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Rapport management in service complaints to taxi-cab companies on Twitter/X: The case of Uber in Mexico and Spain

La gestión de las relaciones interpersonales en la realización de quejas de servicio a empresas de taxi en Twitter/X: el caso de Uber en México y España

Abstract: Service complaints in face-to-face and telephone interactions have received some attention among Hispanists (e.g., Márquez Reiter, 2005, 2013). However, while several studies exist concerning online service complaints relating to English and other languages (e.g., Vásquez, 2011; Meinl, 2013; Dayter and Rüdiger, 2014), little attention has been given to this commonplace activity in digital environments in the Spanish-speaking world. Employing a contrastive pragmatics perspective, this paper examines service complaints made by Uber users on the company's Mexican and Spanish Twitter/X accounts. Based on the corpus selected, and, adopting a rapport management perspective (Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008), we consider whether complainers orient themselves towards maintaining, enhancing, or challenging rapport, as reflected in their choice of semantic formulae and use of internal and external modifiers. In addition, we examine trends in the production of complaints across Twitter accounts relating to the interactional purposes they appear to serve (e.g., obtaining redress, threatening revenge, etc.). Findings show that while users across Twitter accounts adopted an overall rapport-challenging orientation, there were differences in how this orientation manifested. They also showed that complaints fulfilled very different purposes among the two groups studied. This suggests that users of the two Twitter/X accounts have different interactional priorities.

Key words: complaints, digital pragmatics, Twitter/X, Uber, rapport management, service interactions

Resumen: Las quejas de servicio en interacciones cara a cara y telefónicas han recibido alguna atención entre hispanistas (v. p. ej., Márquez Reiter, 2005, 2013). Sin embargo, si bien existen algunos estudios de quejas sobre servicios en línea en inglés y otras lenguas (v. p. ej., Vásquez,

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2011; Meinl, 2013; Dayter y Rüdiger, 2014), se ha prestado poca atención a esta actividad en los entornos digitales del mundo hispanohablante. Empleando una perspectiva pragmática contrastiva, este artículo examina las quejas de servicio presentadas por los usuarios de Uber en las cuentas de Twitter/X de la compañía en México y España. A partir del corpus seleccionado, y adoptando la perspectiva de la gestión de las relaciones interpersonales (*rapport management*) (Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008) se explora si los usuarios que emiten las quejas se orientan al mantenimiento, realce o amenaza de las buenas relaciones, tal como se manifiesta en su selección de fórmulas semánticas y empleo de modificadores internos y externos. Además, se examinan las tendencias en la producción de quejas en relación con los propósitos interaccionales reflejados en las mismas. Los resultados muestran que, si bien los usuarios en los dos grupos adoptaron una orientación general amenazadora, hubo diferencias sobre cómo se manifestó esta orientación. Asimismo, se encontró que las quejas parecen cumplir muy distintos propósitos para los dos grupos estudiados. Esto sugiere que los usuarios de las dos cuentas de Twitter/X tienen diferentes prioridades en la interacción.

Palabras clave: quejas, pragmática digital, Twitter/X, Uber, gestión de las relaciones interpersonales, interacciones de servicio

1 Introduction and aims

Complaining is a commonplace speech act that has received considerable attention in face-to-face (e.g., Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995; Edwards, 2005; Wolfe and Powell, 2006; Laforest, 2009) and telephone-mediated (e.g., Márquez Reiter, 2005, 2013) contexts. With the expansion of social media and digital consumerism (Park and Lee, 2019), the internet has now become a fertile ground for the study of complaints, for example, on TripAdvisor (Vásquez, 2011; Hernández Toribio and Mariottini, 2023), eBay (Meinl, 2013), CouchSurfing (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2014), and Booking.es (da Silva, Pérez-García, and Vázquez-Pesado, 2022), among others (see Section 2.3). Of these, da Silva et al. (2022) and Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2023) also involve cross-cultural comparisons of Spanish with another language, respectively, Portuguese and Italian. However, to our knowledge, there are no speech act studies available on digital complaints relating to intralinguistic variation in Spanish. Thus, the present study attempts to address this gap in the literature with a study examining service complaints on Twitter (now X)[1] made by users of the taxi company, Uber. The perspective adopted is thus a contrastive pragmatics one, looking at possible variation in the realisation of complaints across the two country-specific Twitter/X accounts: Uber Mexico and Uber Spain.

   Uber has a presence on Twitter/X (and other social media including Facebook and Instagram) through which it promotes its services and new products as well as its green credentials. Some customers use Uber's Twitter/X accounts to voice their complaints; a selection of these is, precisely, the object of examination in this study. An initial observation of several accounts suggested that the Spanish and Mexican sites could be fertile ground for the examination of complaints; thus, these accounts were chosen as a starting point in the analysis of (Uber) complaints in the Spanish-speaking world on Twitter/X. Future studies can look at other accounts. Also, there are a number of studies on face-to-face complaints relating

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[1] Data for this study was collected in 2019/2020 when the platform was still known as Twitter.

to Mexican and Peninsular Spanish, which were considered as a suitable foundation from which to begin work.

Given the scarcity of research in this area, as pointed out above, it is of interest to examine digital complaints in themselves, and a contrastive perspective can highlight local practices or preferences that may otherwise go unnoticed. While the exact provenance of any given user posting on the Mexican or Spanish Uber Twitter/X accounts cannot be firmly established based on the information available, it is expected that users will normally submit their complaints on the Twitter/X account linked to the place where they are using Uber's services. We can, therefore, look at trends in the production of complaints according to Twitter/X account (see Section 3).

Considering the conflictive nature of complaints (Section 2.1), it is also interesting to examine how complainers approach them relationally. For example, do they formulate their complaints as direct criticisms? Do they attempt to mitigate them? Adopting a rapport management perspective, which Spencer-Oatey ([2000]2008, p.3) defines as "the management of interpersonal relations," in this work, we will consider various aspects of how complainers manage rapport in the realization of complaints. Spencer-Oatey proposes that language can be used to maintain, enhance, or threaten harmonious social relations (p. 3). In other words, our actions can be geared at supporting or challenging rapport. We will examine several complainer strategies to gain insight into their willingness to create conflict and, hence, adopt (or not) a rapport-challenging stance. To this end, we will investigate complainers' use of various semantic formulae (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993; Bolívar, 2002; Pinto and Raschio, 2008; Elias, 2013) as well as internal and external modifiers (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989), including medium-specific ones (e.g., emojis) that either upgrade or mitigate the complaint, hence challenging or maintaining/enhancing rapport. This will also allow us to examine Edwards' (2005) contention that people do not wish to be seen complaining, for instance, by avoiding direct criticism and instead providing evidence to support the complaint.

As we shall see in this work, unlike requests or apologies, complaints are rarely definable by specific linguistic formulae (Edwards, 2005: 7). Instead, complaints are perhaps best described as speech act sets (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993), that is, they are often achieved through the combined use of several identifiable semantic formulae. In addition, when making complaints, speakers may be more or less explicit in laying blame and in their description of the offence. Such considerations can be used to rank complaints in terms of illocutionary directness (Trosborg, 1995); however, different combinations of these elements of complaint structure can also fundamentally alter a complaint's purpose, to the extent that certain complaint forms may be solidarity building (Boxer, 1993). This observation leads to an alternative way of categorising complaints, that is, according to their interactional purpose for the complainer (Wolfe and Powell, 2006). Among the expected purposes in the present corpus are those connected to the customer service aspect of the Twitter/X accounts studied: gaining redress or shaming the service provider for their failing service; but there may be others due to the opportunities afforded by the public nature of Twitter/X: garnering sympathy with and warning other users. Thus, we will also consider how speakers construct their complaints to achieve different interactional purposes.

More specifically, the research questions we intend to answer are:

1. What is Twitter/X users' rapport management focus and how does it vary across the two data sets?

2. Based on how groups of semantic formulae are used and how complaints are targeted, what interactional purposes do complaints appear to fulfil for the complainer? And what interactional priorities (service vs. personal goals) do these purposes reflect?

With respect to the first research question (RQ1), both semantic formulae employed to realise complaints as well as internal and external modifiers will be examined in terms of their import/function to maintain, enhance, or challenge rapport in the corpus of service encounters analysed. Concerning the second research question (RQ2) and in order to determine complaint purpose, we will develop a complaint taxonomy based on the combination of key semantic formulae. This will also involve looking at how the service context influences complaint purpose(s).

The study is organised as follows: Section 2 provides the background and context, starting with a consideration of several features of complaints as discussed in the literature (2.1), followed by an overview of offline complaint studies in Spanish (2.2) and online complaints relating to different digital sites and different languages (2.3). In Section 3, we include a brief consideration of features of Uber and its presence on Twitter/X (3.1), followed by a description of how our corpus was selected (3.2) and the analytical framework employed (3.3). Section 4 contains the analysis, description and discussion of our results; our conclusions are summarised in Section 5.

2 Background and context

2.1 Complaint studies across languages

First and foremost, a complaint expresses dissatisfaction or a negative evaluation, be that concerning a person, their actions, or a situation (Trosborg, 1995, pp. 311-312). In this sense a speaker's expectations of a given scenario are key and the complaint results from these being disconfirmed, the hearer being generally found responsible due to their (in)action (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987). What distinguishes a complaint from straightforward criticism or accusation then is the speaker's sense of grievance (Edwards, 2005, p. 8).

Beyond expressing the speaker's emotional state, complaints are also a way for speakers to seek redress. As Laforest (2009, p. 2460) puts it, "regulation of behaviours is the ultimate goal of complaining" and indeed, many complaints contain explicit appeals for an apology or remedial action (Trosborg, 1995; Bolívar, 2002; Márquez Reiter, 2005, 2013; Meinl, 2013).

In terms of (im)politeness effects, Brown and Levinson ([1978] 1987), for example, would consider complaints to be face-threatening acts (FTAs) due to the potential damage they can cause to the interlocutor's positive face:[2] complaints made to the person(s) responsible for the speaker's dissatisfaction are confrontational acts with potential for conflict. Several authors have studied the strategies complainers use to manage this potential conflict and have categorised these in terms of linguistic (in)directness—from the most indirect, where an offence might be merely hinted at and face threat is minimised, to the most direct where

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[2] Brown and Levinson ([1978]1987, p. 62) define positive face as the "want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others," in contrast with negative face, which they describe as the "want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others".

blame is laid, unambiguously, upon the complaint recipient and the level of face threat is high (see e.g., House and Kasper, 1981; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995).

Perhaps, surprisingly, these studies found significant use of quite direct complaints. Olshtain and Weinbach (1987), for example, examined a corpus of complaints elicited via DCTs from native and non-native speakers of Hebrew and ranked them on a five-level scale (where 5 was the most direct). Their results showed that both groups favoured complaints ranked as level 3 (45% of all complaints made), that is, half-way along their directness scale. Of course, context is an important factor in this as a high level of perceived offence may demand a very explicit, direct complaint. Additionally, there are situations where people may feel entitled to complain, for example, if they are dissatisfied with a service they have paid for (Márquez Reiter, 2013) and several studies looking at online service complaints tend to support this, finding that the majority of the complaints in their corpora were direct (Meinl, 2013; Depraetere, Decock, and Ruytenbeek, 2021).

This being said, as Edwards (2005) points out, nobody likes to be seen as a "whinger" and the potential threat to the complainer's negative and positive face (Márquez Reiter, 2005) may explain the range of strategies speakers employ to downgrade complaints. Such behaviour includes adding jokey or positive comments to complaints (Edwards, 2005; Vásquez, 2011), use of internal mitigation (House and Kasper, 1981), and other strategies aimed at making the complaint seem necessary or reasonable (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2014).

Another area of complaining behaviour concerns so called *indirect* (Boxer, 1996) or *third-party* complaints (Laforest, 2009). These are complaints "expressing dissatisfaction … with something or someone that is not present" (Boxer, 1996, p. 219) and are often associated with solidarity building between speakers (see Boxer, 1993; Acuña Ferreira, 2004, 2011; Kozlova, 2004). As Vásquez (2011) notes, however, many service complaints look like third-party complaints in the sense that the complaint recipient is not the party being blamed, yet, in terms of function, and indeed face threat, such complaints are more like the direct complaints discussed previously.

The problem of defining complaint directness is discussed by Wolfe and Powell (2006), leading them to develop a particularly insightful approach that attempts to account for a wide range of complaining behaviour. These authors were concerned with gender differences rather than attempting to assess the (in)directness of complaints; instead, they examined the purposes complaints appeared to serve for speakers. In a corpus of 160 complaints made during naturally occurring taped conversations, a total of seven speaker purposes were identified, ranging from building solidarity, to asserting their superiority, to making excuses for their behaviour or calling others to account—these last two being the strategies favoured, respectively, by men and women in this study.

As mentioned, several studies have explored the ways in which speakers manage the conflict potential of complaints—particularly mitigating their complaints—and much of this work uses Brown and Levinson's ([1978]1987) politeness theory as a point of reference. Despite its continuing influence, Brown and Levinson's work has received considerable criticism, particularly regarding its applicability in non-Anglo-Saxon cultures (see Wierzbicka (1985) discussing Polish versus English, and Bravo (2004), with reference to the Hispanic context, among many others). Here we opt for Spencer-Oatey's ([2000] 2008) rapport management framework, which offers a non-ethnocentric (Spencer-Oatey, 2003), more encompassing perspective than Brown and Levinson's ([1978] 1987) on (im)politeness phenomena (see Section 3.3).

Of particular relevance to this work, several empirical Spanish speech act studies (García, 2009; Placencia and Mancera Rueda, 2011, among numerous others), including one on the subject of complaints (Elias, 2013), have relied on Spencer-Oatey's ([2000] 2008) framework. Thus, it was deemed suitable as the theoretical basis from which to study the interactional strategies used in the complaints contained in our corpus.

As our work concerns online service complaints in Spanish, the following discussion shall consider, firstly, complaint behaviour in various varieties of Spanish and, secondly, complaints in online service encounters. Due to the limitations of space, we shall focus most closely on work that relates to speech act realisation and takes a pragmatics or contrastive pragmatics approach.

2.2 Complaint studies in Spanish

Of the significant body of research concerning the language of complaints from a pragmatics perspective, a number of studies have considered their realization in Spanish. For example, Bolívar's (2002) study focused on Venezuelan Spanish; Márquez Reiter's (2005, 2013) involved Uruguayan Spanish, while Rao's (2013) study analysed Mexican Spanish complaints. Other work has looked at Mexican-American bilingual Spanish speakers in the United States (Elias, 2013) and compared their complaining behaviour to that of native (US) English speakers and monolingual Mexican Spanish speakers (Pinto and Raschio, 2008). Peninsular Spanish speakers were the focus of work by Díaz Pérez (2001), who considered aspects of politeness in several speech acts, including complaints. Finally, while not directly relevant to this work as they do not concern speech act realisation, Acuña Ferreira's (2004, 2011) studies and Rodríguez's (2022) should be mentioned for their use of naturally occurring rather than elicited data. Rodríguez's (2022) deals with the affiliative purposes of complaining through an analysis of telephone conversations in Spanish, while both Acuña Ferreira's studies focus on emotional expression in complaint stories forming part of male gossip (Acuña Ferreira 2004), and in a comparison of the prosodic characteristics of complaints made by men and women in Peninsular Spanish and Galician (Acuña Ferreira 2011).

As a study partly involving Peninsular Spanish speakers, Díaz Pérez's (2001) work is of some relevance here. The study used a DCT to elicit complaints (and other speech acts) from 225 students (75 native Spanish speakers; 75 British English speakers; and 75 non-native English speakers) and classified complaints according to a taxonomy based on Trosborg (1995). Of particular note is the finding that social distance was the major factor in speakers' choice of complaint strategy regardless of the degree of offence, with more explicit strategies being used only when speakers were socially close. The groups of speakers were found to differ particularly in terms of their use of mitigation and upgrading mechanisms: native English speakers were the most likely to use mitigators while native Spanish speakers used least mitigation but employed the most upgraders.

Of most interest to the present work, however, are the studies by Bolívar (2002), Pinto and Raschio (2008), and Elias (2013) as they all look at complaints in terms of sets of semantic formulae. These authors observed the use of up to seven semantic formulae including openers, negative evaluations, apologies, and closers, which speakers employed in different combinations to produce their complaints. This approach will be followed in this work.

Bolívar (2002) elicited complaints from 50 Venezuelan females in two different situations: complaining to a friend and complaining to a stranger. The study found that in the first situation, respondents were most likely to use strategies of warning and negative evaluation

while in the second situation the most frequently used formulae were alerters and requests for repair.

Pinto and Raschio (2008) compared Mexican Heritage Spanish speakers (N=21), monolingual Mexican Spanish speakers (N=22), and monolingual American-English speakers (N=40). Data were gathered using an online DCT including three complaint scenarios. Results showed Heritage speakers aligning closely with monolingual US English speakers in certain aspects of their complaint production such as in their reduced use of openers and threats compared to Mexican Spanish speakers. In common with US English speakers, they also used multiple mitigators, although, at the same time, they were more likely than either of the other speaker groups to make complaints without any mitigation. The authors note that these are surprising, polar-opposite speech patterns and suggest that it is a phenomenon indicative of the conflicting influences affecting Heritage speakers.

Another study in the same area is that of Elias (2013) who used role-plays to generate her corpus of complaints in Mexican Spanish and US English by second generation Mexican American bilinguals (21 participants). One of the main purposes of this work was to explore whether or not these speakers had a different rapport orientation when speaking either Spanish or English. Findings showed that although there were some differences in their complaining behaviour when speaking Spanish compared to English (speaking Spanish they tended to give more reasons, justifications, or explanations while in English they would more often suggest, request, or command), overall, their approach to interpersonal relations was the same in both languages. In fact, these speakers favoured rapport enhancing strategies involving positive politeness which the author suggests shows their Hispanic culture was the most dominant influence on their linguistic choices. This finding is in contrast with that of Pinto and Raschio's work (2008) but may be an artefact of the small sample size.

Several studies exist concerning service complaints; of most relevance are those of Márquez Reiter (2005, 2013) examining telephone complaints in Uruguayan Spanish, made by dissatisfied customers in two contexts: firstly, calls to a care provider (2005), and secondly, calls to a company providing time-share holiday homes (2013). The call sequences in these two studies share many common features—in particular, how callers began their complaints with a factual, non-emotional account of their problem and later, when they realised that their transactional goal was unattainable, resorted to lengthy sequences of troubles-telling or *desahogo* (literally, 'relief')[3] (Márquez Reiter, 2005). The author attributes callers' initial directness to the context of the interaction—a service encounter—which gives the customer an entitlement to complain. With regards to *desahogo*, Márquez Reiter (2005: 510) comments that this form of self-disclosure, revealing quite personal details, demonstrates callers' need to be listened to even when a solution to their problems is unlikely to be offered.

2.3 Online complaint studies

There are now numerous studies of complaints in online service contexts; these include, among others: two works on TripAdvisor, that of Vásquez (2011) exploring international English complaints and Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2023) comparing negative reviews in Spanish and Italian; Meinl (2013) comparing the e-commerce site eBay complaints in British English and German; Dayter and Rüdiger (2014) on English language complaints in reviews written on the online hospitality platform CouchSurfing; Spiessens and Decock's (2017) work

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[3] The author does not translate this term instead noting that, in the context, it is semantically equivalent to the English phrases "to let off steam" and "to get something off one's chest".

on French and German business to business email complaints; Depraetere et al.'s (2021) study concerning complaints about French and Belgian rail services on Twitter/X; and da Silva et al. (2022) comparing negative reviews in Spanish and Portuguese on Booking.es.

Vásquez's (2011) work on TripAdvisor analysed a corpus of 100 negative reviews. Counterintuitively, Vásquez (2011) found that over a third of reviews contained positive comments alongside negative evaluations. For instance, Vásquez (2011) noted that reviewers were most likely to accompany their complaint with a recommendation or advice. The author argues that this strategy allows complainers to avoid looking like whingers and present themselves as objective and reasonable (see also Edwards, 2005). Of particular interest in this work is how reviewers appeared to construct their complaints with a dual audience in mind: addressing both fellow travellers and hospitality providers at different points in their review (Vásquez, 2011, pp. 1714-1715).

Meinl's (2013) work on eBay, is a cross-cultural study of English and German complaints. A data set of 400 English and 400 German complaints was analysed according to a taxonomy loosely based on that of Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) comprising eight directness levels (eight being most direct). Results revealed very few differences between the ways in which English and German eBay users formulated their complaints with both sets of users favouring the "explicit" strategy (level 3 on the scale used) mentioning the offence, the hearer, or both. The author comments that this result may reflect how eBay users, irrespective of cultural background, follow common practices—encouraged by the policies of the platform—such that the norms of the community override any cultural differences between the ways groups of speakers on the site might complain in face-to-face situations.

Dayter and Rüdiger's (2014) work analyses reviews on the CouchSurfing forum, a network that allows travellers to connect and stay in one another's homes for free. The site's lingua franca is English and of the 48 profiles selected for the study, 25 were of native English speakers while the remaining users had varying degrees of proficiency in English. The authors identify a range of strategies employed by complainers to make their complaints sound as objective as possible. Of these, two are particularly relevant to this study: *empiricist discourse* (pp. 199-200), a term coined by Potter (1996: 152) and *corroboration* (pp. 201-202). Empiricist discourse involves framing a complaint as factually as possible—simply stating events— thereby leaving all moral judgement to the complaint recipient, while corroboration involves the use of evidence to support a complaint. The authors argue that the use of these strategies relates to the dynamic of the site whereby reviewers need to protect their own reputations as desirable guests; thus, they need to legitimise their complaints by making them sound reasonable. In other words, these strategies allow complainers to present themselves as reasonable and reliable thus validating their complaints.

Meanwhile, Depraetere et al. (2021) compared complaints made on Twitter/X to the Belgium and French rail companies SNCB and SNCF, ranking complaints in terms of directness. In 200 complaint threads, the authors found only two implicit complaints noting that both Belgian and French complaints tended to use either the second or third most explicit of strategies on their directness scale.

In contrast to the other work mentioned here, Spiessens and Decock's (2017) study does not concern customer complaints posted on a public online forum, but rather business-to-business complaints contained in email communications. The corpus examined comprised 73 French and 104 German business emails, and complaints were examined using an adapted version of Trosborg's (1995) taxonomy. Findings showed both French and German speakers mostly used expressions of dissatisfaction and requests for repair; also, complaints from both

sets of speakers tended to be downgraded, especially using politeness markers (e.g., "please") and agent avoiders (impersonal address or passive voice constructions). Cross-cultural differences were observed in terms of general style with Germans tending to be more explicit while the French opted to be more confrontational.

Finally, concerning the two most recent studies— da Silva et al. (2022) and Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2023)—, they are of particular interest due to their treatment of complaints in Spanish. da Silva et al. (2022) noted that Spanish speakers seemed to be more confrontational than the Portuguese speakers in their work; however, theirs is a very small-scale study including only 10 Spanish and 10 Portuguese reviews; thus, it is not possible to draw any robust conclusions regarding the complaining behaviour of each group of speakers.

Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2023) is a far larger study comparing a total of 500 complaints (250 in Spanish and 250 in Italian), and in contrast to da Silva et al. (2022), their data showed Spanish speakers to be the more conflict averse group, having a greater tendency to use what they describe as weaker complaint forms than their Italian counterparts. For example, Spanish and Italian speakers mostly made complaints using negative evaluations; however, Spanish complaints were more likely to also contain an ameliorating positive comment or involve suggestions and recommendations (pp. 22-25). The inclusion of positive statements in these complaints, as in Vásquez (2011), is no doubt a strategy aimed at appearing reasonable; nonetheless, it could also be a facet of the review-style nature of these complaints leading to a desire to also appear *fair*. This desire may, in addition, be connected to an awareness that complaints perceived as malicious run the risk of being referred to TripAdvisor's site moderators.[4] Twitter/X, however, is not a dedicated review platform thus the appearance of this strategy in the present corpus is unlikely.

3 Methodology

3.1 Uber on Twitter/X

Uber represents part of the growing gig-economy relying on independent workers to provide services to the public via mobile platforms. Founded in 2009 as Ubercab, it is an international company with a reported 93 million users worldwide in the last quarter of 2020 (Burgueño Salas, 2021).

The social networking site Twitter/X has 556 million active users (Most popular social networks, January 2023), and one of its key features is that it allows for the sharing of multimodal tweets, including verbal texts with a 280-character limit, videos, memes, etc. Uber has a presence on Twitter/X, as remarked above, and its number of followers is recorded on its various account pages. At the time of data collection for this study (January 2019), Uber had over 19 000 and 480 000 followers in Spain and Mexico, respectively.

Like many other businesses, Uber uses Twitter/X for marketing purposes, for instance, advertising its services and new products. Interestingly, these posts sometimes trigger complaints when users' experiences do not correspond with what is advertised. We can see

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[4] The hospitality businesses reviewed have the option to appeal to these moderators in the case of what they feel to be malicious reviews, as exemplified in certain complaint responses found in Hernández Toribio and Mariottini's (2023, p. 32) corpus.

this in (1a) where Uber_Spain advertises its services by asking *¿A dónde vamos?* 'Where shall we go?'
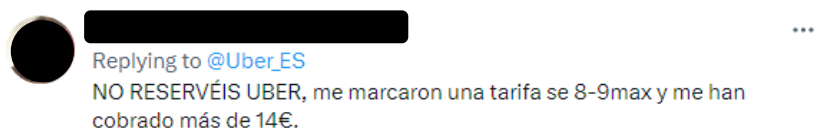
(1a)   Uber_Spain promotional tweet
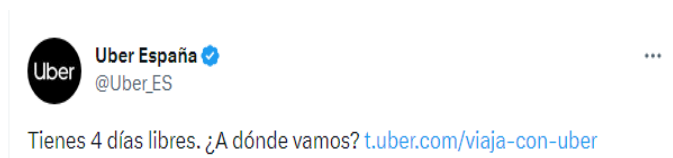
'You have 4 free days. Where shall we go?'

This post prompts a dissatisfied user, (1b), to firstly warn other users against using the service and to then complain about her experience of overcharging:

(1b)   Uber_Spain complaint (SpC26)[5]

Retweet of the advert shown in 1a

'DO NOT BOOK$_{Tp}$[6] UBER, they quoted me a fare of 8-9 max and they charged me more than 14€.'

Twitter/X makes it possible for users to engage directly with companies. Thus, while Uber offers customer service via a dedicated website and call lines, customers clearly view Twitter/X as an appropriate platform to air their complaints. Thus, unlike (1b) where the complaint arises in reaction to Uber's promotional tweet, most complaints in our corpus were initiated by clients, as in (2a), where the complainer explains a situation where a driver failed to show up:

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[5] We use Sp to refer to examples gathered from Uber's Spanish account and Mex for examples from their Mexican account. C stands for complainer and the number that follows refers to the complaint number in the corresponding corpus.

[6] To distinguish between familiar and formal address and singular and plural forms we use the following convention: subscript Ts and Tp for familiar singular and plural forms respectively; subscripts Vs and Vp for formal singular and plural forms, respectively.

(2a) Uber_Mex complaint (MexC39)
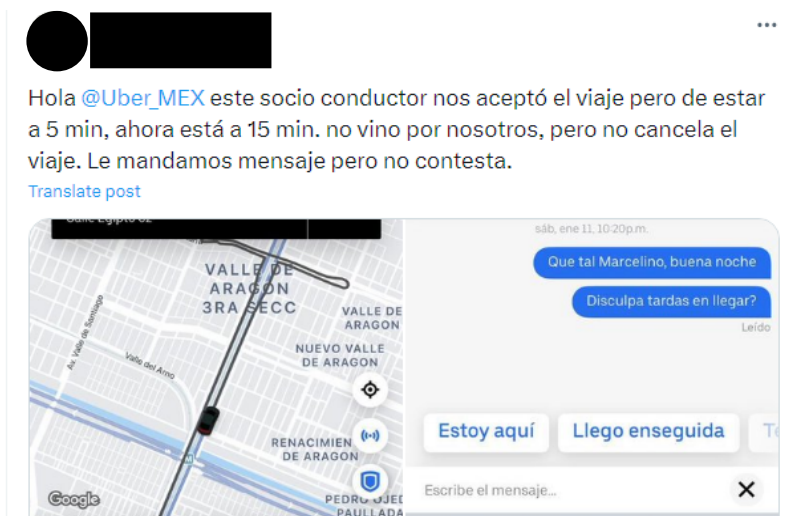
'Hello @Uber_Mex this partner driver accepted our journey but from being 5 min away, now he's 15 min away. he hasn't come for us, but he doesn't cancel the journey. We sent him a message but he doesn't answer.'

Most complaints (i.e., 88.5%) were replied to by customer services; for instance, the response to (2a) is (2b):

(2b) Uber_Mex response to MexC39

'We want youTs to be able to count on the service whenever youTs need it USER, if your drive is late by more than 5 minutes over the wait time that initially appears on yourTs App, youTs can cancel and youTs will not be charged a cancellation fee. Thanks for telling us what happened.'

As in the example above, these replies often helped us confirm the complaint nature of the original post. The following section provides further details concerning complaint selection for the corpus.

3.2 The corpus

As indicated, our corpus for analysis comprises complaints posted on Uber's local Mexican and Spanish Twitter/X accounts. The use of natural data has the advantage of being unaffected by any transcription process or issues concerning the observer's paradox (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). To differentiate between the users posting on the two accounts studied, we shall refer to these as either Mexican account complainers (MexComps) or Spanish account complainers (SpComps).

Data were collected within a time span extending from the beginning of November 2019 to the end of January 2020. The data collection process required going through all the tweets posted in the period selected and deciding which ones constituted or involved a complaint. This resulted in a corpus of a total of 131 tweets: 65 from Spain; 66 from Mexico. Posting about an issue with the service indicates dissatisfaction, thus a statement of a problem was sufficient for a tweet to be counted as a complaint and responses from customer services and other users supported this interpretation.

A minority of complaints gathered extended to become multi-turn conversational sequences with customer services (9%) and/or other users (23%); however, it was decided not to consider these additional turns, but to focus on the utterances that contained the complaint. This approach was taken since it was found that the act of complaining itself was normally carried out via a single tweet, that is, a tweet that contained an utterance fully identifying a problem a user had encountered that had caused, or was causing, dissatisfaction. In addition, users were often advised to continue their complaint using private messages; thus, the further development of complaint sequences was unavailable in most cases.

This study sets out to examine customer complaints concerning cab services, as previously indicated. It should be noted that any posts about Uber's food delivery service, UberEATS, and those from drivers were ignored. Certain posts were also rejected because, either they were too unclear or, rather than complaints they were, in fact, simply criticisms of Uber; for instance, there was significant discussion of the legality of Uber's operating practices on the Spanish platform.

Posts are public but for the purposes of protecting user privacy, all Twitter/X handles referring to users were removed. This complies with the principles laid out by the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke et al., 2020) in their ethical guidelines.

While a future study could focus on a larger corpus, we hope our exploratory study will provide an initial window into complaint behaviour among Uber users in Spain and Mexico.

3.3 Analytical framework

As stated in the research questions, the particular areas of interest in this work are identifying firstly complainer's rapport management orientation, and secondly, the purpose complaints appear to have for the complainers in this corpus.

Considering our first aim (RQ1), as touched upon in the introduction, Spencer-Oatey's ([2000] 2008) rapport management framework offers a robust way of examining linguistic (im)politeness phenomena. The framework maintains useful concepts such as Goffman's ([1967] 2005) notion of face, and Brown and Levinson's ([1978] 1987) notion of face-saving strategies in the presence of FTAs, but also incorporates other components—so called bases for rapport management. The three principal bases include face sensitivities which are dependent on speakers' social connection and identities, speakers' interactional goals (interpersonal versus transactional), and speakers' perceptions of the sociality rights and obligations associated with the interaction, that is, their social expectations relating to participants' interactional roles and responsibilities. Taken together, these considerations allow us to define speakers' interpersonal strategies in terms of a rapport orientation: maintaining, enhancing, or challenging rapport.

Influenced by their perceptions surrounding these three bases, speakers use various strategies to manage their interpersonal relations, or rapport, in several domains (Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008, pp. 21-31). These include the illocutionary (speech act realisation),

discourse (topic and discourse structure), participation (turn-taking, pauses), stylistic (choices of address, tone, or genre specific lexis), and non-verbal (e.g., facial expression, gestures, proximity) domains, of which we will consider the illocutionary as well as the nonverbal domains. The latter, as we will see, includes nonverbal aspects pertaining to digital communication such as the use of emoji (see, e.g., Sampietro, 2019) and prosodic orthography (e.g., the use of capitals to convey shouting) (Androutsopoulos, 2000; Giammatteo, 2024). This domain is relevant in the present study when it comes to the analysis of internal and external modifiers in speech act realization (Section 4.2).

Each complaint in our corpus was analysed first in terms of its constituent semantic formulae and the (internal and external) modifiers employed. With regards to semantic formula, here we relied on the definitions used in previous work (Bolívar, 2002; Pinto and Raschio, 2008) to identify most common formulae, but introducing several new categories to account for the particular features of our data. Each semantic formula was assessed as to whether it was neutral to the conflict potential of a complaint, or whether it lowered or raised it. This led to their categorisation as rapport maintaining, enhancing, or challenging formulae.

With reference to Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) coding scheme, modifiers were classified as either mitigators or upgraders, with a focus on their rapport enhancing and rapport challenging effects). Additional insights derived from several works concerning the particular features of online communication (Androutsopoulos, 2000; Herring, 2001; Cirillo, 2012; Robb, 2014; Giammatteo, 2024). The identification and categorisation of semantic formula and modifiers is explained in greater depth in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Concerning our second aim (RQ2), building on Wolfe and Powell (2006), we developed a taxonomy to describe the interactional purposes served by the complaints in this corpus. These categories are primarily based on the types of semantic formulae used but also on how well-specified the complainer's problem was and whether a responsible party was explicitly blamed, or targeted (Wolfe and Powell, 2006). This approach allowed us to avoid the concept of (in)directness—the basis of other taxonomies (e.g., Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995)—which is ambiguous when applied to complaints, especially in the context of service encounters (Vásquez, 2011), as explored in Section 2. For instance, we found that 105 (80.2%) of all complaints in this corpus explicitly identified a responsible party to blame, and thus would be considered direct according to Olshtain and Weinbach (1987) or Trosborg (1995); however, while the principal addressee of all these complaints was the company, in a substantial minority of cases (24, 22.86%), the party blamed was a driver—a third party—; thus, using Boxer's (1996: 219) definition, they could be classed as indirect complaints.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Semantic formulae

Using the definitions outlined in previous work (Bolívar, 2002; Pinto and Raschio, 2008), we identified eight widely used semantic formulae within our corpus: alerters, justifications, negative evaluations, preaching, problem statements, threatening consequences, direct requests for repair, questions (interrogatives requiring an answer), and closers. We also introduced the "orienter" and the "rhetorical question". The former comprises statements that do not directly relate to the problem complained about, or provide justification for it, but instead give contextual information that assists understanding. The latter constitutes an (implicit) assertion despite its interrogative character (see, e.g., Escandell Vidal, 1984), and

some scholars have included questions of this type under the categories of preaching (Pinto and Raschio, 2008) and moralising (Bolívar, 2002); however, they are distinctive in being formulated as interrogatives. It was also necessary to introduce the use of sarcasm as a further formula to account for certain, often humorous, utterances that contained an element seemingly designed to ridicule the situation. These formulae are listed, with examples, in Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c below, and classified according to their conflict potential orientation.

Formulae presenting the complainer and their complaint as reasonable or utterances seeking to foster empathy with the interlocutor (Pinto and Raschio, 2008) (statements and justifications) were judged to lower a complaint's conflict potential and were therefore counted as rapport enhancing (REn; Table 1a).

Table 1a. *Rapport enhancing and maintaining semantic formulae used across data sets.*

Semantic formula	Example	Mexico	Spain
Problem statement	(3) SpC4: *me habeis cobrado un viaje que hice hace 3 días dos veces* 'you$_{Tp}$ have charged me for a journey I made 3 days ago twice'	61 (29.1%)	51 (21.7%)
Justification	(4) SpC32: *Y no era por un asunto de pedido mínimo* 'And it wasn't a case of minimum charge'	24 (11.4%)	19 (8.1%)
	Total REn	85 (40.5%)	70 (29.8%)
	All semantic formulae	**210 (100%)**	**235 (100%)**

Those formulae that would be regarded as appropriate to the medium or to the type of interaction (i.e., openers, closers, and orienters) were deemed to be rapport maintaining (RMa) as they are neutral in terms of conflict potential (Table 1b).

Table 1b. *Rapport maintaining semantic formulae used across data sets.*

Semantic formula	Example	Mexico	Spain
Alerter	(5) SpC1: *una pregunta* 'a question'	38 (18.1%)	42 (17.9%)
Closer	(6) MexC3: *Gracias* 'Thanks'	1 (0.5%)	7 (3 %)
Orienter	(7) SpC25: *estoy en Argentina de vacaciones, soy usuaria* 'I'm in Argentina on holiday, I'm a user'	11 (5.2%)	12 (5.1%)
	Total RMa	50 (23.8%)	61 (26.0%)

	All semantic formulae	210 (100%)	235 (100%)

Rapport challenging (RCh) formulae (Table 1c), on the other hand were those that increased conflict potential by either making judgements that attempt to induce negative emotions like shame or guilt (i.e., negative evaluations and preaching); threatening the reputation of the complaint recipient (i.e., rhetorical questions, accusations, threatening consequences, warning, or insulting); or requiring them to act (i.e., questions and requests). The category of 'other' was introduced to account for a number of formulae that occurred only infrequently (less than twice in both sub-corpora). These include warnings, advice, insults, and accusations.

Table 1c. *Rapport challenging semantic formulae used across data sets.*

Semantic formula	Example	Mexico	Spain
Question	(8) MexC2: *¿Qué procede?* 'What next?'	6 (2.9%)	8 (3.4%)
Request repair	(9) MexC3: *Solicito mi reembolso* 'I request my reimbursement'	9 (4.3%)	14 (6%)
Preaching	(10) SpC14: *En Uber a ningún lado, se te olvida la maleta y nadie te da respuesta por 48 horas #UberPierdeMaletas* 'Nowhere in Uber, if you forget your suitcases, nobody gives you an answer for more than 48 hours #Uberlosessuitcases'	11 (5.2%)	15 (6.4%)
Negative evaluation	(11) SpC12: *que decepción @Uber_ES* 'what a disappointment @Uber_ES'	23 (11%)	31 (13.2%)
Rhetorical question	(12) MexC12: *@Uber_MEX que pasa con tus conductores que no quieren hacer viajes* 'what's going on with your drivers not wanting to make journeys'	13 (6.2%)	13 (5.5%)
Use of sarcasm	(13) MexC21: *Me están cobrando la mensualidad del auto o qué jajaja* 'You're charging me for monthly hire for the car or what hahaha'	2 (1%)	8 (3.4%)
Threatening consequences	(14) SpC2: *Cancelaré mi cuenta* 'I will cancel my account.'	4 (2%)	9 (3.8%)
Other: e.g.: Insult	(15) SpC13: *me cago en vuestros muertos* 'I shit on your$_{Tp}$ dead'	7 (3.3%)	6 (2.6%)
	Total RCh	75 (35.7%)	104 (44.3%)
	All semantic formulae	**210 (100%)**	**235 (100%)**

Overall, MexComps showed a slight orientation to REn with 40.5% of all formulae used being rapport enhancing while 35.7% were RCh and 23.8% were RMa. Furthermore, the most frequently used formulae in this sub-corpus were either REn or RMa: statements (29.1%), alerters (18.1%), and justifications (11.4%). Problem statements and justifications are not only

rapport enhancing but, the former also demonstrates a significant trend among MexComps to appear reasonable by framing their complaints as factually as possible. This is an example of the empiricist discourse observed by Dayter and Rüdiger (2014) and it fits well with Edward's (2005) contention that speakers do not want to be seen complaining.

For the SpComps, while 29.8% and 26.0% of formulae were REn and RMa respectively, 44.3% were RCh. However, problem statements and alerters were still overall the most used formulae (21.7% and 17.9% respectively). The third most used formula was negative evaluation (13.2%). The use of this formula and the generally higher orientation to RCh in this sub-corpus show SpComps were less worried about being seen as complainers than MexComps.

Concerning the use of alerters, some comparisons can be made with previous studies. Bolivar's (2002) findings, for instance, show that these conversational openers were more common in complaints to strangers; commenting on their high use among monolingual Mexican Spanish speakers, Pinto and Raschio (2008: 240), observe that this may indicate these speakers feel a particular need to establish camaraderie—also noting their common appearance before the issue of a threat. Once again, we would suggest these represent a routine formula that speakers resort to due to perceptions of risk in the interaction (Laver, 1981). Thus, their high incidence in this work is unsurprising given that these are complaints to strangers and, the fact that they were slightly more common in the MexComps sub-corpus, may reflect Pinto and Raschio's (2008) observations about Mexican Spanish speakers.

4.2 Modifiers

Complainers in this corpus used a wide variety of internal and external modifiers to either reduce or increase the power of their complaints. These are categorised, respectively as rapport enhancing (REn) modifiers (Table 1a) and rapport challenging (RCh) modifiers (Table1b). Many of the internal modifiers found in our corpus are common in other forms of communication, and following Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) coding scheme, these could be straightforwardly categorised as either mitigators (thus functioning as REn modifiers), or upgraders (thus constituting RCh modifiers).

In addition, a variety of medium-specific affordances (MSA) also acted as internal modifiers. Many features, such as prosodic orthography (Androutsopoulos, 2000) and abbreviations (Herring, 2001) suggest informality and could be described as part of an in-group slang (Cirillo, 2012). As such, they tend to mitigate complaints, thus, they were categorised as REn modifiers (solidarity MSAs, see Table 2a). Other features were definitively upgrading and thus rapport challenging; for instance, capitalisation (Robb, 2014) is generally understood as the text equivalent of a raised voice, as in (1b), where the user emphatically warns others against reserving Uber cabs (upgrading MSAs, see Table 2b).

Certain other MSAs present in the corpus constituted external modifiers, for example, emojis and, to a lesser extent, emoticons. These have been described as contextualisation cues (Herring, 2007) and can take on many different meanings: they can indicate emotional state and also help read between the lines for intended irony or humour (McSweeney, 2018). In this corpus, they were used to indicate the extremity of the complainers' frustration, hence upgrading complaints. Angry or sad faces were common but also laughing faces exaggerating the absurdity (in the complainer's opinion) of certain routes taken, therefore, ridiculing the driver.

The Twitter/X-specific affordance of the hashtag was a further external modifier that also appeared in complaints. The evolution of the hashtag, from its start as an aid to searching for information to its current role as a stylistic indicator is discussed by Scott (2015). In this corpus, hashtags were used in a variety of ways to upgrade complaints. For example, hashtags were used as negative evaluations of Uber's performance, as in (10) on Table 1c, which includes a hashtag asserting that Uber loses suitcases. Hashtags were also used to reference the company—see (32a and 34a) #uber—and while this looks innocuous, employing the company name as a search term leads other users to this complaint and is therefore an act threatening the company's reputation. Thus, these instances of hashtag use were also considered to be upgrading MSAs.

Finally, three further external modifiers were also identified. Like the modifiers discussed above, these were technology mediated, one specific to Twitter/X—retweets of promotional posts from Uber (to convey disappointment vis-à-vis an unfulfilled expectation, see Table 2b)— and two related to smartphone usage—the attachment of screen shots showing maps with the routes and/or positions of drivers or text message conversations with drivers (thus providing visual evidence, see Table 2a); or pictures identifying drivers (thus engaging in naming-and-shaming, see Table 2b). These items appeared with sufficient frequency that it was possible to ascribe them a meaning in conjunction with their accompanying text, so qualifying them as modifiers. The use of visual evidence is a corroboration strategy (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2014) and was considered to be a REn modifier as it is a means by which users enhance their own reputations, justifying their complaints and demonstrating them to be reasonable. The other two strategies were RCh modifiers: naming-and-shaming drivers not only damages the reputation of the driver but could be considered a warning to others, thus constituting a threat to the cab company; and retweeting promotional material with an attached complaint speaks quite explicitly to one of the main identifiers of a complaint—an expression of disappointed expectations.

As can be seen in Tables 2a and 2b, results show that for both MexComps and SpComps, RCh modifiers were more widely used (67.2% and 76.9% respectively) than REn modifiers. The slightly lower use of RCh modifiers among MexComps suggests this group were slightly less oriented to rapport challenge than the SpComps.

Table 2a. *Rapport enhancing internal and external modifiers used across data sets.*

Modifier	Example	MEXICO	SPAIN
Rapport enhancing visual evidence	Screenshot of itinerary or messages to/from driver (see examples 2a, 34a and 34b).	29 (16.7%)	8 (6.8%)
Solidarity medium-specific affordance (or MSA)	abbreviations: (16) SpC49: *Porfa* (*por favor* 'please'); prosodic punctuation (17) MexC20: *…cosas robadas por sus conductores ni nada!!!* '… things stolen by your drivers or anything!!!'	18 (10.3%)	11 (9.4%)
Other	Affiliative slang: (18) MexC2: *que onda* 'what's the deal'; use of conditional tense: (19) SpC11: *Entendería el cobro de los 3,50€, pero…* 'I would understand charging the 3.50€, but…'	10 (5.7%)	8 (6.8%)
	Total REn modifiers	57	27

	(32.8%)	(23.1%)
All Modifiers	**174 (100%)**	**117 (100%)**

Table 2b. *Rapport challenging internal and external modifiers used across data sets.*

Modifier		Example	MEXICO	SPAIN
Emphatic language	Hyperbole	(20) MexC37: *jamás me dieron una solución* 'they never gave me a solution'	16 (9.2%)	11 (9.4%)
	Adverbials	(21) SpC7: *y encima no haya ni un …* 'and on top there's not one …'; (22) MexC7: *además de sentir vulnerabilidad* 'besides feeling vulnerability'	22 (12.6%)	26 (22.2%)
	Offensive terms	(23) SpC38: *Vaya viaje de mierda* 'What a shit trip'; (24) MexC18: *Puto @Uber_MEX* 'Bitch [literally, male prostitute] @Uber_Mex'	22 (12.6%)	9 (7.7%)
	Time / Frequenc	(25)SpC62 … *tras contactar tres veces* '… after contacting (you) three times'; (26) MexC27: *más de dos meses* 'more than two months'	8 (4.6%)	15 (12.8%)
Upgrading MSA		Capitalisation: (27) SpC36: *QUÉ FALTA DE PROFESIONALIDAD* 'WHAT A LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM' (see also example 1b); emojis: (28) MexC38:☹(see also example 31b); hashtags: (29) MexC54: *#MejorEnBici* '#BetterByBike' (see also examples 32a and 34a)	30 (17.2%)	22 (18.8%)
Naming-and-shaming		Screenshot of driver ID or picture of licence plate (see example 31b).	19 (10.9%)	2 (1.7%)
Disappointment		Retweeting company adverts (see example 1a)	0 (0%)	5 (4.3%)
		Total RCh modifiers	117 (67.2%)	90 (76.9%)
		All Modifiers	**174 (100%)**	**117 (100%)**

One striking difference between sub-corpora concerns how many modifiers were deployed. Specifically, while both groups used almost equal numbers of RCh modifiers, MexComps used

over twice as many REn modifiers (57 instances) compared to SpComps (27 instances). In addition, it is interesting to note that a good number of MexComps (48%) use both REn and RCh modifiers while SpComps executed the majority of their complaints with RCh modifiers only (57%). These findings are somewhat in keeping with other studies, for instance, Díaz Pérez's (2001) observation that Peninsular Spanish speakers used both fewer mitigators (REn modifiers) and far more upgraders (RCh modifiers) than other speakers in his study while Pinto and Raschio's (2008) work suggests Mexican speakers are likely to use more mitigators.

The most common modifiers among MexComps were upgrading MSAs (17.2%), classified as RCh modifiers, and visual evidence (16.7%), categorized as REn modifiers. The use of the latter is a further example of MexComps' desire to make themselves appear reasonable and demonstrate the necessity of their complaint. Of the upgrading MSAs used in the MexComps sub-corpus, the most common were capitalisation and emojis (respectively, 42.3% and 38.5% of all upgrading MSAs in this sub-corpus). These tend to accentuate complainers' personal feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with the service received, rather than directly attacking the complaint recipient's reputation (as in the case of using hashtags, for example). In combination with other features of MexComps' style, namely the use of statements to provide an empiricist discourse, it seems that, for these complainers, perceived violations of sociality rights (Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008) drive their rapport management strategy: the sense that they are only complaining out of necessity because the rights and obligations implied in the service interaction have not been fulfilled.

The most frequently used modifiers among SpComps were both RCh modifiers: emphatic adverbials (22.2%) and upgrading MSAs (18.8%), of which 63% were hashtags. These RCh modifiers are particularly focused on reputational damage to the complaint recipient: in the case of the former, showing the cab company and its drivers to be incompetent, and, in the case of hashtags, spreading negative word of mouth. In this way, SpComps' primary modification strategies might be described as negative impoliteness (Culpeper 1996: 358) in that they convey a degree of condescension and scorn for the recipient. In combination with the high use of the negative evaluation semantic formula, it seems that SpComps are most concerned with attacking the complaint recipient's face sensitivities.

Besides the differences between the sub-corpora outlined above, two others emerged that are worth mentioning: firstly, the low levels of offensive language among SpComps compared to its relatively frequent appearance in the MexComps sub-corpus: 12.6% (MexComps) and 7.7% (SpComps), and secondly the almost complete absence of the naming-and-shaming strategy among SpComps (1.7%) compared to MexComps (10.9%). Concerning the use of offensive language, this stands out as inconsistent with the more general trends seen for MexComps since it directly attacks the recipient's face by being unambiguously rude (see Kienpointner, 1997: 259-260) and indeed positively impolite (Culpepper, 1996). This may say something about the Mexican complainers' cost-benefit calculations for these interactions (Spencer-Oatey, [2000] 2008) and how they differ from those made by Spanish complainers. The use of taboo words may indicate that complainers on the Mexican account feel they have little to lose by being rude—perhaps having low expectations that complaining will, in fact, do any good.

The perceived futility of complaining may also explain the MexComps' use of naming-and-shaming: in the absence of support from customer services, consumers must protect one another by giving out warnings about untrustworthy individuals working for private cab companies. There is, however, an alternative or supplementary interpretation stemming from previous observations of how MexComps appear concerned about how others see them:
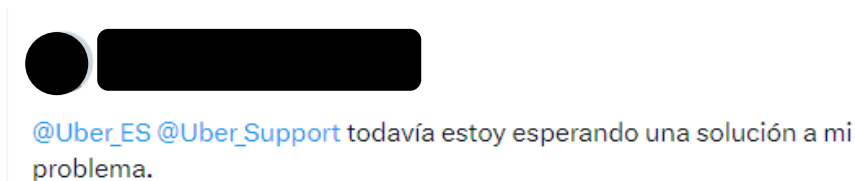
attempting an empiricist discourse (Dayter and Rüdiger, 2014) to avoid being seen as whingers (Edwards, 2005) by using statements and providing evidence. The the use of naming-and-shaming could be, therefore, another facet of this heightened audience awareness. In contrast, the Spanish complainers, being apparently far less self-conscious about their complaints, barely used this audience-centred strategy.

4.3 Complaint purpose

As described in section 3.3, to determine the interactional purposes of complaints, we used the inclusion of specific semantic formulae, the explicitness of the problem stated, and how a complaint was targeted. This allowed us to define six distinct categories of complaint purpose in this corpus. Two of the categories seen in the present study coincide with those identified by Wolfe and Powell (2006): gain catharsis for complainer (catharsis) and call responsible parties to account (call-to-account). The other four categories are specific to this corpus: gain recognition for complainer (recognition); obtain redress (redress); upbraid responsible parties (upbraid); and threaten revenge on responsible parties (revenge). Below, we provide examples of each of the complaint-purpose-categories identified in our corpus.
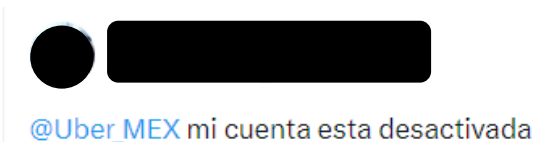
The examples below illustrate, firstly, gaining *recognition* for the complainer (30a and 30b) and, secondly, *call-to-account* responsible parties (31a and 31b). These complaint purposes were realised in very similar ways: both contain references to well-specified problems, but neither make the complainer's dissatisfaction explicit through the use of particular semantic formulae (such as negative evaluations); rather, the complaint is implied by the fact the complainer has bothered to post about their experience. These complaints differ, however, in that while both (31a) and (31b) apportion blame—in (31a) the complainer blames Uber saying, *me lo habéis cargado de nuevo* 'you_Tp have charged me again' and in (31b), Uber's driver (*tu socio conductor* 'your_Ts driver') gets the blame—this is not the case in either (30a) or (30b).
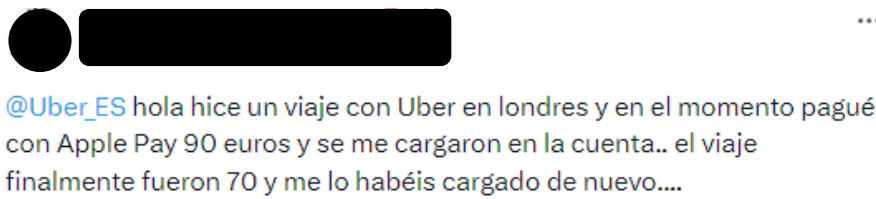
(30a) SpC19:

@Uber_ES @Uber_Support todavía estoy esperando una solución a mi problema.

'I'm still waiting for a solution to my problem.'

(30b) MexC5:

@Uber_MEX mi cuenta esta desactivada

'my account is de-activated'

(31a) SpC27:

@Uber_ES hola hice un viaje con Uber en londres y en el momento pagué con Apple Pay 90 euros y se me cargaron en la cuenta.. el viaje finalmente fueron 70 y me lo habéis cargado de nuevo….

'hello I took a trip with Uber in london and at the time I paid 90 euros with Apple Pay and my account was charged.. the trip was 70 in the end and you$_{Tp}$ have charged me again….'
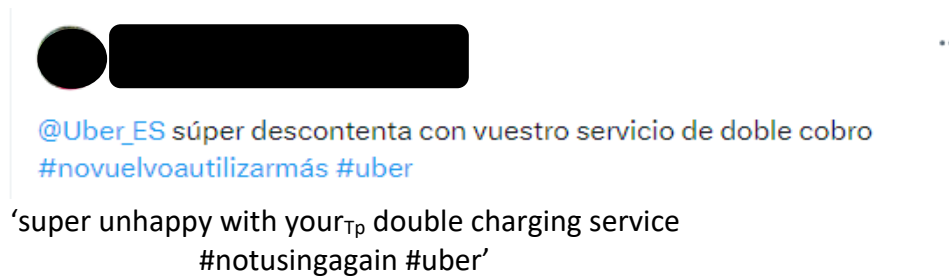
(31b) MexC11:

'yesterday I booked Uber, your$_{Ts}$ partner driver made me wait more than 10 minutes and then cancelled the trip and I was still charged for the total journey including the cancellation fee.'

In this way, while *recognition* seeks to get the complainer's problem noticed—and hopefully dealt with—reminding the company of its service responsibilities, by laying blame, *call-to-account* also aims to make responsible parties face up to their failings.

In (32a) and (32b), the purpose is gaining *catharsis* for the complainer. In both examples complainer's dissatisfaction is explicit in the negative evaluations *súper descontenta con vuestro servicio* 'super unhappy with your service' and *la PEOR experiencia* 'the WORST experience,' but there is no precise description of the problem. This type of complaint is all about the complainer letting off steam.
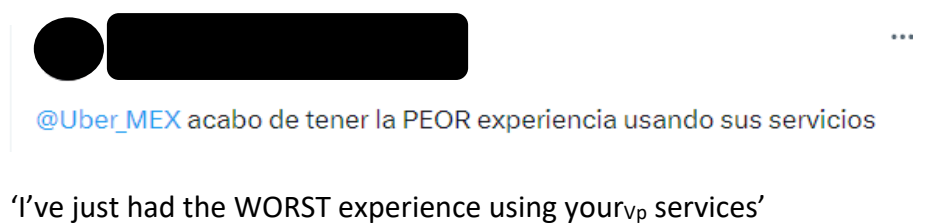
(32a) SpC30:

@Uber_ES súper descontenta con vuestro servicio de doble cobro #novuelvoautilizarmás #uber

'super unhappy with your$_{Tp}$ double charging service
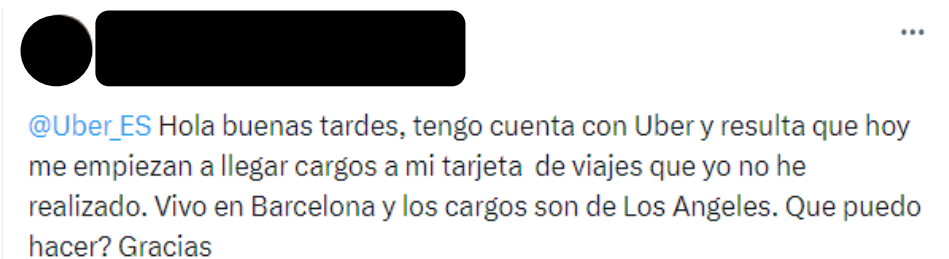#notusingagain #uber'

(32b) MexC6:

@Uber_MEX acabo de tener la PEOR experiencia usando sus servicios

'I've just had the WORST experience using your$_{Vp}$ services'

Examples (33a) and (33b) demonstrate the obtain *redress* purpose. Complaints of this type make it clear that the complainer requires the provision of a remedy to specific problems, most often being charged incorrectly, as in the examples provided. This was done by the inclusion of requests for reimbursement, for instance, or questions which could be interpreted as indirect requests. In (33a), the complainer indirectly requests help by asking what to do next:
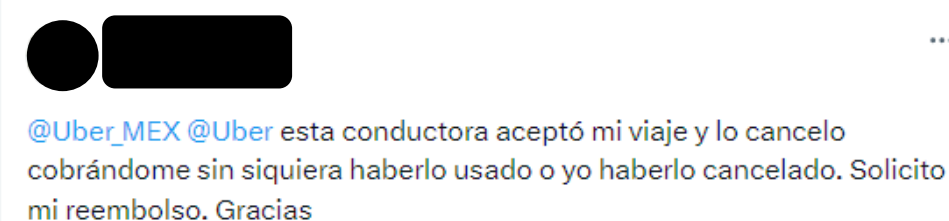
(33a) SpC6:

@Uber_ES Hola buenas tardes, tengo cuenta con Uber y resulta que hoy me empiezan a llegar cargos a mi tarjeta de viajes que yo no he realizado. Vivo en Barcelona y los cargos son de Los Angeles. Que puedo hacer? Gracias

'Hello good afternoon, I have an account with Uber and it seems that today charges have started coming off my card for journeys I haven't taken. I live in Barcelona and the charges are for Los Angeles. What can I do? Thanks.'

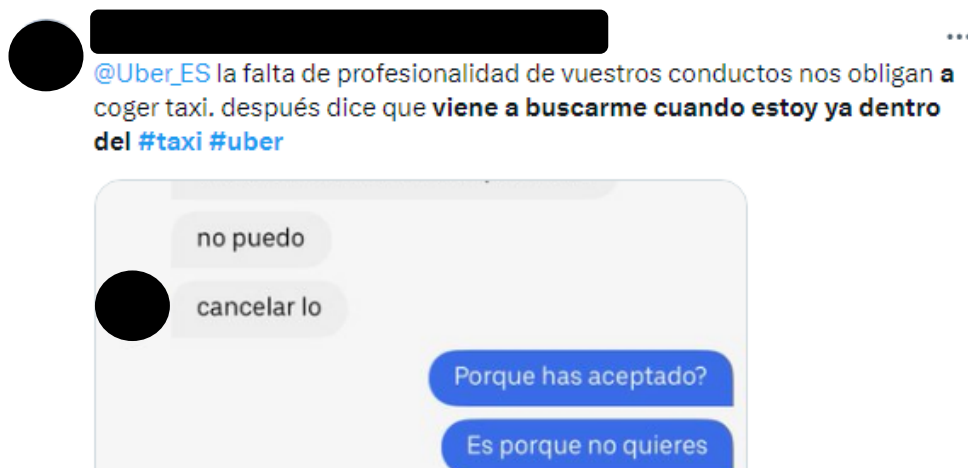While in (33b) the complainer directly asks for a reimbursement:

(33b) MexC3:

@Uber_MEX @Uber esta conductora aceptó mi viaje y lo cancelo cobrándome sin siquiera haberlo usado o yo haberlo cancelado. Solicito mi reembolso. Gracias

'this driver accepted my trip and cancelled it charging me without even having used it or me having cancelled it. I request my reimbursement. Thanks'

An interesting point concerning redress complaints is that they uniquely included what might be termed a full conversational routine—beginning with an opening greeting and ending with a recognisable closing. This may reflect Laver's (1981, p. 290) observation that "maximum routine reflects maximum risk": redress is the only complaint-type where the complainer wants something specific from the complaint recipient; thus, the stakes are highest, representing maximum risk for the complainer. Unfortunately, the small size of the corpus does not allow us to make any firm conclusions in this respect.
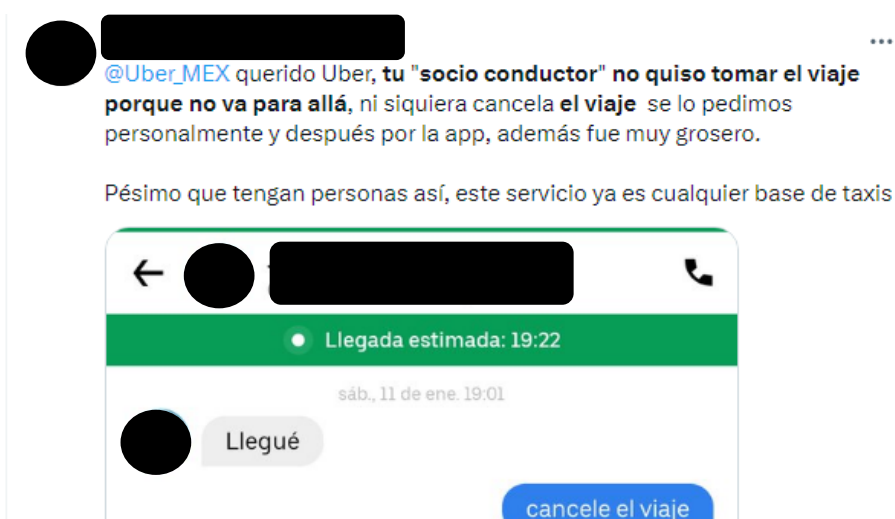
In (34a) and (34b) below, the complainer's purpose is to *upbraid* the responsible parties. Upbraids in our corpus always apportioned blame and referenced specific problems; in (34a), the driver is blamed for not turning up while in (34b) Uber is blamed for the poor quality of its drivers. Most importantly, however, upbraids also contained semantic formulae making the complainer's dissatisfaction clear—negative evaluations of the level of professionalism shown by Uber's drivers (34a) and Uber's driver vetting procedures (34b).

(34a) SpC43:

@Uber_ES la falta de profesionalidad de vuestros conductos nos obligan **a coger taxi. después dice que viene a buscarme cuando estoy ya dentro del #taxi #uber**

no puedo

cancelar lo

Porque has aceptado?

Es porque no quieres

'the lack of professionalism of your$_{Tp}$ drivers obliged us to get a taxi. then he says he's coming to pick me up when I'm already in the #taxi #uber'

(34b) MexC17

@Uber_MEX querido Uber, **tu "socio conductor" no quiso tomar el viaje porque no va para allá**, ni siquiera cancela **el viaje** se lo pedimos personalmente y después por la app, además fue muy grosero.

Pésimo que tengan personas así, este servicio ya es cualquier base de taxis

←   📞

Llegada estimada: 19:22

sáb., 11 de ene. 19:01

Llegué

cancele el viaje

'dear Uber, your "partner driver" didn't want to take the trip because he's not going that way, he didn't even cancel the trip we asked him to personally and then via the app, furthermore he was very rude.
Dreadful that you have people like that, this service is now like any other taxi service'

Examples (35a) and (35b) express the complainer's desire to take some form of *revenge* on responsible parties. The key element of these complaints is the expression of dissatisfaction through the inclusion of some threat of action to the detriment of the recipient, in the examples shown, to never use Uber's services again.

(35a) SpC56:
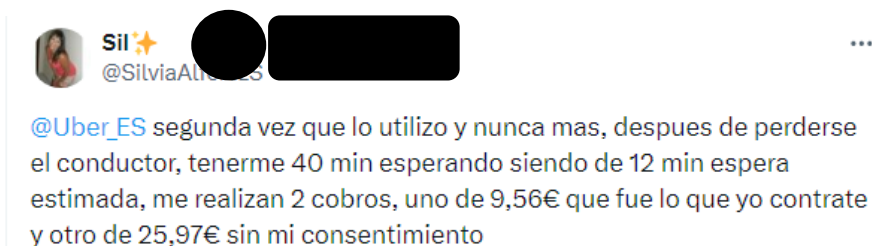
'second time that I use it and never again, after the driver got lost, having a 40 min wait the estimated wait time being 12 min, they charged me twice, once 9.56€ which was the one I booked and another of 25.97€ without my consent'

(35b) MexC19:
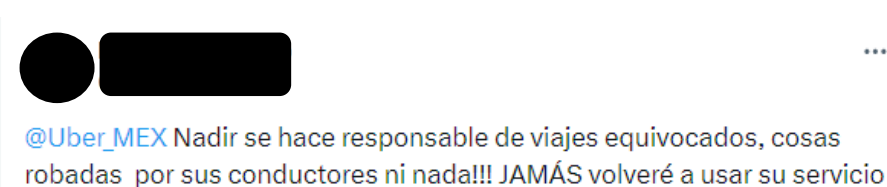
'Nobody takes responsibility for wrong journeys, things stolen by your drivers or anything!!! I will NEVER use your service again.'

The purposes of complaints for each sub-corpus are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. *Complaint purposes across data sets*

Complaint Purpose	Twitter/X Mexico	Twitter/X Spain	TOTAL
Recognition	3 (4.5%)	2 (3.1%)	5 (3.8%)
Call-to-account	13 (19.7%)	2 (3.1%)	15 (11.5%)
Redress	14 (21.2%)	20 (30.8%)	34 (26%)
Catharsis	17 (25.8%)	9 (9.2%)	26 (19.8%)
Upbraid	15 (22.7%)	22 (33.8%)	38 (29%)
Revenge	4 (6%)	10 (15.4%)	13 (9.9%)
	66 (100%)	65 (100%)	131 (100%)

As can be seen in Table 3, upbraid is the most common purpose in the whole corpus (29% of all complaints) while redress is the second most common (26%). The SpComps sub-corpus followed this pattern with 33.8% and 30.8% of complaints, respectively, having the purpose of upbraiding or obtaining redress. The picture is somewhat different in the MexComps sub-corpus, where catharsis was the most common purpose (25.8%) followed by upbraid (22.7%) and redress (21.2%). Both sub-corpora had low incidences of revenge, but it was more common among SpComps (15.4% compared to 6% among MexComps).

Considering the service context of these complaints, it is perhaps not surprising that obtaining redress was a common purpose in both sub-corpora since this purpose most directly addresses the transactional needs of complainers. However, that upbraid was the most common purpose among SpComps shows these speakers prioritise making the recipient of their complaint feel bad over any potential transactional aims. Similarly, the high use of catharsis among MexComps suggests that they too prioritise non-transactional aims, in this case, their own disappointed expectations regarding the service provided by Uber. These findings are in keeping with, on one hand, SpComps' tendency to attack the complaint recipient's face sensitivities and, on the other, MexComps' focus on sociality rights violation as discussed in section 4.2.

That catharsis is the main purpose of complaints for MexComps is also noteworthy in that, like this group's use of taboo words (section 4.2), it betrays a certain lack of confidence in the complaint procedure and a sense of the futility of complaining. This perception in the MexComps sub-corpus may be based on experience: in 2018 the Mexican government fined several private taxi companies for various consumer rights abuses (México multa a Uber, 12 July 2018). Of course, this occurred sometime before the data for this study was collected, however, many of the complaints expressed here, such as multiple charges, difficulty in contacting customer service, and misleading advertising, are, in fact, precisely the problems for which cab companies were fined.

5 Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the rapport management strategies and complaint purposes used by complainers on the Mexican and Spanish Twitter/X accounts of the private cab company, Uber.

In response to RQ1, and concerning overall rapport orientation, both groups tended towards rapport challenge; however, this tendency was strongest for SpComps: SpComps used more RCh semantic formulae (44.3%) while MexComps used more REn formulae (40.5%) but both groups used more RCh modifiers (67.2% and 76% for SpComps and MexComps respectively). Despite these similarities, there were many differences in precisely how the two groups manifested their rapport challenge due to their perceptions of the interaction and the interactional purposes they sought to fulfil by complaining.

MexComps seemed to have a higher audience awareness than their SpComps counterparts and this showed itself in several ways. Firstly, MexComps showed a strong preference for statements in constructing their complaints, and one of their most widely employed modifiers was the use of visual evidence; both features seem to display a desire among complainers to be seen by others as being reasonable, or avoiding sounding like complainers (Edwards, 2005). Secondly, only MexComps used the tactic of naming-and-

shaming to warn other users about specific bad drivers. These features of the MexComps sub-corpus, in addition to their use of modifiers, specifically the high use of certain upgrading MSAs emphasising their sense of dissatisfaction, suggest that their approach is driven by their sense of sociality rights violation: their disappointed expectations with respect to the service.

In contrast, SpComps appeared unconcerned about being seen as complainers, favouring complaints constructed using RCh semantic formulae, particularly negative evaluations, modified using emphatic adverbials and hashtags to inflict reputational damage on the complaint recipient. These features show that, unlike their MexComps counterparts, the area of rapport management of most concern to SpComps is not sociality rights but face sensitivities.

Following from this and in answer to RQ2, we see that complaining seems to fulfil different purposes for each of the groups studied reflecting their differing interactional priorities. Thus, in keeping with their concerns about face sensitivities, SpComps' complaints were more about making the recipient uncomfortable thus they mostly upbraided responsible parties (33.8%), while MexComps focussed on their own feelings and sense of disappointment in the service provided by trying to achieve catharsis for themselves (25.8%).

This said, redress was also a common purpose for both groups (SpComps, 30.8%; MexComps, 21.2%) making it the second most frequent purpose in the corpus as a whole. The significant use of redress is probably because all these interactions took place in the context of a service encounter, and thus, users felt entitled to both complain and, in addition, to expect a remedy to their problems. However, as shown, this transactional goal does not appear to be the top priority for either MexComps or SpComps.

While we have identified some tendencies in Uber users' complaint behaviours in the two groups, as outlined above, a caveat is that this is a small-scale study; thus, future work might include expanding the corpus to determine whether the patterns seen here continue to hold. Also, Uber has accounts based in several other Latin American countries; thus, further data could be gathered from these sources to provide another avenue for research into intralingual regional variation. Of equal interest would be to examine complaint development over several turns with responses from the companies and contributions from other Twitter/X users. This would enable further examination of the influence of the audience in these interactions.

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