it is seen to be a component of this more structured format. A related effect can be seen with the use of second-person pronouns. While all the letters in the corpus are classified as personal correspondence, the type and intimacy of the relationship between the interlocutors varies. We see use of 'sincerity' almost exclusively in those letters where the relationship is more distant, for example in-laws, cousins, or colleagues; a distance generally encoded in the use of the formal pronoun (*vous*, *usted/vuestra merced*).¹⁵ That is, overall, 'sincerity' appears in contexts where the speakers are not intimate acquaintances, in specific communicative contexts, and even then, it is restricted to specific locations in the text.

The limited number and type of contexts as well as the relatively high frequency points to a fixing of the expression of 'sincerity', indexing honesty and authenticity of the communication and of the relationship between interlocutors, as part of a closing formula available to speakers of French during this time period. As the term is used more frequently as part of a *formule de politesse* 'closing formula' (literally, 'politeness formula'), it can be seen less as an expression of true feeling or honesty, and more as a pragmatic move pointing to the desire to express an emotional - or at its extreme, simply civil - relationship with the interlocutor. As a final step, this pragmatic meaning could be weakened further, to the point where the expression of sincerity becomes simply an empty textual element marking the end

¹⁴ In Bergs' (2004: 213) rather broad typology, these might correspond generally to the phatic and request categories, with the latter serving a more appellative (conative) function.

¹⁵ Two of the three exceptions, all in Spanish, are along the lines of the example in (6), where in fact the 'sincere respects' are addressed to a third party, who can be considered a secondary addressee of the letter, and who would most likely be addressed with the formal pronoun.

of the letter. If the mention of sincerity can be interpreted as simply a politeness marker, or the presentation of oneself as being sincere without actually being so, speakers may adopt strategies to counter this possible interpretation. This may explain the fact that ‘sincerity’ very rarely appears alone, as well as the high frequency of intensifiers and the presence of doxastic verbs, which reinforce the discursive force of the formulae and emphasize the trust implicit in the communication between author and addressee.

3.3 Spanish and French: different strategies?

The few tokens of ‘sincerity’ in the Spanish documents appear in much the same context as in French. Although ‘sincerity’ is not combined with intensifiers or other modifiers as in the French half of the corpus - perhaps because it is not fixed enough to need reinforcement - it does collocate with terms of affection and emotion in much the same way. This encoding of emotional connection is made explicit in the Spanish example shown in (6), a letter from Juan III to his cousin Domingo. In this case, ‘sinceros respetos’ appears in a series of parallel constructions along with ‘afectuosos recuerdos’ and ‘muchos cariños’, each directed at a different recipient: Juan III’s aunt, his cousin (the addressee of the letter), and the addressee’s children. This parallelism of structure suggests a certain synonymy of elements serving the same meta-textual function and only differentiated by degree of formality. Here, sincerity is associated with the person shown the most respect, whereas the equal or lower-status addressees are more explicitly accorded love.

- (6) *Ofrece mis **sinceros** respetos a la tia, con afectuosos recuerdos a tu mujer y muchos cariños a los niños.*
Offer my **sincere** respects to my aunt, with affectionate remembrances to your wife and much love to the children.
(Juan III, 1818, HNOC MSS 171 F 123)

In the Spanish example in (7), ‘sincerity’ again appears in a similar context: alongside *amistad* and the formal pronoun, in a letter classified as a request. However, in this case, ‘sincerity’ was not originally included in the letter, but rather inserted into the second draft. This insertion may indicate that the author perceived a need to emphasize the strength and honesty of her emotions beyond the original text. By explicitly mentioning sincerity, she underscores the authenticity of the author-addressee relationship as a way of maintaining the idea - perhaps the polite fiction - that the closeness of the claimed emotional connection excuses the gaucheness of requesting financial assistance. However, her choice of insertion could also be influenced by a much more established French pattern. This formula of ‘sincere friendship’ which is so frequent in the speakers of this corpus would logically be readily available to a French-dominant bilingual such as Marie Louise, and arguably to the Spanish-dominant Juan III in (6). These possibilities are not mutually exclusive; the existence of the French pattern as part of a bilingual speaker’s repertoire (Matras 2009:7) allows him or her to adopt the cognate form for pragmatic effect in Spanish.

- (7) *siento en sumo grado de que la larga distancia en que nos hallamos nos tenga privados de cultivar y estrechar personalmente la amistad ^sincera^ que os profesará siempre su apasionada amiga y Servidora*
 I am very sorry that the large distance at which we find ourselves prevents us from cultivating and personally strengthening the ^sincere^ friendship that your passionate friend and servant will always profess to you
 (Marie Louise, 1818, HNOC MSS 171 F 119)

Although ‘sincerity’ appears in similar contexts in both languages for bilingual speakers, the low frequency in Spanish does indicate a difference between the two languages, especially given the fact that monolingual speakers almost never use ‘sincerity’. This difference can be seen in (8), where a letter from Joaquin to his cousin (8a) is paired with an unsigned contemporaneous translation into French (8b):¹⁶

- (8)
- a. *procuraré ir á presentar à U^d personalmente la seguridad de mi cariño, y entre tanto ruego à U^d que acepte los mas afectuosos recuerdos de mi familia, y que ofreciendo los à su esposo é hijos me considere siempre su mas afecto primo y amigo Q.B.S.M.*
 I will be able to go to personally present to you the certainty of my affection, and meanwhile I beg that you accept the most affectionate remembrances from my family, and that offering them to your husband and children you consider me always your most fond cousin and friend [who kisses your hand]
 (Joaquin, 1866, HNOC MSS 103 F21)
- b. *j’irais vous presenter mes plus sinceres amities En attendant recevez les souvenirs Les plus affectueux de ma famille, comme aussi à votre Mari et Enfants et croyes moi le plus sincere ami et Cousin.*
 I would present to you my most sincere regards while waiting receive the most affectionate remembrances from my family, and also to your husband and children and believe me the most sincere friend and cousin.
 (Unknown translator, HNOC MSS 103 F21)

In the original Spanish, monolingual Spanish-speaker Joaquin does not include the word ‘sincere’, but the translator uses it twice.¹⁷ It is clear that at least for this speaker, the French *sincère* encompassed the Spanish terms *seguridad* ‘certainty’, and *afecto* ‘fond’. This points to the increased frequency and conventionality of the word in French, where it is available as a catchall to express honesty, trustworthiness, and emotional connection. However, the narrower range of ‘sincerity’ in Spanish, reflected also in the dictionary definitions which are tightly focused on lack of duplicity, means that Spanish speakers are

¹⁶ While the reasons this text was translated are not specified, it is likely that the addressee, Marie Daron, did not read Spanish. This is suggested by the fact that another of her correspondents switches to writing letters in French, while also apologizing for her language (example 5), after the two had likely met in person.

¹⁷ These two tokens are not included in the quantitative analysis above.

using other words to index affection and authenticity. In the same contexts where ‘sincerity’ appears in the French documents, namely closing formulae of letters such as Joaquin’s which use the formal second person pronoun, we see instead references to truth and affection as the formula of choice.

Besides these explicit mentions, there are a number of other strategies Spanish-speaking authors use to express emotional connection and honesty in the ‘sincerity’ context. The most common closing formulae for Spanish letters using the formal pronoun include a version of one or both of the following phrases, variants of which appear in (9): *Dios guarde muchos años* ‘God keep [you] many years’ and *Que besa su mano* ‘who kisses your hand’. The latter also appears in the Spanish letter in (8), but is left out of the French translation. In example (9), these formulae cooccur with mentions of friendship (*amigo*), certainty (*seguro*), and passion or devotion (*apassionado*). As is clear from the prevalence of abbreviations, these expressions are highly formulaic. The former, which also appears frequently on the outside of letters, is consistent with the larger role that religion played in daily life in late modern Spain and its colonies. For instance, it was also very common to place a cross on the outside as well as the inside of a letter, at the top of the page (García Sánchez 2014: 439), and this is true of most of the Spanish letters in this corpus. Many of the letter-writers, even French-dominant ones, fill their Spanish letters with religious symbols and references, in a way that even the French-speaking Ursuline nun Marie Madeleine does not.

- (9) *N^{ro}. S^{or}. Guardé la vida de vm. los m^s. a^s. que pido. [...] BLM. â vñ. su mas seguro apassionado serb^{or}. y amigo*
 May [our] [lord] watch over your life for the [many] [years] I ask him to. [...]
 Your most certain and devoted servant and friend [kisses your hand]
 (Athanese de Mézières, 1772, LaRC 600 B 3 F 37)

The gesture of kissing the recipient’s hand is a metaphor for the physical act of leave-taking and stands here as a way of exiting the epistolary world (Laitinen and Nordlund 2012). It suggests a respectful obedience, while the mention of God invokes a shared cultural and religious context associated with trust and truth. Although it does not refer directly to the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors, this prayer does serve as a claim that the author is interested in the addressee’s well-being and positions the two of them together as faithful members of the same religion (cf De Toni this volume; Shvanyukova this volume) within the very Catholic cultural context of late modern Spain.

‘Sincerity’ in French and the two above phrases in Spanish appear to be the preferred closing formulas to indicate truth and interest in the addressee in the less intimate private letters in this corpus. For closer relationships, however, particularly family members who may address each other as *tu/tú*, many speakers prefer a more metaphorical allusion to the emotional relationship through reference to the ‘heart’. This is the case in (10), where *corazón* ‘heart’ appears alongside an appeal to truth. In fact, it also appears in the French letters, if much less frequently, suggesting the ‘heart’ metaphor was available in both languages as an expression of emotional connection. Joseph Bouligny even uses a Latin version, *ex corde* ‘from the heart’ to sign off many of his letters to his brother.

- (10) *quedo de todas veras su hermana de Corazon*
 I remain with all truth your sister from the heart
 (Theresa, 1770, HNOC MSS 103 F 6)

The use of ‘heart’ is not surprising; given its common association with emotional connection and the fact that it appears in the French dictionary and thesaurus entries for ‘sincerity’ from the time period, we might expect it as an option for expressing emotional openness. Although they do not appear in the 18th and 19th Spanish dictionary definitions, expressions containing *corazón* - as well as those with roots such as *verdad* ‘truth’, *honesto* ‘honest’ - can be included in the sphere of discourse modalizers expressing sincerity in modern Spanish (González Ruiz 2005: 211). Spanish speakers in the Boulogny corpus prefer mention of honesty, affection, religion, or metaphors of leave-taking to explicit mentions of ‘sincerity’, with an additional split conditioned by formality.

4 Discussion

The very act of insisting on one’s sincerity can paradoxically cause the reader to suppose the opposite; that the speaker is in fact dishonest, concealing something, or feeling something different to what he professes. It becomes so impossible to express one’s authentic emotions and not come across as simply being courteous or formulaic that sometimes the only recourse is to refuse to say anything at all, as Juan III claims to do in (11). This refusal to profess feelings paradoxically conveys a stronger message of sincerity and emotional engagement by first breaking with convention and then calling attention to the act of doing so.

- (11) *Si, mi Querido Domingo, tu noble conducta queda gravada en mi corazon de un modo indeleble, q^e. no pretendo expresar temeroso de debilitar en esta pintura los sentimientos q^e . has sabido inspirarme, y ofender tu modestia. Sea p^s mi silencio el interprete mas cierto de mi eterno agradecimiento*
 Yes, my dear Domingo, your noble conduct stays engraved in my heart in an indelible way, [which] I do not try to express afraid of weakening in this portrayal the feelings [that] you have been able to inspire in me, and offend your modesty.
 [So] let my silence be the truest interpreter of my eternal thanks
 (Juan III, 1818, HNOC MSS 171 F 123)

However, in most other cases, speakers wishing to be seen as sincere - that is, truthful, emotionally open, and authentic - do seek to express it. A claim of sincerity allows speakers to behave as though all parties are operating in good faith as a way of claiming an interpersonal relationship and facilitating the other communicative goals of the written interaction. This understanding of operating in good faith is similarly present in the Spanish construction of addressee and interlocutor as faithful members of the Catholic community but rooted in particularly Spanish cultural traditions. These strategies rely upon a shared awareness of epistolary conventions as well as shared rules of politeness in interaction.

The word ‘sincerity’ itself, with these implications, can be seen to be a part of French epistolary writing and accepted as common practice therein. Definitions from contemporaneous dictionaries and thesauruses show that its meaning encompasses both truth and emotional openness, while the same is not true of the Spanish cognate at the time. Both monolingual and bilingual speakers writing in Spanish use separate terms to denote affection and honesty, while those writing in French reinforce or expand upon the term ‘sincerity’ through slight modifications of the available formula with intensifiers and additional terms denoting affectionate relationships.

The speakers who rely the most heavily on the French formula of sincerity are those with less education or facility in writing French: the less practiced Marie Madelaine and bilingual speakers who are Spanish-dominant. Authors with less practice in epistolary composition have been shown to rely more heavily on formulae to expediate their letter-writing, especially because it provides a reliable structure which can be used as “scaffolding” for the writer’s content (Elspaß 2012: 56; Rutten and van der Wal 2012; Tamošiūnaitė this volume). The same principle appears to apply to bilingual speakers writing in their non-dominant language, especially in formal contexts. However, bilingual speakers are also then able to transfer this formula - or at least the greater semantic range of ‘sincerity’ - from French to Spanish; a creative use of linguistic and formulaic resources. This transfer may have also been happening at other levels: it appears that Spanish dictionary- and thesaurus-writers were reading, if not translating, French texts, and letter-writing manuals could conceivably have undergone similar influence (cf. Sandersen 2007: 275-276). Influence of the prestigious French language at these levels as well as the widespread cultural prevalence of the concept of sincerity in Western Europe at the time may all have been factors contributing to the changing meaning and increased frequency of *sincero* in 19th century Spanish. Regardless, for these bilingual speakers, ‘sincerity’ was a part of their overall letter-writing repertoire and available to be used in Spanish in the contexts where other speakers might reference truth or friendship.

In more intimate letters, speakers appear to avoid this formula, and instead use other methods of validating the relationship between the interlocutors. In many cases this is a reference to the heart or to the social or genetic ties linking them as part of the same family, despite the physical distance. Or, as Juan III does, they lament that the codified formulae which others use as shorthand to perform sincerity fall woefully short of expressing their true feelings.

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