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Speech Act Set in TripAdvisor Conflictive Exchanges: a Contrastive Pragmatic Analysis between Spanish and Italian

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Abstract

In the present article, taking a 'polylogal' perspective, we carry out a cross-linguistic analysis of speech act sets in conflictive exchanges (SASCs) on TripAdvisor (TA) in Spanish and Italian. These exchanges involve, on one hand, reviewer opinions concerning hospitality and travel experiences and, on the other, hospitality/travel-industry representative responses to form a review-response pair that is part of a polylogue with other TA users. These exchanges are characterised as potentially conflictive since, where travellers rate their experiences as poor, this micro-act of complaint may be responded to in a more or less confrontational fashion with hospitality-industry representatives responding in ways that either encourage, minimise, or avoid conflict.

Our research is based on a total of 1,000 TripAdvisor (TA) posts forming two sub-corpora (Spanish and Italian) each of 500 review-response pairs where users gave opinions concerning their experiences of certain hotels or restaurants and were responded to by representatives from these hotels or restaurants. Our objective is to analyse these SASCs in order to identify a) the different categories of SASCs used in, firstly, reviews (opposition) and, secondly, in responses (reactions); b) to what extent

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each of these categories are used; c) if there is variation between the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora in terms of the use of different types of SASCs in opposition and reaction, and finally, d) how this variation might be related to sociocultural factors in the two sub-corpora. Data show several dissimilarities between the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora in terms of communication strategies used on the TA platform. For example, Italian hotel/restaurant representatives adopted a confrontational style using mostly unmitigated disagreement, acts of disqualification or self-praise while, in contrast, Spanish respondents were more supportive using mostly convivial acts, mitigating supportive moves and linguistic strategies.

Besides giving a range of insights into cross-cultural variation in digital communication strategies, this work also provides a methodological model for the analysis of macro conflictive speech acts and their modification strategies. It is hoped that this model will prove useful in future research concerning digital communication, especially TA exchanges.

Keywords

conflictive speech act set – TripAdvisor platform – cross-linguistic pragmatic analysis

1 Introduction

The growing use of social media in all spheres of public and private life has led to a change in the relationships between service users and providers in many service sectors. This in turn has seen the emergence of new modes of, and formulae for, communication in sectors such as tourism.

A survey carried out by Google in November 2021 revealed that travellers from the US who undertook a major trip in 2020 spent approximately 71% of their trip-planning time searching for information online. In addition, more than half (57%) of those surveyed used an online source as inspiration for their trip. A further Google/Storyline Strategies report suggests that travellers now tend to consider cultural engagement as a key factor when deciding on a holiday destination, with 86% of travellers reporting going abroad for this reason alone. In this way, numerous online forums now exist on which service users post about their personal experiences, recommending or complaining about products and services to help guide others; the travel industry is no exception.

It is in this context that TripAdvisor (TA) was set up and the forum has grown considerably in recent years to become a benchmark for the online tourism industry due to its high number of users and the volume of reviews generated.

The opinions presented in these TA reviews have come to transcend their original purpose of simple information provision to achieve the status of acts of advice and guidance for future travellers. Thus, TA has become the focus of research interest in various sectors such as tourism, economics, informatics, and, indeed, linguistics. However, compared to the body of research in economics and tourism related fields, to date, linguistic studies of TA are scarce. Of those studies that do exist we would highlight several contrastive studies by Cenni and Goethals (2017, 2020, 2021) reviewing the structures and moves comprising positive and negative opinions in various languages (English, German, and Italian) as well as Napolitano's (2018) work analysing the moves found in responses to complaints comparing those on the English and Italian TA platforms, and Márquez Reiter, Hidalgo Downing, and Iveson's work examining online reviews and hotel responses of Spanish Caribbean hotel chains, focusing attention on interculturality. Single language studies of TA include that of Vásquez (2011) who considered how English-speaking users made complaints in reviews posted on the platform; that of Suau Jiménez (2017) studying the construction of subjectivity using interpersonal markers in English; and those of Mancera Rueda (2017) and Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán (2021) both exploring attenuation strategies in Spanish complaints.

In this work we aim to add to the field of comparative speech act research comparing complaint realisation strategies on the Spanish and Italian TA platforms. To this end, we will provide an overview of TA reviews in Spanish and Italian, considering these as directive speech act sets comprising, for example, suggestions, advice or warnings (Hernández Toribio and Mariottini, 2016, 2018) paying special attention to how certain speech acts in the set constitute attenuating external modifiers of the directive head act. Furthermore, while previous studies provide a firm basis for the speech act set approach to TA reviews, we intend to move the discussion into the area of conflict language. This is a novel area of research in that the existing research into online conflictive interactions (c.f. Lorenzo-Dus et al. (2011) and Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2014) on YouTube; Marcoccia (2004) on newsgroups; and Khazraie, Talebzadeh (2020) on Wikipedia), while extensive, has not, as yet, addressed exchanges on TA.

Like other online data, those extracted from TA are especially interesting for pragma-discourse analysts, because they represent *authentic data* (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), unmediated by transcription processes and not subject to the so-called observer paradox. For these reasons, TA represents an ideal – and, to date, under explored – forum for investigating unelicited *conflictive exchanges* from a *crosslinguistic perspective*.

Turning to the dynamics of TA exchanges, here, we must recognise that both initial review posts (a) and their respective responses (b) are oriented not only towards the other coparticipant in the interaction but also towards TA readers: including potential travellers for whom the reviews posted become a directive speech act set (suggestions, recommendations/advice, or warnings) as well as representatives of the tourist and hospitality establishments being reviewed. As Goffman (1981) would put it, the ratified participants in the conversation are numerous and thus, TA is a platform for polylogic exchange (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014), that is, "communicative situations which gather together several participants" (Kerbrat-Orrecchioni, 2004: 3).

In addition, the platform is constantly evolving: the move from web 2.0 to web 3.0 in 2019 saw its original community of travellers joined by brands, influencers, publishers, and friends. As a result, travellers can now connect with a range of like-minded people, including content creators, to share information in line with their interests. In addition, as members of TA, users can create and view new multimodal content such as photos, videos or articles either privately or publicly, while TA's travel section allows members to discover relevant information more quickly in the travel-planning phase of their trip and to get help from their friends, family, and trusted experts. Thus, for travellers, TA provides a personalised service organised around the consumer's experience (Hernández Toribio and Mariottini, 2023). To meet the needs of service providers, on the other hand, the platform recently launched *TripAdvisor Insights*, which "acts as a direct source of news, tips, latest trends, industry research and statistics".

However, despite the potential multi-party nature of interactions on TA (a feature common to many online platforms), we will limit ourselves to a consideration of adjacent review-response pairs, that is:

> a) review posts containing an initiating interactional move by a traveller expressing opinions that would be considered potentially conflictive, that is, raising complaints and/or making negative assessments, and,
> b) the corresponding response, from the respective hotel or restaurant representative, that might be more or less conciliatory or conflictive.

The conflict potential of the former lies in the reviewer's expression of dissatisfaction and as such they comprise speech act sets centred around head acts of, for instance, criticism or reprimand which might be more or less attenuated (Koczogh, 2014; Decock and Spiessens, 2017). This conflict potential, however, is only activated by the response. TA own support pages tell us:

"TripAdvisor allows business representatives to post one response to each review. This feature lets you respond to the review and tell your side of the story. Your management response will appear alongside the review it refers to, so that travellers can read both perspectives" (https://www.tripadvisorsupport.com/en-GB/hc/owner/articles/347). This telling of their side of the story, while it might contain head acts of thanks, and especially apology, may also contain disagreement and even disqualification of the reviewer's opinions. Here then, responses are communicative moves, or sequences of moves (c.f.: Cenni and Goethals (2020: 2) referring to Swales's work (1981) describing responses as a "sequence of 'moves', where a move is a stretch of text serving a particular communicative function") responsible for activating the conflict potential of the reviewer's complaint and/or negative assessments expressed in their post. Consider the following example:

(1) REVIEW
Mediocre
El gym tiene una bici y una cinta, abierto en horarios limitados. Desayuno pobre, fruta en mal estado, abre tarde especialmente los fines de semanas y muchas veces de manera impuntual. La lavandería es Mediocre, el planchado es malo y el servicio no disponible sábado y domingo. La habitación súper oscura, deprimente.

RESPONSE
Estimado Julián.
Gracias por hospedarse con nosotros en su visita a Barcelona.
Lamentamos que su experiencia no haya cubierto sus expectativas.
Informarle que nuestro gym está abierto todo el día, desde las 7 am hasta las 23 hs. y, si nos solicitan extenderlo, no hay ningún problema.
Nuestro buffet de desayunos es muy variado y de alta calidad.
También, el servicio de lavandería está disponible todos los días del año.
Referente a la oscuridad de la habitación, la reserva era para una del tipo Dúplex, pero en caso de que no se encuentra a gusto, le podríamos haber dado una superior, situada en una planta más alta. No dude en consultar con nuestro equipo.
Reciba un saludo cordial. Atentamente.

Here, although the hotel's representative thanks the reviewer and apologises, s/he does not share the reviewer's opinion about the hotel's facilities and contradicts their words using various explanations. This expression of outright

disagreement with the reviewer's opinion on several counts thus opens the possibility for conflict.

In the present article, we provide a contrastive pragmatics analysis of speech act sets in these conflictive exchanges (SASCs), addressing the following questions:

a) What types of illocutionary speech act sets are found in this corpus of TA reviews and responses?
b) To what extent are they used?
c) Is there variation in the use of SASCs in reviews and responses between the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora?

2 Theoretical Framework

Conflict situations may be caused by many different factors, but always imply a clash of interests or intentions between two or more people, pursuing two or more incompatible objectives or interests (D'Errico et al., 2015). In such situations, an interlocutor can pursue various goals: to force the addressee to act in a certain way; to prevent an action; to comply with a specific behaviour; or bring the addressee to a certain psychological state; among others. To achieve these goals, "a speaker may even employ a communicative strategy that deliberately creates social conflict with the addressee, thus causing disharmony between the interlocutors" (Limberg, 2009: 1376). Thus, conflict arises precisely "through actions that disagree with or oppose a position a prior speaker has taken up, resist or try to change a course of action, disaffiliate from the prior speaker, challenge knowledge and rights to know or complain about or criticise a co-present party" (Glenn, 2019: 220–221). Therefore, conflictive speech acts cannot be studied in isolation, but rather at an interactive and social level that considers the principle of conversational preference. Utterances produced by participants in a given conversation prompt the formulation of a second utterance which is dependent on the first but comprises a set of non-equivalent options some of which will be preferred over others.

As Pomerantz (1984: 62–63) points out, when a speaker formulates an assessment (as in the speech acts of praising, complaining, insulting, bragging, self-deprecation, or complementing, for example), they are inviting their interlocutor to agree or disagree. Furthermore, while an initial assessment provides for the relevance of the recipient's reply, it may be structured to convey "preferred and dispreferred next actions" (1984: 63). By and large, what would be considered a preferred or dispreferred next action in response to a given initial

assessment is linked to verbal (im)politeness with the former being related to the maintenance of sociability and the latter viewed as impolite, hurtful, or wrong. Thus, while preferred responses tend to generate solidarity, dispreferred responses form the basis for conflict exchanges. In this work, then, we shall consider two-part exchanges in which the initial assessment (1) comprises a complaint followed by the next actions (2) of disagreement and even disqualification (dispreferred), or alternatively, the actions of agreement or apology (preferred):

1. Initial assessment: the speech act set of *complaining*.
Complaining has received considerable attention from the pragmatics perspective both in face-to-face interaction (c.f.: studies by Sacks, 1992; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; among others) and more recently, online (Olshtain and Treger, 2023). A complaint can be defined as a speech act in which the speaker expresses disapproval or negative feelings such as displeasure or annoyance in reaction to a past or ongoing action performed by the complaint recipient, who is held responsible (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987: 195; Trosborg, 1995: 311–312). In this way, as Leech (1983) highlights, complaints often involve speech acts such as threats, accusations, curses, and reprimands; thus, their function should be considered as conflictive.

Furthermore, the complaint should be considered as both an expressive and a directive speech act. As Searle (1969) discusses, complaints fall into the group of expressive acts insofar as they express a speaker's psychological state, i.e., feelings of discontent, disapproval, or dissatisfaction with a situation or the behaviour of others (Heineman and Traverso, 2009: 2381). Yet, by complaining, the speaker seeks to alter or gain redress for whatever situation or behaviour they have deemed unacceptable. Therefore, complaint is a directive act whereby the speaker imposes their will on the interlocutor who is required to perform remedial action. In this way, the complaints studied here would be expected to trigger two types of response from the hotels and restaurants they are aimed at: dissent and rejection of the complaint, or agreement and acceptance of the criticism.

2. Next actions (move or speech acts set) generated by the complaint: *agreement*, *disagreement* or even *disqualification*.

Having described complaints as conflictive acts, it is perhaps more accurate to consider conflict as an "interpreting process" (Bou-Franch and Garcés Conejos, 2014: 23). Taking this perspective, it is not the action (the initial assessment resulting in the production of a complaint) that triggers conflict but rather the opposition to it, that is, the next action involving disagreement or disqualification.

The formulas through which explicit disagreement is manifested are diverse (Kreutel, 2007; Maíz Arévalo, 2014) including next actions such as negative evaluations and accusations (Decock and Spiessens, 2017: 93); contradictory statements (Koczogh, 2014: 149; Decock and Spiessens, 2017: 93); explanations and requests for clarification (Maíz Arévalo, 2014: 445–446; Maíz Arévalo, 2014: 216–217); clarifications of the speakers' meaning (Koczogh, 2014: 151); accusations (Decock and Spiessens, 2017: 93); listing services, or reprimanding (Vanderveken, 1990: 179; Dozie and Otagburuagu, 2019: 33).

Furthermore, and of particular relevance to our study, disagreement can acquire different degrees, that is, it may be more or less softened or reinforced being described as "strong or weak for sequential reasons" (Pomerantz, 1984); "softened"; "neither softened nor reinforced" or "reinforced" (Koczogh, 2014; Wang et al., 2022); or in terms of "strong forms"; "strong yet mitigated forms" and "mitigated forms" (Kakavá, 1993). Thus we find that "different types of acts of disagreement are identified depending on whether the act of disagreement is softened/mitigated or reinforced/aggravated" (Decock and Spiessens, 2017: 92), for example, depending on whether the disagreement act co-occurs with acts of agreement (Pomerantz, 1984), or on the types of supportive moves that accompany the head act through which the disagreement is executed. For instance, disagreement may be weakened by being preceded by some form of symbolic agreement such as an apology. On the one hand then, we find disagreement forms involving a *dissent head act* and on the other, those involving an *apology head act*.

In the first case, where dissent forms the head act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), other accompanying speech acts function as either mitigating or intensifying supportive moves. If dissent is reinforced rather than mitigated, the disagreement conveyed is strong and thus conflict can be intensified, as in our corpus where dissent was accompanied, for example, by insults directed at the complainer's own behaviour or personal idiosyncrasies. In the second case, where the disagreement speech act set contains an apology head act, this suggests the complaint has been accepted; the inclusion of other speech acts such as greeting, thanks, or reiterations of the apology then function to intensify the original apology and mitigate any dissent expressed. However, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) point out, the person issuing an apology will not always be responsible for whatever offence is being complained about thus, s/he may not feel obliged to apologise. Moreover, the apology may be an automatic response when an actual or potential threat has transgressed an unwritten social norm and also as a reaction to a speaker's disappointment. In this way, an apology might not reflect genuine feelings of regret or remorse, but rather the need to or appropriateness of satisfying a social expectation (Norrick, 1978; Yu Liu, 2015). Apologies are thus to some extent

acts of normative politeness or convivial acts (Leech, 1983) that on one hand contribute to the maintenance or harmonious development of social relations and, on the other play an important role as acts of self-face work by the complaint recipient (Hernández Flores, 2013).

Disagreement then, whether softened or strengthened, is often far from being a simple speech act, rather, like complaining it should be viewed as a speech act set in which a variety of communicative moves of very different natures co-occur. This is explored in section 4 where we give examples from the corpus involving: a) head acts of disagreement comprising expressive and assertive speech acts (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989); b) supportive moves comprising a variety of other speech acts; c) the use of expressive speech acts such as thanking, apologising and greeting as mitigating external modifiers; d) the use of commissive speech acts, also with an attenuating function.

3 Methodology and Corpus Analysis

This research is based on the analysis of a corpus of Spanish and Italian conflict exchanges in TA; specifically, 500 adjacent pairs (250 pairs for each language considered; 1,000 individual posts) comprising traveller reviews containing complaints and their corresponding responses from hotel/restaurant representatives involving disagreement or disqualification. To make the two sub-corpora maximally comparable and valid, we considered reviews in each language concerning hotels and restaurants in three big cities in Italy: Milan, Rome, and Naples for Italy; and Spain: Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville. Furthermore, to ensure the sample was as representative as possible, we collected no more than 5 conflict exchanges for each hotel or restaurant and limited the time span for data collection to a period from January 2019 to December 31, 2022.

Other variables taken into account in the configuration of the corpus include a) review rating category and b) platform ranking of the hotel/restaurant (top, intermediate, and bottom). In the case of the former, although the TA platform has five available rating categories (*excellent*, *very good*, *average*, *poor*, *terrible*), we chose reviews based on an amalgamated set of categories: the best (*excellent* and *very good*); the middle (*average*); and the worst (*poor* and *terrible*). In the case of the latter, in each corpus, hotel/restaurants were selected from each of the three rankings, see Table 1:

TABLE 1 Hotel and restaurant rankings

	Restaurants			Hotels		
	Best	**Middle**	**Worst**	**Best**	**Middle**	**Worst**
Spanish corpus (250 pairs)	41	42	42	41	42	42
Italian corpus (250 pairs)	41	42	42	41	42	42

Analysis was carried out manually, annotating a) types of speech acts (expressive, directive, assertive, and commissive) both in reviews and responses; b) the strategies and linguistic resources used to execute the macro-acts of complaint and disagreement, which give rise to the conflict. We also used the AntConc (Anthony, 2005) program for the quantification of specific linguistics resources used.

In what follows, we will first present the creation of a model for the analysis and cataloguing of conflict triggering speech acts in TA reviews (Figure 1), as well as those contained in the corresponding TA responses (Figure 2) in both Spanish and Italian. This model also systematises the most important linguistic structures appearing in the corpus with the functions of either conflict mitigation or conflict escalation (Figures 3 and 4). In this way, our analytical model includes, on the one hand, the types of speech acts performed as part of the initial complaint and which are thus potentially conflictive assessments, and, on the other, those acts present in the responses to those assessments that realize their conflict potential through head acts of disagreement and/or disqualification.

Our model has allowed us to make a quantitative comparative analysis of the conflict exchanges occurring in our two sub-corpora providing numerous insights into the cross-linguistic pragmatics of conflict speech act production. This is important as there are currently very few cross-linguist variational studies of conflict speech.

4 Results

4.1 *Model for Analysis*

As discussed in section 3, we formulated a model for analysis that enabled us to categorise and systematise the conflict exchanges in our corpus.

Regarding reviews, as shown in Figure 1, we identified a number of strategies through which travellers express their complaints which can be organised into categories based on the types of speech acts used in their execution. The first category involves assertive speech acts in which the reviewer informs a hotel/restaurant concerning certain negative aspects of their experience. This category produces three strategies dependent on the relevance or importance of the negative assessments made: a) positive assessments + negative aspects [PA+NA] where several positive assessments are made which predominate over the negative aspects of the review; b) mixed opinions [NA+PA] where negative opinions constitute the nucleus of the review although some minor positive aspects also appear; c) intensified negative opinions [NA] where only negative opinions are expressed and, in the case of multiple negative assessments, these intensify the complaint. The second category constitutes reviews where the reviewer describes their emotional state using expressive speech acts. This category gives rise to two strategies: expressing the reviewer's personal dissatisfaction [DIS] and expressing pity for the hotel/restaurant reviewed [PITY]. The third category includes complaints made using a commissive act whereby the reviewer promises not to return to the hotel/restaurant complained about [PRO]. The fourth category makes use of directive speech acts and produces two strategies, one where the reviewer requires the hotel/restaurant representative to do something (requesting, suggesting, or advising) [SUG], and a second where the reviewer attempts to influence other travellers by issuing warnings, for instance, to prevent them from having a similar negative experience [WAR].

Review SASCs	
Category: Speech acts used	**Strategy name**
Assertive Speech Acts	[PA+NA] Positive Assessments + Negative Assessments [NA+PA] Negative Assessments + Positive Assessments [NA] Negative assessments only
Expressive Speech Acts	[DIS] referring to the reviewer him/herself expressing his/her dissatisfaction [PITY] referring to the hotel /restaurant representative expressing pity
Commissive Speech Acts	[PRO] Promises not to return
Directive Speech Acts	[SUG] Requests, advice, suggestions to the hotel/restaurant [WAR] Warnings to other TA users

FIGURE 1 Review SASCs

With respect to responses, a similar form of categorisation was used to systematise and quantify macro-acts of disagreement or disqualification. Thus, the corpus contains: a) two strategies involving assertive speech acts: [LIST] where the hotel/restaurant lists the services they offer and [REW] in which they re-word or re-interpret some aspect of the traveller's review; b) four strategies using expressive speech acts: [APO/TH/RE+but], where dissent is mitigated by apologies, thanks, or regret; [UD], unmitigated dissent or disagreement; [REP] in which the reviewer is reprimanded; [INS] where the reviewer is insulted; c) two strategies using commissive acts: [AV], in which the hotel/restaurant representative undertakes to be available to serve the reviewer and [HO], whereby the hotel/restaurant representative manifests the desire for the reviewer to make future visits; and one strategy employing directive acts, [ASK], in which a request is made to TAs platform administrators to take action against a harmful or malicious review.

Response SASCs		
Speech acts used	**Strategy name**	
Expressive Speech Acts	Dissenting Speech Acts	[APO/TH/RE+but] Apologise, thank, express regret + but element [UD] Unmitigated disagreement
	Disqualifying Speech Acts	[REP] Reprimanding [INS] Insulting the reviewer's opinion
Assertive Speech Acts	[LIST] Listing services	
	[REW] Rewording	
Commissive Speech Acts	[HO] Hope for a future visit	
	[AV] Declare him/herself available for contact and to help with further needs	
Directive Speech Acts	[ASK] Ask TA for redress or denounce reviewer	

FIGURE 2 Response SASCs

Moving to a deeper examination of the linguistic structures (lexical items and syntactic structures), here we consider internal modification of the head act only (of reviews and responses). The bases for analysis are summarised in Figures 3 and 4:

1. Mitigated Negative Assessment
A) [ME] Using minimisers ('algo'/ 'un po' *a little*)
B) [EP-MOD] Using epistemic modal expressions of possibility (e.g.: 'quizás'/ 'forse' *perhaps*)

2. Mixed Assessments: Negative Assessments + Positive aspects
A) [TO] Using 'Lo único positivo'/ 'L'unica nota positiva' *the only positive thing*

3. (Intensified) Negative Assessment
A) [NA/N] Using negative adjectives or nouns (e.g.: 'terribile' *terrible*, 'pessimo'/ 'pésimo' *worst*; 'uno schifo' *a disgrace*)
B) [EP-MOD-V] Using epistemic modal verbs (e.g.: 'penso'/ 'pienso' *I think*; 'credo'/ 'creo' *I believe*; 'mi sembra'/ 'me parece' *it seems to me*) and evidential verbs ('he visto'/ 'ho visto' *I have seen*)
C) [MOD-ADV] Using adverbs (e.g.: 'sicuramente'/ 'sin duda' *without doubt*)
D) [OAQ] Using exclamatory interrogatives to express objection (e.g.: '4 stelle??' *4 stars??*)

FIGURE 3 Linguistic structures in reviews SASCs

1. Mitigated Disagreement
A) [RE/APO] Performative verbs expressing regret or apologise before disagreement (e.g.: 'Lo lamento, pero no estoy de acuerdo' *I'm sorry but I don't agree*).
B) [SHIFT] Lexical-semantic corrections or shifting between negative and positive connotations using rewording: disagreement is shown by making minor changes to the interlocutor's original comments.
C) [DM] Discourse markers used to enumerate lexical items or syntactic structures effectively constituting an assertive speech act, e.g.: listing services offered or an item's characteristics, introduced by 'por lo que respecta' *in regard to*, 'en primer lugar' *in the first place*.

2. Reinforced Disagreement
A) [UF/ST] Unmitigated forms and structures of disagreement using performative markers (e.g.: 'non sono affatto d'accordo con te' *I don't agree at all*) intensified by adverbs; reprimands; or direct or indirect insults.

FIGURE 4 Linguistic structures in response SASCs

4.2 *SASCs in Spanish and Italian Reviews*

Using the analytical framework described in 4.1. (figures 1–4), we carried out a quantitative and qualitative analysis to compare and contrast the features of conflictive exchange in our Spanish and Italian sub-corpora.

In reviews where the complaint itself constituted the head act, as was the case in those rated *terrible* or *poor*, the accompanying supportive moves would, in general (but not exclusively), intensify the complaint. This is exemplified in (2) from the Spanish corpus and (3) from the Italian corpus. In (2) four intensifying devices are used: the adjective, 'peor' *worst* in an intensifying relative superlative construction; the ironic comment, 'menos mal que era brutal' *thank goodness it was brutal*; the metaphor, 'atendado japonés' *Japanese attack*; and the imperative directive to 'viajen un poco más' *travel a little more* which takes the role of a reprimand. (3), in contrast uses only three intensifiers: a metaphor, 'rapina a mano armata' *armed robbery*, a commissive act 'penso di non andarci più' *I think I'll not go there again* in addition to a list of dishes ordered which emphasises the reviewer's opinion that the restaurant is overpriced.

(2) Atentado japonés
Menos mal que era brutal (según las opiniones) … La peor experiencia de comida japonesa de mi vida. Por favor, viajen un poco más.

(3) Rapina a mano armata
Giro alla […] ci fermiano 3 persone 85 euro di cui 2 primi 1 mezzo primo 3 secondi Acqua Dolce Penso di non andarci più.

In other instances, positive appraisal formed the focus of the review with the complaint realised as a single, simple speech act. These examples used an assertive act of positive evaluation as the head act so attenuating the complaint and lessening the review's conflict potential. Reviews of this nature (usually ratings in positive categories *good* or *very good*) sometimes contain only minimal (4) or even non-existent (5) criticism, however, responses from the hotel/restaurant addressed containing apology or dissent allow us to interpret even these apparently innocuous utterances as potential triggers for conflict: in (4), the restaurant-representative's (self-) assessment of their establishment's prices and food-quality function as a justification and so contradict the criticism made by the reviewer while in (5), it appears that the reviewer's description of the chef as 'giovane' *young*, which might have been intended as a neutral, or even positive comment (implying that they must be resourceful to have achieved success so early in their career), is in fact interpreted as a positive criticism (i.e., they are too young to be sufficiently experienced) producing the response strategy we have termed rewording [REW] (see section 4.3.2.).

(4) Un lugar pintoresco. Fuimos a comer unos amigos e hicimos una reserva previa, cuando llegamos estaba la mesa preparada y el camarero nos acompaño a la mesa. Tengo que destacar la amabilidad y la atención del personal, así como la rapidez en servir la comida. *Lo que menos nos gusto es que las tapas son demasiado pequeñas para el precio que tienen*, pero de sabor exquisito. Pedimos los platos que adjunto en la foto, junto a una botella de vino, dos refrescos y 2 botellas de agua pequeña, sin postre y la cuenta fue 63E.

ANSWER

Hola!

Gracias por dedicar unos minutos en comentar su experiencia con nosotros. Nos alegra saber que disfrutó de nuestra cocina y que valoró el esfuerzo y el trabajo que hace nuestro equipo todos los días para que se sienta como en casa. *Por otra parte, nuestros precios son comparables a los establecimientos similares de la zona, y creemos que ofrecemos una buena relación calidad-precio dada la cuidada elaboración de nuestra cocina y el servicio que ofrecemos*. Esperamos volver a verle muy pronto. Un cordial saludo.

(5) Esperienza di sapori

Locale gestito da giovane Chef, grande passione che si esprime in tutte le ricercate proposte, delicate, innovative con un eccellente equilibrio di sapori il tutto accompagnato da magnifici cocktails.

ANSWER

Ciao Stefano, grazie del "*Giovane Chef*". *In realtà la carta d'identità attesta la mia gioventù, ma sono quindici anni che giro per i migliori ristoranti italiani, con qualche puntata all'estero* (Lussemburgo, Londra, Oman e Dubai). L'abbinamento piatti-cocktails è una novità per Milano, ma noi ci crediamo molto.

We will now go through each strategy found in our corpus of reviews and discuss their particular linguistic features that either mitigate or intensify the complaint. Following this we will look at differences between the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora.

4.2.1 Review SASCs Involving Assertive Speech Acts

In this category, we include reviews in which negative assessments are made using assertive speech acts. These kinds of reviews have a variety of forms ranging from those that are almost entirely positive [PA+NA] through those that are mostly negative but contained a single positive [NA+PA], to those that are exclusively negative [intensified NA] (see section 4.1.).

4.2.1.1 [PA+NA] *Positive Assessments + Negative Assessments*

These reviews normally had TA ratings in the positive categories of *good* or *very good*. Here the head act of the review is a positive assessment and reports of negative aspects are minimal. In terms of complaint categorisation, following Olshtain and Weinbach (1987, 1993) a review of this nature would be considered either as a *below the level of reproach complaint* or as an *expression of annoyance*, since they are instances where "S chooses to minimise Face Threatening of H" (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993: 111) (where S is the speaker and H the hearer).

This macrostructure has several variations, the first of these is the [PA 'but' NA] form in which the negative comment (complaint) might be introduced by one of the following:

A) Concessives: 'aunque'/ 'anche se' *although*; 'pur' *for* + gerund. See (6), (7).
   (6) Todo bien, *aunque* bastante básico: habitación; cuarto de baño; cama; desayuno.
   (7) Hotel molto elegante con camere spaziose e di livello, *anche se* forse necessiterebbe di una "rinfrescata svecchiante", soprattutto nella facciata esterna dello stabile.

B) Adversatives: 'sin embargo' *however*; 'pero'/ 'ma' *but*; 'tuttavia' *still*. See (8), (9).
   (8) Buen hotel *pero* con peros El hotel está bien, aseo moderno y amplio, amabilidad de los empleados, buena limpieza y metro cerca. *Pero* tiene dos fallos importantes, cama de muelles incómoda y necesidad de reformar muebles, ya que tienen marcas de excesivo uso.
   (9) [...] Il cibo è buono *ma* le porzioni sono contenute.

C) Expressions which highlight a unique negative aspect ('lo único' *the only*'; 'la única pega' *the only sticking point*; 'el punto negativo' *the negative point*; 'el único problema' *the only problem*; 'como única queja' *as the only complaint*; 'solo que' *only that*; 'l'unica pecca' *the only flaw*; 'l'unico aspetto negativo' *the only negative aspect*), mechanisms that also act as attenuators, since they highlight the exceptionality and/or conjuncture of the negative aspect. See (10), (11).
   (10) Deberían limpiar los baños. *Mi única queja* del hotel y primordial es que deberían limpiar más a fondo los bajos [baños], sobre todo las juntas.
   (11) La reception attenta e professionale. *L'unica pecca* la colazione servita al piano seminterrato per ovvia mancanza di spazio esterno, per il resto un ottimo albergo. Consigliato

Or the negative comment might be mitigated [PA+mitigated NA] as in the following (see Figure 3):

A) [ME] Using minimisers: 'un poco/un po' *a little* and fuzzy concepts such as 'algo' *some*.
   (12) Volveremos. Nos dieron una habitación muy luminosa. Las habitaciones aunque *algo* pequeñas tienen un diseño bonito y moderno. [...] El desayuno *algo* escaso. Aún así, seguro que repetimos cuando volvamos a Barcelona.
   (13) estancia perfecta
   un poco caro, pero merece la pena.
   (14) [...] hotel e un buon hotel ma *un po* datato. E nel mezzo del nulla, 15min da Fiumicino e 40min dal centro. Muoversi costa molto con i taxi. L hotel e *un po* datato ma funziona tutto.

B) [EP-MOD] Using epistemic modal expressions of possibility (e.g.: 'forse/quizás' *perhaps*) which reinforce other attenuating mechanisms (e.g.: 'un poco' *a little*) or even another adverb ('leggermente' *slightly*).
   (15) [...] La comida muy buena, pero *quizás* un poco caro para las cantidades que ofrecen. En cualquier caso, algo con fácil solución.
   (16) Abbacchio alla scottadito con patate ottimo, *forse* leggermente troppo bruciato. In ogni caso la location era tipica.

4.2.1.2 [*NA+PA*] *Negative Assessments + Positive Assessments*

In this variation the main negative, that is, the complaint, is placed in the initial position while an exceptional instance of a single positive aspect is highlighted by means of phrases such as: 'lo único +' *the only* + positive value adjective or 'unica nota positiva' *single positive*.

   (17) Ni a mí peor enemigo le recomiendo este hotel.
   Estuve con mi pareja en el hotel (febrero 2022). *Lo único bueno* que tiene es la ubicación.
   (18) Deludente!
   Hotel vecchio e poco curato. Camera priva di minibar e bagno con un unico doccia schiuma, e noi eravamo in due! Colazione pessima e molto povera, il tutto a risparmio, sicuramente servizi non degni di un hotel a 4 stelle ... ho trovato di molto meglio in strutture a 3 stelle! *Unica nota positiva* la posizione, perché molto centrale.

4.2.1.3 [NA] *Negative Assessments Only*

At the most negative end of the scale of the assertive-speech-act category are those that only contain negative assessments. These would be considered similar to accusations and, in this corpus, are intensified using a variety of means:

A) [NA/N] Using emphatic negative adjectives or nouns (e.g.: 'terribile' *terrible*; 'pessimo'/ 'pésimo' *worst*; 'uno schifo' *a disgrace*).

(19) Experiencia *terrible*
Una persona en la puerta que sólo molesta, muy maleducado, ya dentro un agobio, no permiten que converses con tus amigos, atosigándote con ofertas sin parar.

(20) *Pessima* pizza
Abbiamo mangiato una pizza veramente *pessima*: pur non lesinando negli ingredienti, l'impasto è veramente terribile.

(21) Uno *schifo*. … Stanze sporche, medicinali sul tavolo, mozziconi fuori al balcone, lavandino sporco … *Lurido*, armadi rotti, letti distrutti, uno *schifo* …

B) [EP-MOD-V] Using epistemic modal verbs (e.g.: 'penso'/'pienso' *I think*; 'credo'/'creo' *I believe*; 'mi sembra'/'me parece' *it seems to me*) and evidential verbs ('he visto'/'ho visto' *I have seen*).

(22) Desastre de sitio
[…] Sirven unos trozos de langostinos en una concha de vieira y cobran casi 4 euros por cada uno. Un fraude. El sushi es lo peor que *he visto* en años. Y pagar mas de 3 euros por una copa de Barbadillo nunca deja de sorprenderme. Mala experiencia. *No creo* que duren mucho.

(23) Cibo scarso e non buono, camere vecchie, personale sgarbato, caffè al bar acido. Il tutto a prezzi stellari. *Non credo* possa essere peggio di così.

C) [MOD-ADV] Using modal adverbs (e.g.: 'sicuramente'/'sin duda' *without doubt*)

(24) […] El baño *sin duda* necesita ser renovado y la limpieza, HORRIBLE, como si la habitación hubiera estado cerrada meses …

(25) Non capisco le quattro stelle. Colazione povera, il ciambellone preso era duro, *sicuramente* non era neanche del giorno prima

D) [OAQ] Using exclamatory interrogatives to express objection (e.g.: '4 stelle??' *4 stars??*)

(26) Marco incomparable. Hay que cuidar el detalle.
Volvemos a la terraza [...], marco incomparable, para disfrutar de un café y un poco de relax para iniciar la tarde con energía. Tomamos un buen café, bien atendido, pero ... *es que hay que pedir que te sirvan un vaso de agua con cada café?*... lo dicho hay que cuidar el detalle.

(27) L'ho fatto presente alla cassiera che con assenza di premura vs il cliente mi ha risposto che lo avrebbe fatto presente allo chef!!!!. ... *ma per servire pizze surgelate senza odore di rancido serve uno chef?*. ... non basterebbe un piatto pulito o un tagliere igenizzato o nuovo?

4.2.2 Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive acts appearing in the corpus include those referring to feelings of disappointment, disillusionment, shame, or pity. We distinguish between:

A) [DIS] Expressive acts that refer to the internal emotional state of the reviewer and/or to their expectations. Hence the use of nouns, adjectives and verbs referencing emotional states (e.g.: 'decepción' *disappointment*; 'Milanese delusa!' *disappointed of Milan!*; and 'nos decepcionó' *we were disappointed*).

(28) *Decepción*
El nuevo [...] *nos ha decepcionado*, comparándolo con el [...]. El local es amplio y cómodo con un servicio de mesa atento y profesional. Sin embargo, la cocina *nos decepcionó*. La lasaña no estaba bien horneada y el ravioli de solomillo estaba elaborado con una pasta muy mediocre.

(29) *Davvero deluso*. [...] Ordiniamo tagliata di danese ... 18€ mi aspetto un burro e invece? Dura e sfilacciosa con mezza patata tagliata a metà ad accompagnarla? Ma siete seri? *Mi sono vergognato* di aver proposto io il locale ai miei commensali. Non so neanche io perché do 2 stelle solo per la gentilezza del personale. *Deluso, mi aspettavo di piú*."

B) [PITY] Expressive acts that refer to how the reviewer feels about the hotel/restaurant (e.g.: 'una lástima' *a pity* or 'che peccato' *what a pity*). In general, these addressed the manager of the hotel/restaurant directly and thus, these examples involve personal disqualification (of the recipient) and are similar to insults:

(30) Buena comida y mala atención
[…] Así pues, y siendo benevolentes, *una lástima* y un despropósito, pero hay que remarcar que con camareros de este tipo no se puede ir muy lejos […]. Juan, Pepa y seis comensales más.

(31) Che *peccato*
L'albergo in sé è meraviglioso. *Peccato che è tenuto veramente male*.

4.2.3 Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive speech acts, specifically, promises not to return to particular hotels/restaurants are frequently used as supportive moves for the main complaint speech act. These speech acts effectively manifest the consequences of whatever negative experience is referred to in the review.

[PRO] Promises to not return (e.g.: no volveré/non tornerò *I will not return*), often appear with adverbial intensifiers ('nunca'/'mai più' *never*):

(32) Camas incómodas
Hotel un poco alejado del centro.
Las habitaciones amplias pero con acabados de baja calidad. El servicio del personal es amable. Nos recibieron con un plato de jamón ibérico (nos pareció un detalle muy cortés). Lo que me parece inaceptable es que la cama sea tan incómoda. *No volveremos*.

(33) Prenoto 1 mese fa con accordo ritiro oggi, 19.12.19 ore 13:30. Mi presento in orario, facendomi 15 km per raggiungerli, e il dolce Bussolano non è arrivato. Non mi hanno avvisata in nessun modo e non hanno provato in alcun modo a recuperare. *Ovviamente non tornerò mai più*. Sono veramente delusa e rammaricata. Sono non professionali.

4.2.4 Directive Speech Acts

Directive acts such as suggestions, recommendations, (dissuasive) advice, and even warnings are common. These are mostly aimed at other readers of the reviews, that is, future travellers planning their trip or visit, but are sometimes addressed directly to the hotel/restaurant being reviewed. In the latter case, reviewers frequently use explicit performative verbs ('no lo recomiendo'/'non lo consiglio' *I don't recommend*, 'aconsejo' *I advise*) or the corresponding nouns ('sugerencia' *suggestion*; 'consiglio' *recommendation*) and adjectives ('recom mendable'/'consigliabile' *recommended*), often intensified by adverbs ('para nada'/'per niente' *not at all*). We distinguish:

A) [SUG] Requests, advice, suggestions to the hotel/restaurant.

(34) Muy buena ubicación y muy buen precio
Muy buena ubicación, buen precio, calidad de los servicios y amabilidad del personal. La carta del restaurante solo contiene un plato vegano, *está podría ser una sugerencia* que el hotel podría tener en cuenta para mejorar la oferta culinaria.

(35) Complessivamente è garantito un buon servizio, valida la colazione. Non all'altezza la pulizia, non allineata con la recensioni. Tende macchiate e sporche, soprattutto quelle interne a scorrimento. *Consiglio la direzione di rivedere i dettagli.*

B) [WAR] Warnings to other travellers.

(36) Pésimo servicio
Servicio *nada recomendable*. Las comandas y bebidas tardaban muchísimo, y cuando pedimos una copa de vino nos dijeron que sólo servían botella cuando en la carta aparecía precio de copa y de botella. *No lo recomiendo para nada.*

(37) Hotel completamente da ristrutturare. Colazione misera e qualità scadente, personalmente non sono riuscita a mangiare nulla. Zona di Milano veramente mal frequentata. Stanze piccole. *Sconsigliatissimo.*

4.2.5 Crosslinguistic Considerations

Contrastive analysis of the Spanish and the Italian sub-corpora sheds light on cultural and contextual distinctions between these two groups in terms of their choices of pragmalinguistic structures and strategies used to intensify or mitigate conflictive speech acts. The full range of strategies used in the reviews across both the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora studied here and their frequencies are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Frequency of different SASCs in Spanish and Italian reviews

Review SASCs		**Frequency (Spanish)**	**Frequency (Italian)**
Assertive Speech Acts	[PA+NA] Positive Assessments+Negative Assessments	21.4%	20.2%
	[NA+PA] Negative Assessments + Positive Assessments	0%	3.2%

TABLE 2 Frequency of different SASCs in Spanish and Italian reviews (*cont.*)

Review SASCs		Frequency (Spanish)	Frequency (Italian)
	[NA] Negative assessments only	38.3%	42.1%
Expressive Speech Acts	[DIS] referring to the reviewer him/herself expressing his/her dissatisfaction	9.7%	8%
	[PITY] referring to the hotel /restaurant representative expressing pity	2.5%	9.7%
Commissive Speech Acts	[PRO] promises not to return	9.9%	4.9%
Directive Speech Acts	[SUG] requests, advice, suggestions to the hotel/ restaurant	10.3%	1.3%
	[WAR] warning to other TA users	8.4%	8.9%

As expected, the reviews considered here contain a high incidence of assertive, negative assessments. The use of intensified [NA] is the most common strategy in both sub-corpora but it was far more frequent in Italian reviews: 42.1% of Italian reviews contained this structure compared to 38.3% of Spanish reviews. The [PA+NA] structure was almost equally frequent in both sub-corpora: this structure appears in 21.4% and 20.2% of Spanish and in Italian reviews, respectively; and is attenuated, in similar proportions for both languages by [ME] and [EP-MOD].

Overall, expressive acts are most frequent in the Italian sub-corpus: 17.7% of Italian reviews contained these speech acts compared to only 12.2% of Spanish responses. Use of [DIS] is similar in both sub-corpora (Spanish: 9.7%; Italian: 8%), thus this pattern is largely due to the significant use of [PITY] in the Italian sub-corpus (9.7% of reviews) in contrast to its rarity in the Spanish sub-corpus (2.5% of reviews). The [PITY] strategy is a direct devaluation of the complaint recipient while the expression of disappointment in [DIS] is more personal to the speaker. Referring to the speaker's emotions or subjective feelings (disillusionment, disappointment or shame) can function to attenuate

the complaint, thus [PITY] is a more intensified form of criticism than [DIS]. In this regard, then, Italian reviewers appear to be more inclined to stronger forms of complaint than their Spanish counterparts.

The trend towards weaker forms of complaint to avoid conflict seen among Spanish reviews is also evident in their use of directive acts, particularly the [SUG] strategy: compared to their Italian counterparts, Spanish reviewers are far more likely to include a suggestion or offer advice to the hotel/restaurant when making their complaint (10.3% versus 1.3%).

In terms of issuing warnings to other TA users, here both sub-corpora are similar with 8.4% of Spanish reviews using [WAR] compared to 8.9% of Italian reviews. The presence of these strategies shows Spanish and Italian reviewers are aware of their role in helping other travellers to make decisions and also that they wish to prevent future travellers from incurring extra costs or having bad experiences.

Reviews containing commissive speech acts, specifically the use of [PRO], are less common. This strategy represents an indirect disqualification of the services received and thus is an attenuated form of complaint. Findings show that Spanish respondents make most use of this strategy (9.9% compared to 4.9% of Italians), which is in line with the previously noted tendency in this sub-corpus to prefer softened complaints.

4.3 *SASCs in Spanish and Italian Responses to Reviews*

The response speech act set can be more or less confrontational depending on its head act. In the most conciliatory responses in this corpus, the head act comprises an apology: an utterance from the hotel/restaurant seeking to mollify the reviewer that often references the complained about issue. Accompanying the head act, it is common to see supportive moves such as greeting and farewell formulas, good wishes, invitations or offers, thanks, and indeed, promises of improvement or redress.

In example (38), a reviewer complains about several aspects of their experience at a hotel; the respondent, see (39), first thanks the reviewer for taking the time to write a review, then apologises for not fulfilling their expectations giving a number of explanations for the problems encountered and finally finishes with a promise to be at the reviewer's disposition in the future:

(38) Estimada Sra.
Espero que este teniendo un buen día. En primer lugar, me gustaría agradecerle su reciente visita y su tiempo al compartir su experiencia con nosotros y con el resto de viajeros. En nombre de todo el equipo, le pedimos nuestras más sinceras disculpas por no haber

cumplido con sus expectativas. Si me permite, me gustaría poder aprender más sobre su experiencia. Sus palabras nos ayudarán a continuar mejorando nuestro servicio. Estaré encantado de poder llamarle a la hora/teléfono que mejor le convenga. Una vez más, muchas gracias por su tiempo y consideración. Estoy a su plena disposición para cualquier asistencia adicional que puedan necesitar. Esperamos poder volver a volver a darles la bienvenida pronto.
Guest Experience Manager

(39) Estimado cliente, Le agradezco el tiempo dedicado en compartir sus comentarios con el resto de viajeros. Lamento profundamente que su experiencia con nosotros no haya cumplido del todo sus expectativas. Me gustaría compartir mi sorpresa en relación al comentario acerca de la incomodidad de la cama y la almohada, pues es algo que nuestros clientes habitualmente destacan por su excelente calidad y por ayudar a favorecer el descanso. En relación al calor en su habitación, lamento profundamente cualquier molestia causada por este inconveniente. Al encontrarnos en Febrero, época del año con temperaturas habitualmente bajas, el sistema de aire acondicionado se encontraba en revisión, pero fue inmediatamente puesto en funcionamiento cuando nos trasladó su comentario. El equipo del hotel queda a su entera disposición para todo lo que pueda necesitar Atentamente,

Overall, example (39) is a conciliatory response, however, other responses are more conflictive containing acts of overt disagreement with the opinions expressed by reviewers. In such cases, any apology given no longer constitutes the central act of the response, becoming instead a supportive move that, together with others (greetings, farewells, thanks), modifies and mitigates the dissenting head act.

Dissenting acts can be carried out both through direct refusals and denials, or indirect speech acts. Sometimes these acts go beyond being instances of dissent, that is, showing *disagreement* (Langlotz and Locher, 2012; Maíz Arévalo, 2014; Decock and Spiessens, 2018), to become acts that Bach and Harnish (1979) have termed *disputative* in which speakers make an objection to the initial act. By rejecting the assertions of the initial act (the complaint), the speaker justifies their disagreement (Brenes Peña, 2011), meaning that disputative acts involve an even higher degree of illocutionary force than dissenting ones.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, we differentiate between *positively* and *negatively* framed structures. The former includes structures in which disagreement while not necessarily mitigated by internal modifiers is accompanied by expressive speech acts (greetings, thanking or apologies) which act

as normative politeness formulae, that is, external modifiers that mitigate the disagreement. In contrast, the latter, negatively framed structures are those responses in which the normative framework is minimised or not respected at all, i.e., there are no *polite* external modifiers and instead, the reviewer's opinion is disqualified often using reprimands and even insults.

In the following example (40), the response begins with the service provider recalling a telephone conversation with the reviewer saying how deeply unpleasant it was. They finish with a reprimand concerning how some people (the reviewer) seem to enjoy stabbing others in the back.

(40) Ricordo bene quella telefonata, perché alla soglia dei miei quarant'anni, mai avevo provato una situazione di tale disagio, tristezza, profonda tristezza. Era un giorno di metà aprile, avevo da pochi giorni chiuso per la prima volta il cancello del nostro albergo di famiglia, che da più di cento anni sta lì stupendo, splendente del lavoro che la mia famiglia e il mio staff fanno da anni. Lo confermano le migliaia di giudizi positivi che riceviamo ogni anno. Avevo ancora nel cuore lo sguardo attonito dei nostri dipendenti che vanno via, fissa negli occhi la tragedia delle bare portate dai camion dell'esercito, davanti a me una città fantasma. Ricevo la telefonata di un ragazzo di giovane età che mi dice ridendo: "sto venendo lì sulla vostra terrazza a fare un aperitivo con i miei amici". Io incredula le dico: "siamo in pieno lock down non è possibile ospitare nessuno, è vietato dalla legge, l'albergo è chiuso! " Lui ridendo mi risponde "se non t'interessano i soldi almeno ti importerà ricevere una recensione da uno" su tripadvisor. Molte volte si è detto che la sofferenza generata dal virus ci avrebbe reso tutti migliori, ma a quanto pare in alcuni di noi rimane il gusto sadico di accoltellare chi è già a terra esanime. "Omo omini lupus, aimè!"

4.3.1 Expressive Speech Acts

The hotel and restaurant responses to reviews in this corpus contain several different types of expressive acts. Some, like apologies or expressions of regret, are convivial acts (Leech, 1983) which, on the one hand, function to maintain or develop harmonious social relations and, on the other, are acts of self-face work (Hernández Flores, 2013) for the respondent. As such, these softened disagreements would be deemed the most appropriate way – following the recommendations of the TA platform itself – to show dissent. This being said, there are also instances where respondents articulate non-attenuated manifestations of their emotional state or even issue reprimands to the reviewer, see example (40).

—Softened Disagreement

A) [APO/TH/RE+but] Mitigated disagreement
In this strategy, disagreement, which may or may not be made explicit, for instance, by the formula 'no estoy de acuerdo' *I disagree*, is introduced by a *but* element. In some case, this element may also be preceded by an apology, expression of regret, and/or thanks.

(41) In merito alla multa, *ci dispiace molto* che questo piccolo fastidio sia accaduto: purtroppo la procedura informatica non ha funzionato come sempre accade, *ma non potevamo saperlo*.
(42) *Sentimos que nuestra ubicación no haya sido totalmente de su agrado, ya que* contamos con una localización privilegiada en la zona centro sin estar en pleno casco antiguo [...].
(43) Sobre lo de Marina *lo siento mucho pero no estoy de acuerdo*, Ella es lo mejor de nuestro equipo y el 99,9% de los clientes lo puede confirmar, por supuesto ella también es humana y se puede equivocar, pero el comentario me parece bastante fuera de lugar.
(44) Per quanto riguarda il discorso sul Taco *mi permetto di dissentire* in quanto si tratta di un prodotto che viene realizzato artigianalmente dalla nostra cucina in un formato classico, con l'utilizzo di prodotti di prima qualità che ne giustificano il prezzo.

The connectors ('ya que' *since*; 'pero'/ 'ma' *but*) introduce a counterpoint to the preceding speech act, here most usually an apology or expression of regret, which constitutes an acknowledgement of the negative aspect outlined in the reviewer's complaint. The structure thus becomes an incrimination. However, this kind of utterance also implies that the speaker might not feel any actual responsibility for the reviewer's displeasure and is carrying out the apology simply as an act courtesy to satisfy a social expectation (Norrick, 1978). Nevertheless, the argument introduced by the *but* element is often an explanation, i.e.: "an utterance that gives or asks for a reason or example to indicate that the speaker cannot accept the previous speaker's proposition" (Koczogh, 2014: 145), making it a mitigation strategy.

—Unmitigated or Strengthened disagreement

A) [UD] Unmitigated forms and structures of disagreement
A reviewer's complaint might be perceived as a threat, and thus the hotel/restaurant representative responds to the complaint with strong disagreement showing various degrees of emotion from annoyance, irritation, anger,

contempt, to disgust (Angouri and Locher, 2012: 1552). These vehement negative emotional displays constitute unmitigated disagreements.

(45) Ci spiace che abbia trovato caro il nostro tagliere *che non è assolutamente scarso come Lei riferisce* ed è davvero adeguato per due persone. [...] Gentile David, forse *quando parliamo di porzioni scarse evidentemente non intendiamo la stessa cosa!!*

(46) Un cocinero no puede estar todo el rato con la mascarilla por una razón muy sencilla: *¿Como prueba los platos a través de la mascarilla?*

B) [REP] Reprimanding the interlocutor

The reprimand is an accusation through which personal displeasure is expressed as a form of punishment, reproving percieved wrongdoing (Vandervecken, 1990; Dozie and Otagburuagu, 2019: 33). Reprimands effectively question whatever issue the reviewer raised and should be considered as strategies aimed at persuading the reviewer change their opinion. This makes these utterances strengthened forms of disagreement.

(47) Mi mancava il fenomeno! La serata era affollata, *le arriva una pasta sbagliata e lei che fa? La mangia tutta tutta tutta e non dice nulla per poi lamentarsi a distanza di giorni su tripadvisor!* Ma non sarebbe stato meglio dirlo subito!

(48) Buenos dias
Gracias por dar su opinion.
Si usted pretende que el hotel entre en conflicto, esta muy lejos de su proposito
Desde las 10.00 h, tal y como usted lo solicito, su habitación estaba lista y preparada.
Si usted no llego, el motivo solo lo sabra usted. Como vera, el hotel esta para dar el servicio que el cliente pide.
Puede usted decir lo que desee, pero el hotel y equipo esta con la conciencia muy tranquila de su trabajo. ¿la tiene usted?

C) [INS] Insulting the reviewer's opinion

Insults used as disqualifications, are examples of strengthened disagreement.

(49) [...] Io credo una cosa che *voi siete persone scostumate* e non meritate più di venire al mio locale, inoltre in altre recensioni dico sempre spero dì rivedervi, invece adesso dico Spero di non rivedere più *le vostre faccine antipatiche e scostumate*.

(50) [...] Ah!, por si tienen dudas de la veracidad de lo que acabo de exponer, esta filmado por las cámaras de seguridad Nosotros también lamentamos y mucho lo sucedido, pero *es cuestión de educación, humildad, humanidad ... y sobriedad*
Atentamente

4.3.2 Assertive Speech Acts

Various assertive acts were used by hotel/restaurant representatives in response to reviewer comments: principally listing services but also, although far less frequently, addressing specific negative points raised by reviewers.

—Softened Disagreement

A) [REW] Rewording

Responses often register disagreement by means of rewording, that is, by making minor changes to the reviewer's original comments. This is done in several ways, for example by lexical-semantic corrections or by shifting from negative (critical) to positive (favourable) connotations (Pomerantz, 1984: 75). This form of "clarifying speaker's meaning" (Koczogh, 2014: 157) while demonstrating disagreement effectively attenuates its force.

(51) Gracias por su comentario, me alegra leer que encontró el hotel "bonito". En cuanto a la *"poca trayectoria"* que tiene el hotel, está usted en lo cierto, ya que solo llevamos 4 meses abiertos tras la gran reinauguración (Nuestro predecesor [...] fue el primer hotel de lujo de la ciudad de Madrid y fue totalmente renovado, reabriendo sus puertas en Marzo de 2018). Pero a pesar de *nuestra juventud*, nuestro equipo cuenta con décadas de experiencia en hotelería de lujo, con lo que nuestros clientes pueden disfrutar de un experimentado servicio de lujo en unas instalaciones prácticamente nuevas.[...]

(52) [...] ciò che per Lei è *démodé*, per altri- e sono la maggioranza dei nostri ospiti – è *vintage* o *ricercato*.

In examples (51) and (52) the hotel representative makes an ironic reinterpretation of the reviewer's words substituting certain lexical elements to change their negative connotations into something more positive. Thus, in (50), 'poca trayectoria' *little track record* becomes 'juventud' *youth*, and in (52) 'demodé' *old fashioned* becomes 'vintage o ricercato' *vintage and sought-after*.

B) [LIST] List of services offered

In this strategy, a sequence containing an apology, disagreement, or expressive act precedes a list of services offered by the hotel or restaurant. These lists are issued as a challenge to something in the review and thus constitute a mild form of disagreement (53) or a mitigation strategy (54).

(53) Gentile signora la informiamo che la nostra struttura è ben posizionata a Napoli centro. il nostro boiler dispone di accumulo acqua ventiquattr'ore su 24 garantisce acqua calda continua anche utilizzando le sei docce presenti nel suo caso la mia collaboratrice è stata sempre presente e attenta alle sue richieste abbiamo riscontrato un difetto sul miscelatore nella stanza numero quattro che è stato sostituito per quanto riguarda il cortile quindi parliamo dell'area condominiale anche se agli occhi del cliente può apparire vecchia abbandonata all'interno la struttura The fresh si presenta moderna, confortevole e pulita. l'ascensore è condominiale e può essere attivato solo tramite un pass in quanto non tutti i condomini hanno pagato la quota di installazione.
Questo passo in caso di disabilità o persone anziane o per esigenze particolari viene rilasciato ai nostri clienti senza nessun problema.
Le stanza inoltre dispongono di ottimi Infissi e sono insonorizzati e garantiscono un notevole comfort acustico all' interno. ho risposto alle sue domande in maniera del tutto chiara ed esaustiva. Cordiali saluti

(54) Buenas tardes Roberto
Soy Javier, el director del hotel y te agradezco que nos hayas hecho llegar tus comentarios tras tu estancia en el hotel.
En estos momentos no tenemos la cocina abierta pero si un menu de snacks (pizzas, bocadillos, pastas, cremas etc). La mayor parte de estos productos son de quinta gama; congelados y/o refrigerados que son regenerados en el momento de servir al cliente, no servimos comida recalentada ya que aparte de no perder sabor y propiedades estariamos comprometiendo la seguridad de nuestros clientes.
Espero que pronto podamos reabrir la cocina y aumentar nuestro equipo.
Muchas gracias

Within the macrostructure of the interaction, these lists are a kind of echo-construction in which some element mentioned by one interlocutor (the initiative intervention) is repeated by the second (reactive intervention) who

organises or explains the information contained in the initiative intervention. As Pomerantz (1984: 83) notes, these "partial repeats [...] that challenge and disagree with the prior" are fundamentally components of disagreement.

4.3.3 Commissive Speech Acts

As shown in sections 4.3.1. (concerning [APO/TH/RE+but]) and 4.3.2. (concerning [REW] and [LIST]), some of the formulae used to express disagreement are, in fact, implicit attenuation strategies due to their function as justifications and explanations. Other speech acts also perform similar mitigating functions when employed as supportive moves to disagreement head acts. Among them, two commissive acts stand out, the first in which the hotel/restaurant representative offers best wishes in the form of hoping to see the reviewer return (55 and 56) and the second where they declare themselves available to the reviewer (57 and 58). Offered after expressing disagreement, these strategies are a form of normative politeness and thus have a mitigation function.

A) [HO] Hope for future visit as a repair strategy

(55) Devo categoricamente dissentire sul tuo aggettivo: la qualità della mia spesa è ottima, e le competenze della cucina le trovo quasi insindacabili. Ma ci stà, non possiamo piacere a tutti. Sarà stato per te un Sabato no, ma *spero di poterti riavere a cena e farti ricredere sul tuo giudizio*. Grazie comunque per la tua recensione. Ti lascio i miei saluti. Gennaro.

(56) Buenos días Mar,
[...] Podemos asegurarle que se trató de algo puntual y *le invitamos a volver a visitarnos y a sorprenderse con el disfrute de la experiencia en* [...] *al 100%.* ¡Saludos!

B) [AV] Declare oneself available for contact and further needs

(57) [...] Me gustaría compartir mi sorpresa en relación al comentario acerca de la incomodidad de la cama y la almohada, pues es algo que nuestros clientes habitualmente destacan por su excelente calidad y por ayudar a favorecer el descanso. [...] *El equipo del hotel queda a su entera disposición para todo lo que pueda necesitar*.

(58) [...] Conclusivamente le Sue pesanti contestazioni, che comunque abbiamo attentamente analizzato e considerato, appaiono a nostro avviso inopportune ed infondate e lasciano presagire una volontà ingiustificatamente denigratoria che non pensiamo di meritarci. *Restiamo a Sua disposizione* e porgiamo
Cordiali Saluti

4.3.4 Directive Speech Acts

In their responses, hotel/restaurant representatives sometimes appeal for collaboration from the TA platform censors to gain assistance in cases of what they feel are harmful or malicious reviews.

[ASK] Ask TA for redress

In example (59), in response to a particular review which they feel is bringing their establishment into disrepute, a restaurant representative asks TA: 'cosa fate per tutelarci …?' *what can you do to help?* In this and similar instances, the question acts as a reproach indicating their disagreement with the reviewer.

(59) Le recensioni scritte apposta volte a intaccare il buon nome di ristoranti e ristoratori sono una disgrazia per chi lavora sodo, con passione e che da da lavorare alla gente. *Tripadvisor, cosa fate per tutelarci …?*

4.3.5 Crosslinguistic Considerations

Table 3 summarises the frequencies of use for the three categories of response SASCs found in the corpus and the main strategies through which they are formulated. In the next section, we will discuss examples of these linguistic structures taken from our corpus and provide some insights into their differing deployment in the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora.

TABLE 3 Frequency of different SASCs in Spanish and Italian responses

Response SASCs			**Frequency (Spanish)**	**Frequency (Italian)**
Expressive Speech Acts	Dissenting Speech Acts	[APO/TH/RE +but]	32.6%	22.3%
		[UD]	2.7%	17.6%
	Disqualifying Speech Acts	[REP]	2.9%	13.9%
		[INS]	2.4%	8.4%
Assertive Speech Acts	[LIST]		5.8%	12%
	[REW]		2.4%	3%
Commissive Speech Acts	[HO]		39.3%	19.9%
	[AV]		11.5%	1.8%
Directive Speech Acts	[ASK]		0%	0.6%

Interestingly, the types of strategy appearing in a response varied depending on type of establishment (hotel or restaurant) as well as sub-corpus (Spanish or Italian) and this shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Comparing hotel and restaurant response SASCs

Responses by hotels/restaurant representatives	**Hotels**		**Restaurants**	
	Frequency (Spanish)	**Frequency (Italian)**	**Frequency (Spanish)**	**Frequency (Italian)**
[APO/TH/RE+ but]	20.1%	9.5%	12.5%	12.8%
[UD]	1.9%	4.2%	0.7%	6.6%
[REP]	1.2%	7.4%	1.7%	6.4%
[INS]	0.7%	1.6%	1.7%	6.8%
[LIST]	5.1%	4.4%	0.7%	7.6%
[REW]	1.4%	1%	0.9%	2%
[HO]	27.7%	9.8%	11.5%	10%
[AV]	7.8%	1.8%	3.6%	0%
[ASK]	0%	0.2%	0%	0.4%

As we have shown, the responses issued by hotel/restaurant representatives consist of a variety of speech act sets on a spectrum of dissent from mild, where the SASC may comprise apologies and thanks to extreme disagreement where the reviewer is insulted or reprimanded. In cases where dissent forms the head act of the response, we also see apologies, greetings, thanks, and invitations used as external modifiers, or supportive moves (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), to attenuate the disagreement.

In the Spanish corpus, the most common strategy is the commissive, [HO], in which the hotel/restaurant representative expresses their desire for the reviewer to return (39.3%). The second most common strategy is expressing disagreement with a but element, [APO/TH/RE+but], while the third most frequent strategy is that in which the representative promises to make themselves available to the complainer [AV] (11.5%).

Concerning the less used strategies in the Spanish corpus, despite being softened forms of disagreement, [REW] and [LIST] are surprisingly uncommon (2.4% and 5.8% respectively). This may be explained perhaps by certain

peculiarities of these strategies: [REW], for example, requires the presence of lexical elements in the review that can be reinterpreted – ideally ironically – and given new meaning while [LIST] depends on the level of detail in the original review since, as we explained in 4.3.2, lists of services in a response replicate those mentioned in the review.

The most striking aspect of the Spanish responses is the lack of strengthened disagreement strategies, for instance, only 2.4% of responses are categorised as unmitigated disagreement [UD] while more direct disqualifications such as reprimanding [REP] or insulting [INS] the reviewer are equally rare (2.9% and 2.4% of responses respectively). In the case of [INS] it is also interesting to note not only its rarity, but also that in formulating their insults, hotel/restaurant representatives tend to opt for less confrontational approaches indirectly criticising the reviewer's lack of judgement, gastronomic culture, or other values related to education or courtesy.

Italian responses show similar tendencies to those in Spanish, particularly in the popularity of the [APO/TH/RE+but] strategy: this strategy is most common among Spanish hotel/restaurant representatives and only slightly less popular among their Italian counterparts (Spanish: 32.6%; Italian: 22.3%). One pronounced difference between the sub-corpora is the lack of commissive strategies among Italians: [HO], 19.9% and [AV], 1.8%, compared to 39.3% and 11.5% respectively for the Spanish sub-corpus. In addition, the use of [LIST] in the Italian sub-corpus is far greater than in the Spanish: 12% vs. 5.8%, reflecting the Italian trend to include a greater level of detail both in initial reviews and in subsequent disagreements. However, perhaps the most significant distinction between the Italian and Spanish responses is the high level of strengthened disagreement in the former compared to the latter: [UD], 17.6% vs 2.7%; [REP], 13.9% vs 2.9%; and [INS], 8.4% vs 2.4%.

Of particular interest is the disparity between the Spanish and Italian sub-corpora in the use of commissive acts, [HO] and [AV] (Spanish, 50.8%; Italian, 21.7%). This feature highlights not just the prevalence of normative politeness strategies in Spanish, but also the importance of positive (self-) image for these hotel/restaurant representatives: highly aware of their role in the interaction, they use these strategies to hide their discomfort in the face of the complaint received.

The lack of normative politeness strategies in the Italian sub-corpus is significant and also in line with other studies. In their work on responses to hotel reviews on TA, Cenni and Goethals (2020: 4), for example, note a preference among Italian respondents for "'dismissing' the complaint, signalling a stronger inclination to defend the hotel's perspective in opposition to more

accommodative interactions". While this tendency is most evident in respect to these politeness formulae, it is also present in comparatively high incidence of certain other strategies in the Italian sub-corpus, specifically [REP] and [INS].

Similarly, Italian respondents show more concern for defending the quality of the services offered, as evidenced by their higher use of [LIST] compared to their Spanish counterparts. This strategy can be interpreted as a form of self-praise and, within the Italian sub-corpus, it appeared largely unmitigated. Italian respondents' primary concerns often seem to revolve around exalting the great human effort involved in the provision of service which contains the additional implication that this makes them undeserving of any criticism.

The high use of unmitigated disagreement among Italian respondents combined with the tendency of their Spanish counterparts to prefer strategic politeness – courtesy and self-facework activities (Hernández Flores, 2013) – enable us to characterise the former as supportive and the latter as confrontational. Indeed, evidence from the Spanish sub-corpus suggests a lower disposition to conflict, as in example (50), where the respondent makes the meta communicative statement: 'Si usted pretende que el hotel entre en conflicto, esta muy lejos de su proposito' *If you think the hotel is going to enter into an argument, you are very far off the mark*.

There are, however, aspects of communicational approach in which these two groups of speakers converge. Hotel/restaurant representatives responding to reviews, seem to be aware that their conflict mitigation strategies, while directly aimed at the reviewer, are also indirectly aimed at other TA users. Thus, their responses operate on the basis of what might be referred to as a 'double recipient design scheme' and this is probably responsible for the high incidence of the mitigated strategy, [APO/TH/RE+but] in both sub-corpora.

Turning briefly to differences between how hotels and restaurants treated complaints, here we see that, compared to Italian hotels, Italian restaurants were most likely to issue intensified disagreements ([UD], [REP], [INS]). This was especially the case for the [INS] strategy which was used in 6.8% of cases by restaurants but in only 1.65% of cases by hotels. This may be to do with differences in infrastructure between the hotels and restaurants studied with the latter tending to be more local, smaller enterprises, meaning that the respondant was often more personally connected to the business, the restaurant manager, for instance, and thus more likely to take a reviewer's criticism to heart. One might conclude therefore that a greater level of personal connection, fuels rather than attenuates conflict; however, this is not backed up in the Spanish data where there were no significant differences between restaurants and hotels in the use of these three highly conflictive strategies: the

total use of all three in the Spanish sub-corpus was 3.8% for hotels vs. 4.1% for restaurants.

5 Conclusions

This investigation concerns the analysis of a corpus of 500 review-response pairs collected from TA about restaurants and hotels in Spain and Italy. The text of these review-response pairs was analysed manually with the assistance of the AntConc (Anthony, 2005) software tool. Examination of these interactions has enabled us to provide novel insights into speech act sets in conflict exchange (SASCs) and their related linguistic structures.

Unlike previous studies, rather than treating reviews and responses as independent, the present work considers them within the framework of conflict discourse, that is, in terms of previous action (the situation or interaction that prompts a complaint); opposition (the complaint or criticism of the reviewer); and reaction (the response containing disagreement from the hotel/restaurant representative). Furthermore, we consider both initiating acts (reviews) and reactive interventions (responses) as speech act sets (Cohen and Olshtain, 1981) in which different types of speech act are coproduced forming a macro-speech act wherein the various component speech acts can perform different roles (head act or supportive move) depending on their relationships to one another. Within a given review or response, one speech act is identified as the head act, while the other acts in the speech act set function as supportive moves attenuating or, occasionally intensifying, the principal act of complaint (in a review) or disagreement (in a response).

The analytical model developed for this work has allowed us to systematically categorise the communication strategies used in our corpus of TA interactions in Spanish and Italian and highlight the numerous differences in usage existing between the two sub-corpora. Particular results include the finding that, in line with Cenni and Goethals's (2020) study, Italian respondents have an overall confrontational approach favouring unmitigated disagreement, the use of disqualifying acts (reprimands and insults) and self-praise (listing the services of the hotel/restaurant). In contrast, Spanish respondents were more convivial and supportive, preferring acts constituting normative politeness which tend to mitigate disagreement.

This investigation contributes to the ongoing development of cross-cultural pragmatics helping to establish the theoretical foundations of this field through the examination of particular cases as exemplified in the work of House and Kádár (2021). In this way, the present study adds to our knowledge concerning

the types of speech acts used in conflict speech act sets and the linguistic realisations of these acts. In addition, this work opens new perspectives for analysis in future work concerning cross-linguistic variation in conflict interactions. Indeed, the model developed during the analysis of this corpus will prove very useful in future work.

Author Contributions

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The writing of this article and the research on which it is based, in all its phases and parts, are the result of close and balanced collaboration between the two authors. For academic purposes only, the authorship is broken down as follows: María Isabel Hernández Toribio paragraphs 1, 3, 4.2, 5; Laura Mariottini paragraphs 2, 4, 4.1, 4.3. The bibliography is common.

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