Style variation in digital interactions: guests and hotels in Tripadvisor reviews

Variación de estilo en interacciones digitales: huéspedes y hoteles en reseñas TripAdvisor

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Abstract:

In this article we analyse variation in communicative style that appears in guests' reviews and hotel responses on Tripadvisor, the popular travel and tourism platform. The aim of the study is to examine style features that appear in guests' opinions and hotel responses. Although many initial studies in computer-mediated communication identified informality and orality as key features in this type of communication, more recent studies claim the important communicative and linguistic variation that appears in language in CMC, making it impossible to offer an overview of Spanish on the internet, which instead must be observed in situated discourse practices. The analysis of style variation on a corpus composed of reviews and their responses shows that both guests and hotels exhibit traits of adaptability to the medium in order to achieve their communicative goals, but show different and divergent, if not opposed, communication styles, which reflect the users' social realities and images, and the potential audiences to whom interactions are addressed,

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Resumen:

En este trabajo se propone un análisis del estilo comunicativo que aparece en reseñas realizadas por huéspedes de hoteles y sus consiguientes respuestas, en la popular plataforma de viajes y turismo TripAdvisor. El objetivo es identificar y analizar el conjunto de rasgos lingüísticos de estilo que aparecen tanto en las opiniones de los usuarios como en las respuestas de los responsables de las empresas hoteleras. Si bien en los inicios de los estudios sobre comunicación mediada por ordenador se identificó un conjunto de rasgos generales que podían asociarse típicamente a este tipo de comunicación, especialmente en torno a la oralidad e informalidad, estudios posteriores han mostrado la enorme variación que aparece en este tipo de comunicación, por lo que resulta imposible ofrecer una visión general del español en internet, que en cambio ha de situarse en la observación de prácticas discursivas concretas. A partir del análisis de la variación de estilo sobre un corpus de reseñas y respuestas, el estudio muestra que tanto huéspedes como hoteles exhiben rasgos de adaptabilidad al medio para alcanzar sus finalidades comuni-

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ultimately projecting different perceptions of linguistic standards, while expanding the possibilities of linguistic innovation and expression.

Keywords:

Style variation; consumer reviews; digital communication; internet pragmatics; linguistic norm

cativas, pero muestran estilos comunicativos diferentes y divergentes, por no decir encontrados y opuestos, reflejo de las realidades e imágenes sociales de los usuarios y de las audiencias potenciales que posee cada uno, enfrentando percepciones polivalentes de la norma lingüística al tiempo que ampliando las posibilidades de innovación y expresión lingüística.

Palabras clave:

Variación de estilo; reseñas de consumo; comunicación digital; pragmática en internet; norma lingüística.

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1. Introduction[1]

Interest in the field of computer-mediated communication has increased in recent years in studying the interactions that take place in different fields, such as consumption, tourism and travel, thanks to the so-called 'electronic word of mouth'. New 2.0 platforms feature a huge variety of users' opinions, either in the form of opinions or comments after reading a news item, a column in the press, an editorial or following the purchase of consumer products (Chen & Xie, 2008). This context of open and horizontal interaction has given rise to the figure of the "prosumer", a consumer who is also a producer of Internet content (Vasquez, 2011, 2014; Virtannen, 2017).

This paper focuses on this phenomenon, specifically on the reviews posted by guests commenting on their stay at hotels through the Tripadvisor platform, created precisely to host the opinions of users. The platform allows guests' experiences to be shared with other travellers, while at the same time reaching and being read by hotel managers (Law 2006). These two types of recipient mean Tripadvisor opinions become a form of free advertising for hotels and businesses, with their services promoted on users' personal initiative (Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008).

The study of user opinions has aroused a growing interest in pragmatics and discourse studies. In particular, types of complaint that are posted on Tripadvisor (Vasquez, 2011, 2014) and customer satisfaction on Airbnb (Hernández López, 2019) have been described, although always in English. In Spanish, interest has arisen in studying the mechanisms that mitigate speech acts appearing in hotel and restaurant reviews (Mancera Rueda, 2018, Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2015), as well as the processes of narration of experiences by travellers (Mariottini and Hernández Toribio, 2017).

However, responses to user opinions have received little attention, when these constitute reactive forms to the review that allow us to see the discursive practice entirety. Furthermore, while most studies have focused on speech acts and in particular on complaints, or on specific aspects such as mitigation, the way in which interactions between guests and hotels take place has not been analysed, nor has its features of styles and registers. Another interesting question that arises in the collection of reviews, as in all internet data collection, is to what extent discursive practice has to be delimited in

1 This study is part of the research carried out within the framework of the research project entitled '*Variación pragmática en la expresión de la cortesía en español*' (Pragmatic variation in the expression of politeness in Spanish) funded by UCM-Grupo Santander, REF PR87 / 19-2254, grant date 12/4/2019, as well as the R&D project entitled '*Los procesos de la gestión de la imagen y la (des)cortesía: perspectivas históricas, lingüísticas y discursivas*' (The processes of face and rapport management and (im)politeness: historical, linguistic and discursive perspectives), PID2019-107668GB-I00, grant date 06/20/2020.

order to limit the study methodology. Therefore, the objective of this study is to observe the interactions between opinions and responses and to study the stylistic features of both. The hypothesis is that the communicative style of the users of the platform is not homogeneous, but shows variation and even open divergence, in line with the communicative purposes of guests and hotels and the relationship they establish offline. An important element of the corpus is the relationship between the stylistic features of guests and hotels with the notions and perceptions of linguistic standard, which can lead to discussion on how to consider this type of digital writing in relation to the concept of the language standard.

This article is structured by firstly reviewing the bibliography on the subject. In section 3, we discuss some aspects related to the notion of style and registers and the parameters with which they can be studied. In section 4, we introduce the data and methodology. In sections 5 and 6, we present the results and discussion of the analysis of the different stylistic parameters chosen by the guests writing the reviews and the hotels' responses from a comparative approach.

2. Online consumer reviews

Online consumer reviews are an emerging trend that evolved from brief comments offered by users after purchasing products online and which have spread to numerous areas of commerce, creating a discourse genre in which the consumer transmits information and opinion on products (Chen & Xie, 2008). Vasquez (2011, 2014) describes reviewers as 'prosumers', a term that refers to consumers who are also producers, usually unpaid, of online content.

Consumer reviews have received attention in different fields, mainly in marketing and advertising, where studying user opinions is widespread and useful in designing advertising strategies (Brigs, Sutherland & Sioban, 2007; Sparks & Browning, 2010). These studies suggest that users read opinions carefully and are more inclined to value more those products that feature opinions from other users (Munar & Jens, 2014; Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Linguistic orientation studies have paid particular attention to the analysis of negative reviews and complaints, mainly in English (Vasquez, 2011, 2014, Zhang & Vasquez, 2014). In Spanish, Mancera Rueda (2018) studied mitigation strategies on Tripadvisor based on a corpus of reviews of hotels and restaurants in different places, while Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2015) described the speech acts that appear in the opinions of users, and also delved into the construction of the narration of travellers' experiences on Tripadvisor (Mariottini and Hernández Toribio, 2017). In addition, there has been a joint analysis of negative and positive opinions with a comparative pragmatic approach and the question of interculturality in the experiences of travellers in the Hispanic world (Márquez-Reiter and Hidalgo Downing, 2020).

To describe some general characteristics of consumer reviews, Virtanen (2017: 81) uses the notion of adaptability as set out by Verschueren:

> 'The property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs' (Verschueren, 1999: 61).

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In computer-mediated communication (CMC) or, better said, technology-mediated communication or TMC (Gianmateo, Gubitosi & Parini, 2017)[2], adaptability is translated into a set of affordances, such as locus (context), dynamism (processes) or audiences. Regarding the former, consumer reviews have a clear communicative purpose, which is to evaluate a consumer product and therefore are directed towards the topic or towards the author; that is, they are built around the subject of the opinion (topic-opinion) or around the perception of the author (self-opinion).

Topic-focussed
(1) *El libro perfecto para enseñar sintaxis, salvo por un detalle. No incluye las soluciones a los ejercicios, lo que habría sido muy útil.*
(The perfect book to teach syntax, save for one detail. It does not include solutions to the exercises, which would have been very useful).

Author-focussed
(2) *En mi opinión, el libro XX es una introducción excelente al estudio de la pragmática. Una lástima que el curso que estoy enseñando termine en enero.*
(In my opinion, the book entitled XX is an excellent introduction to the study of pragmatics. Too bad the course I'm teaching ends in January).
(Adapted from Virtanen, 2017: 82).

The study analysed a corpus of reviews on linguistics manuals, so these characteristics (focus on the topic / focus on the author) are particularly marked, and adaptability is shown here as a nexus between academic genres (the target audience) and promotional ones, since the reviews are written by experts in the field, demonstrating their knowledge, but also intend to make a persuasive argument. In other types of reviews, such as those of hotels that this study focuses on, reviewers are evaluating an experience, not a product, which therefore has to be lived before it can be reviewed (Vasquez, 2011, Mariottini and Hernández Toribio, 2017) and can be written in different ways, as a short opinion, a narration or arguing a certain point. Studying responses, which is not done in the work of Virtanen or Vasquez, allows further research into the possibilities of the 'locus'; the reactions to the opinions of prosumers by businesses add their point of view. Their communicative purposes and specific target audience are projected both towards the internal (on-line) and external (offline) community. In this corpus, therefore, the main objective is precisely to study the reviews and their responses together, to be able to describe the processes and representations that take place in these interactions.

3. The notion of style in computer-mediated communication

As the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic research of the last decades has shown, the choice of style in a communicative activity depends on the socially established relationship between the formal linguistic characteristics of the statement and the properties of the communicative situation. Therefore, it has consequences for the representation that speakers and recipients make of the experience in which such use is appropriate. Social practice, be it public or private; the conditions

2 The evolution of computer media and the emergence of mobile devices in daily life and communication wrought a series of major changes, which also affect the field of communication. According to Gianmateo, Gubitosi and Parini (2017), today it is more appropriate to speak of communication mediated by technology, a term that encompasses the use of any electronic device for communication.

of production and reception; the channel; the interpersonal or institutional nature of the communicative activity; the participation scheme; the relationships of hierarchy and solidarity existing between participants, –that is, what Halliday (1985) subsumed in the concepts of field, tenor and mode– determine the stylistic characteristics of the different discursive modalities. According to this idea (Halliday, 1985; Gee, 1999; Garrido Medina, 1997: 114-117), style does not simply designate a set of linguistic properties that is superimposed on previous content; style is *meaning*–transmits it– to the extent that its use reflects the representation that speakers have of the context of the situation, and therefore, of how the statements contained in it should be interpreted. Therefore, the choice of a style is associated with particular contexts of use and the ways in which the speakers of a linguistic community represent themselves –based on socially constructed expectations– and the functioning of the components in these contexts. Registers, as linguistic variations associated with more general properties of interactions, play a fundamental role in shaping style. While some authors make style traits coincide with sociolects, or social variation traits, others emphasise that the same social group may present different styles, which is why style can be considered a contextual category, which relates situational traits with linguistic features (Garrido Medina, 1997: 114). Style is characterised by choice, while social variation may be at least partially determined by the user, and not, or not solely, by use. In terms of variation of uses, style refers to 'the set of factors that intervene in the communicative situation, and the relationship with the listener is considered fundamental, that is, the aim of the addressee or receiving public, accommodation of one to the other, the interaction in social media, or prestige in the "linguistic marketplace"'(Garrido Medina, 1997: 117). This idea of style is particularly relevant to our corpus because, as will be seen in the analysis, communicative styles reflect different representations on the users' expectations and intentions regarding audience design.

In technology-mediated communication, the already solid tradition of studies has highlighted the structural characteristics of internet communication (see Herring et. Al., 2013; Yus, 2011), such as interactivity, horizontality or multimodality (Herring et. al., 2013). Some of the features that have been associated with this type of communication are informality and orality (Yus, 2011; Vela Delfa, 2016) and divergence from the linguistic standard (Mancera Rueda, 2016), in line with the emergence of a minimalist and immediate writing, without regulatory filters. However, in recent decades, scholars have observed how discursive practices are continually modified, in line with the rapid evolution of the Internet. A paradigmatic case is email, which was initially described as an informal genre, with characteristics that were associated with orality (Yus, 2011), while more recent studies describe it in professional and academic settings (Pérez Sabater, Turney & Montero, 2008). Clarity, economy and expressiveness stand out as characteristic elements of the communicative style of SMS text messages (Cantamutto, 2017). These three features obviously respond to the contextual factors of this type of text (brevity and speed of response or reaction), and also explain the abundance of abbreviated forms and emoticons. Cantamutto (2017) also highlights informality, a trait that stands out overall in computer-mediated communication (Herring et. al, 2013; Yus, 2011). However, other studies have nuanced the identification of traits that can be applied without taking into account a detailed analysis of participants in interactions. From a corpus of emails in English sent between university professors in academia, Pérez Sabater, Turney and Montero (2008) studied the appearance and frequency of style parameters such as greetings, politeness, the use of emoticons and emojis, abbreviated forms and contractions. The study finds significant variation between emails addressed to a single recipient and collective emails addressed to multiple recipients. While the former exhibited traits of informality and had hardly any politeness markers or elaborate greetings, the collective emails

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instead were reminiscent of professional letter formats, with formal greetings and politeness formulas. They did not find significant use of abbreviated forms or emoticons in either of the two types of email. These stylistic differences suggest that, despite the presence of certain features typical of technology-mediated communication, emails, like other examples of digital interactions, 'reflect the social realities of their users' (Herring et. Al. 2013: 11). Therefore, these studies show that there are actually very notable differences between interactive practices on the Internet. As argued by Ngwenyama & Lee (1997), digital interactions do not simply transmit certain linguistic, structural or textual features, but reflect and produce dynamic discursive practices in which social relations are set in motion and created:

> When people communicate, they do not send messages as electronically linked senders and receivers. They perform social acts in action situations that are normatively regulated by, and already have meaning within, the organisational context. As organisational actors, they simultaneously enact existing and new relationships with one another as they communicate. (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997: 164).

In this corpus, the interactions between guests and hotels show that guests act socially by sharing the account of their stay with an audience, and hotels do not 'respond' in the strictly textual sense to user opinions, but act pragmatically and discursively to establish (new) relationships with users/guests, who refer and have an impact on offline practices. Communication on the platform allows interaction with different 'reception roles' (Goffman 1981): direct recipients (the travellers who wrote the review) and indirect recipients (those who also wrote reviews but not the specific review to which the hotel was answering) Portolés (2004: 223-226), following Goffman, distinguishes between these direct and indirect listeners, and also speaks of casual or furtive listeners, to whom the message is not addressed but who can listen or read it, a phenomenon mentioned by Albaladejo (2010: 928) in his study on *'poliacroasis'*, which he defines as 'the plural reception and interpretation of rhetorical discourses'. In this case, the Tripadvisor platform allows for the presence of casual or furtive listeners, who read reviews regularly or sporadically. Hotels, undoubtedly, are aware of these users as potential customers and guests. However, Albadalejo (2010: 930-931) describes how Barack Obama mentioned these casual users in his speeches, although we have not found any reference to those other users in the responses from hotels in our corpus.

When analysing the language standard, Mancera Rueda (2016) studies the uses that stray from the standard and distinguishes two types; those that do not respect spelling norms (spelling errors) and those that are used consciously for purposes of communication and expression (heterography or alternative spelling). This second type aims to introduce innovative features in digital writing, by imitating or adapting oral expression for example, the use of several exclamation or question marks (Mancera Rueda, 2016: 10). The author considers that some uses are already consolidated in digital communication, such as the use of abbreviations ('*xq*' instead of '*porque*' in Spanish), and are not errors but intentional and much used forms in digital communication. In line with these considerations, and in accordance with the Coserian perspective, the concept of standard has at least two main meanings (among others, since it is a polysemic concept): (i) the prescriptive sense, as what should be said or written and is associated with linguistic correctness, and (ii) the standard in the descriptive sense, as what is usual or habitual (Martin Zorraquino 1988: 431-440). The former implies correctness and refers to the linguistic habits supported in authorised and prestige forms of language and its users, usually in public discursive practices. The latter meaning of standard, on the other hand, refers to what is normal or usual. The two meanings are related in such a way that the latter precedes the former, that is to say, linguistic habits become habitual

or common, and then they are encoded in language; that is, they appear in grammar rules, user manuals, and spellings (Méndez García de Paredes 1999: 111).

4. Study methodology and data

The study of technology-mediated communication requires different methods of research and data collection. The use of large-scale quantitative data, known as big data, is extremely interesting, allowing for downloading of massive amounts of data and observing communicative or linguistic phenomena on internet platforms. De Benito and Estrada Arraz (2018) use phonic and morphosyntactic analysis, crossing it with geolocation, to extract data on variation. While this approach is undoubtedly interesting, it also has some limitations, such as the heterogeneity of collected interactions and of users, data that was not specifically selected, making it extremely difficult to contextualise the phenomena being studied.

Another approach is the compilation of data in a smaller corpus but that has an internal coherence allowing the observation of discursive practice of the Internet. This study follows this approach and has been carried out following the compilation and selection of a corpus of reviews of Spanish hotels chains in the major tourist destinations (Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, Government of Spain, 2019). The aim of this is to focus on the analysis on a corpus of reviews in Spanish, written by native Spanish-speaking reviewers, which is why Spanish-speaking destinations were chosen, ignoring other destinations for the time being.[3] Meanwhile, instead of collecting only negative reviews, as was done by Vasquez (2011), reviews posted over a period of time were studied (October 2018-March 2019), obtaining a corpus of 120 reviews and 102 responses. In line with studies on stylistic features, such as those published by Sabater, Turney and Montero (2008) or Mancera Rueda (2016), the following study parameters were selected: (i) greetings and closings, (ii) T-V distinctions, (iii), politeness formulas, and (iv) typographical syntax and spelling. In order to do this, the full corpus was labelled and a manual and automatic analysis was carried out using Sketch Engine, calculating the appearance of the elements studied and the ratio of appearance per review. Parameters were selected not to be exhaustive but to ensure it was possible to observe interactions between review authors and hotels. The working hypothesis is that the corpus presents variation in style between the reviews and the responses, and that these differences are related to the communicative intentions of the participants on the platform. In the sections that follow, we present the results of the analysis, as well as a discussion on the differences found and their relationship with notions of the linguistic norm.

5. Analysis of style traits in reviews and responses

Table 1 shows the total amount of appearances and the ratio of greetings and farewells that appear in the hotel reviews and responses. These constitute forms of opening and closing of interactions that provide relevant information on the social and pragmatic intentions of participants and the relationship they aim to establish, since through them, they identify themselves as 'social actors' who play a role in the interaction and that show a certain degree of familiarity or distance with

3 A set of three hotel chains with different classification has been chosen, from five to three stars, which will be referred to, for reasons of anonymisation, as A (5 *), B (4 *) and C (3 *).

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their interlocutors (Briz, 1998), thus providing clues on the purpose and functional and interpersonal tenor of interactions (Halliday, 1985). In the corpus being studied, the presence or absence of openings and closings is particularly relevant since the review constitutes an emerging discursive genre in which there is no fully established configuration. Responses, on the other hand, constitute a 'second element of the pair' that have more identifiable features, since they have to refer to and related intertextually with the initial review.

Table 1. Openings and closings in hotel reviews and responses. Number of appearances and [ratio of appearances per review] hotel responses

Forms	Reviews (120 analysed)		Hotel responses (102 analysed)	
	No.	[ ]	No.	[ ]
Greetings	4	[0.02]	102	[1]
Farewells	5	[0.05]	101	[0.99]

Source: Prepared by the author

Results show that the authors of the reviews hardly use openings or greetings (only 4 cases of greetings) compared to the hotels, which systematically open and close responses with formulas of greetings and farewells. When reviewers use greetings, they used the informal (4) or semi-formal (3) option, addressing other platform users. Reviewers use farewell formulas occasionally (5), but they do sign off from reviews in some cases with closing formulas, such as a synthesis or final evaluation (6).

(3) *Buenas tardes a todos, el pasado 24-25 y 26 de julio fuimos al Hotel C de Mallorca.*
(Good afternoon everyone, on 24-25 and 26 July we went to Hotel C de Mallorca). (Opinion 5 Hotel C).

(4) *Hola! Me alojé en el hotel del 1 al 10 de Febrero del 2018. Tengo opiniones encontradas* (Opinion 13 Hotel B)
(Hello! I stayed at the hotel from1 to 10 February 2018. I have conflicting opinions)

(5) *Excelente hotel y excelente la atención de su personal (todos nos trataron muy bien y se esforzaron para que nuestra estadía sea única, especialmente Samuel y Karina en Coco's beach club) También La Palapa bar es otro muy buen lugar que nos trataron muy bien. Saludos.*
(Excellent hotel and excellent attentive staff (everyone treated us very well and tried to make our stay unique, especially Samuel and Karina at Coco's beach club) Plus, La Palapa bar is another very good place that we were treated very well. Regards). (Opinion 5 Hotel A).

(6) *Pero estan en terrible estado todo, las camas, los closet los baños, las camas ni ganas de dormi dan de ver los rodapies tan sucios y las ropas de camas tan viejas que no sabes si estan sucias oh solo viejas!!!!... no lo recomendaria para hospedarse!!!!*
(But everything is in terrible condition, the beds, the wardrobes, the bathrooms, the beds are so off putting and the skirting boards are really dirty, the bed linen is so old that you don't know if it's dirty or just old !!!! .. I would not recommend staying there!!!!)[4] (Opinion 10 Hotel C)

The hotel responses, on the other hand, feature systematic use of greetings and farewells. Greeting are always formal and epistolary, starting with '*estimado/a*' (Dear Sir/Madam) in all cases, or the variant '*apreciado*' (Dear), and follows the generic greeting formula, '*estimado huésped*' or '*apreciado huésped*' (Dear Guest), or a personalised, '*estimado XXX*' (Dear XXX), including the name that appears in the profile or the names the author of the review signs off with. Greeting

were also accompanied by initial politeness formulas such as thanks and apologies and confer on the response a formal and elaborate style, which is strikingly similar to conventions of written correspondence, and specifically, business correspondence. Farewells also appear systematically in responses from hotels and are complex, containing politeness formulas, usually an invitation to return to the hotel ('*le invitamos a volver*', 'please come back) and the formal farewell itself, such as '*atentamente*' (sincerely), '*cordialmente*' (cordially), accompanied by the signature, with the name of the person who wrote the response and their job title (Commercial Director, Community Manager, Quality Manager).

(7) Opinion 5 Hotel B)
Familia XXX
Lugar muy hermoso, bien ubicado, grato ambiente, rica comida e instalaciones apropiadas. Amabilidad de la mayoría de sus trabajadores. De todas formas, para nosotros sigue siendo mejor XXX sobre XXX y XXX.
(Very beautiful place, well located, pleasant atmosphere, rich food and suitable facilities. Mostly friendly staff. In any case, for us, XXX continues to be better than XXX and Occidental XXX)

Estimada Familia XXX[5]:
Agradecemos haberse tomado el tiempo para dejarnos los comentarios de su última estancia con nosotros y nos haya compartido su grata experiencia, es nuestra prioridad ofrecer experiencias memorables a todos nuestros huéspedes proporcionando el legendario servicio y la calidez que nos caracteriza.
Esperamos muy pronto poder darle la bienvenida nuevamente a este pequeño paraíso en Cancun.
Saludos Cordiales,
XXX.
Asistente de Gerencia.
(Dear Family XXX,
We appreciate you taking the time to leave us your comments on your last stay and sharing your pleasant experience with us, it is our priority to offer memorable experiences to all our guests by providing the legendary service and warmth that we are known for.
We look forward to welcoming you back to this little paradise in Cancun.
Kind regards,
XXX
Deputy Manager.

As can be seen in (7), while the reviewer does not use greetings or farewells, but rather presents the review in a topic and opinion scheme (Virtanen 2017), the hotel specifically addresses the author (*Dear XXX family*), by means of a formal and epistolary greeting, and closes the interaction with an invitation (*we look forward to welcoming you again very soon)*, a formal farewell (*best regards*) and the signature (name and job title). It follows that the reviewer does not use conative forms and does not address opinion to a specific person but to other platform users. However, hotels establish a direct relationship with guests (addressing them by name) and use a formal and distant style that highlights the professional nature of the response and the projection of a corporate image that can be seen by the chosen guest and also by all platform users.

5 The corpus has been anonymised, so the names of companies or people do not appear.

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The second parameter analysed is the use of forms of address and T-V distinctions, such as pronominal and personal forms of the verb, both in reviews and hotels' responses, the results of which appear in Table 2. Both full personal pronouns (I, you, etc.) and verb agreement marking have been computed.

Table 2. Forms of address and T-V distinctions in hotel reviews and responses. Number of appearances and [ratio of appearances per review] hotel responses

Forms	Reviews		Hotel responses	
	No.	[ ]	No.	[ ]
First person singular (*yo,* 'I' in Spanish)	340	[2.83]	21	[0.21]
Second person singular (*tú*, informal 'I' in Spanish)	70	[0.68]	-	-
First person plural (*nosotros,* 'us/we' in Spanish)	449	[3.74]	589	[5.77]
Second person plural (*vosotros* informal plural 'you' in Spanish)	36	[0.30]	-	-
Usted/le (formal singular 'you' in Spanish)	4	[0.03]	375	[3.68]
Ustedes/les (formal plural 'you' in Spanish)	2	[0.02]	15	[0.15]
Sr./Sra./Sres. (Sir, Madam, Sirs)	5	[0.05]	8	[0.08]

Source: Prepared by the author

As can be seen, since reviewers construct their opinion around experience or personal assessment, a frequent formula starts with '*yo*' followed by the opinion. This explains the frequency of appearance of the first person pronoun in the corpus (340 cases of '*yo*' and 440 of '*nosotros*'). This formula of '*yo*' followed by an opinion (8) varies to the first person plural, '*nosotros*', when the reviewer wishes to reflect that the stay was shared with family or friends (9):

(8) *Yo la verdad tuve una mala experiencia porque me dieron una habitación alejada y al entrar olía terrible a humedad,* (Opinion 14 Hotel C)
(The truth is I had a bad experience because they gave me a room that was fvery far away and when I entered it smelled terrible musty)

(9) *Estamos hospedados en el hotel, vinimos a pasar nuestra luna de miel, desde que llegamos tuvimos problemas.* (Opinion 2 Hotel B, travelling as a couple) We're staying at the hotel, we came on our honeymoon, and since we arrived we had problems.

This formula also alternates with the presentation focussed on the topic, in line with the topic + opinion scheme, which does not use the first person but rather centres the text on evaluating the experience, without individualising or appellative marks, as can be seen in (10).

(10) *Hotel bastante agradable, pequeño pero con lo mínimo para divertirte, la atención en bares si deja un poco que desear, la calidad de los tragos también es bastante baja. Los restaurantes también cumplen con los mínimo. La ubicación, es lejos del downtown, pero está al costado del puerto a Isla Mujeres* (Opinion 9 Hotel A).
(Quite a nice hotel, small but fun, service at the bars leaves a little to be desired, the quality of the drinks is also quite low. Restaurants also meet minimum standards. The location is far from downtown, but it is next to the port to Isla Mujeres).

In responses from hotels, the number of occurrences of first person singular and plural pronouns are reversed, with occasional use of '*yo*' (21 occurrences) in favour of '*nosotros*' (589 cases), a less referential form that serves as an indicator of politeness while expressing a corporate and professional stance. Hotel responses are written as on behalf of company representatives and appear less individual, presenting action not individually but as a result of teamwork, as can be seen in (10) and (11). In any case, hotels strategically alternate the use of the singular and plural forms: *'nosotros*' to show the corporate image (on behalf of all of us who work here), underlining the collective character of the company, while change to the singular brings the illocutionary force of individualisation. In this case, the person in charge of assisting the guest offers an apology to the guest and shows his or her personal commitment to remedy the problem or make reparations: '*le quiero ofrecer la más cordial disculpa*' (I would like to offer you my sincerest apologies) or '*le puedo asegurar*' (I wish to assure you), highlighting their commitment in the statement.

(11) *Lamentamos que haya sentido que le quitara tiempo, pero le puedo asegurar que el simple hecho de conocer esta información es una inversión para tomar decisiones de alojamiento* (Opinion 2 Hotel A).
(We regret that you felt that it wasted your time, but I can assure you that this information is very useful to us when taking decisions about the accommodation).

(12) *En nombre todos los que trabajamos aquí quiero ofrecerle la más cordial disculpa por los inconvenientes que tuvo durante su estancia* (Opinion 3 Hotel A).
(In the name of all of us who work here I would like to offer you our sincerest apologies for the inconvenience you experienced during your stay).

The use of the second person pronoun, on the other hand, indicates the audiences the review is targeting. In this sense, guests' opinions do not explicitly indicate who they are addressing when they decide to publish their opinion, so it must be understood that the review does not have a specific audience and that, therefore, it is generically addressed to the platform's users (see examples 9 and 10). However, there are cases where review authors do address readers directly, it being understood that these are the travellers who could potentially visit that hotel and are being warned of reviewers' concerns (13).

In addition, the use of the second person singular pronoun appears (in 70 cases), offering an ambiguous reading, since it could be addressing the audience, or an impersonal construction, which is frequently used in spoken language (Enríquez 1984, Hidalgo Navarro 1996-97, Gómez Torrego 1994, De Mello 2000 , Guirado, 2011). The examples found are also abundant in user reviews from Argentina, which may indicate a trait of this South American variety of Spanish (14). Since review authors are relating something from the past (what they have experienced during their stay at a hotel), it can be interpreted that the impersonal construction used, together with the present tense, serves to provide the narrative with a real-time immediacy.

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(13) *Aunque después, cada vez que nos veía nos preguntó con ironía si habíamos visto más cucarachas!*
(Although later, every time he saw us he asked us ironically if we had seen more cockroaches!)
Lo que lamentamos es que en ningún momento se nos compensara por las molestias ocasionadas.
(What we regret is that at no time were we compensated for the inconvenience caused).
Espero que os sirva nuestra lamentable experiencia en dicho hotel (Opinion 5 Hotel C)
(I hope that you will benefit form our unfortunate experience in this hotel).

(14) *Las camas balinesas de la piscina para la opción level estaban ocupadas por quien le apeteciese estar alli y tenias que reclamar tu mismo, ademas estaban sucias.*
*(*The Balinese pool beds for the level option were whomever wished to use them and you were expected to reclaim them yourself, they were also dirty). (Opinion 16 Hotel A).

On the other hand, hotels address reviewers directly. They use the '*usted*' formal address rather than the informal '*tú*', marking social detachment and establishing a business-like relationship with guests, so they systematically use nominal and pronominal forms of deference and formality, such as '*usted*', '*le*', '*señor*' or '*señora*'. Hotels thereby position themselves using a formal and corporate register that is clearly distinguished from the guests. In (14) the contrast between the review and the response can be seen. While the first is constructed from the first person and does not address the audience in a specific way, the hotel addresses the guest with formal and detached courtesy, with the purpose of projecting a professional and commercial image, this will be read by guests but also by all users of the platform, and therefore potential guests as well.

(15) (Opinion 8 Hotel A)
Es el mejor hotel q he visitado en Cuba, la habitación con excelentes condiciones, las visitas excepcionales, la piscina bella, la zona de playa Caribe 5 estrella, el trato del personal excelente. XXX (name of the reviewer)
(The best hotel that I have visited in Cuba, the room was excellent, amazing views, a beautiful pool, the 5 star Caribbean beach area, we were treated very well by the staff).
Estimada XXX:
En nombre de todo el equipo de XXX nos gustaría agradecerle sus valoraciones tras su reciente visita a nuestro hotel.
Deseamos recibirle de nuevo en un futuro no muy lejano. Me encantaría conocerle personalmente en su próxima visita al hotel, por lo que ruego me dejen saber las fechas de su próxima estancia
Saludos Cordiales
*XXX, Community Manage*r
(On behalf of the entire XXX team we would like to thank you for your comments after your recent visit to our hotel.
We hope to see you again in the not too distant future.
I would love to meet you personally on your next visit to the hotel, so please let me know the dates of your next stay.
Kind regards
XXX, Community Manager)

Thirdly, we have analysed the use of politeness indicators. Therefore, we computed politeness markers and formulas, such as those used for thanking and apologising (Bunz & Campbell 2002), in which a type of normative politeness is expressed in conventional forms.

Table 4. Politeness indicators in hotel reviews and responses. Number of appearances and [ratio of appearances per review] hotel responses

Forms	Reviews		Hotel responses	
	No.	[ ]	No.	[ ]
Thanking	30	[0.25]	129	[1.26]
Apology	-	-	53	[0.52]
TOTAL	30	[0.25]	182	[1.78]

Source: Prepared by the author

In our corpus, as can be seen in Table 4, there is significant variation between the reviews and the responses. Expressions of gratitude appear in both reviews and responses, although the proportion is higher in responses than in reviews. The repeated presence of this speech act reveals its importance as a politeness strategy in these interactions, since it refers to the expression of customer satisfaction with the services received, as well as the hotel's consequent satisfaction for having managed to please the guest (see Example 14). It is, therefore, an interaction marking a reaction and reciprocal recognition following a positive experience occurring offline, and that is publicly shown online. On the other hand, the hotels' responses contain apologies to negative reviews and guest complaints, and which feature politeness formulas used by the company In order to offer guests verbal repair. In example (14), the hotel's response formula is framed as gratitude following a greeting. Through this speech act, it recognises the importance of the comments made by guests, particularly if they are positive (*nos gustaría agradecerle sus valoraciones tras su reciente visita a nuestro hotel*, 'we would like to thank you for your feedback after your recent visit to our hotel') due to the impact they may have on the dissemination of its services, and therefore this speech act is the most used overall. The elaborate and formulaic nature of these speech acts, frequently spurred by complaints from users, have a complex, elaborate structure where companies intend to save face and protect corporate image (Márquez Reiter & Hidalgo Downing 2020, Hidalgo Downing , in preparation).

Lastly, we studied the typographical symbols, spelling and punctuation marks of the hotel reviews and responses. The relaxation of this type of marks constitutes a characteristic feature of CMT, according to numerous studies (Yus, 2011; Herring et.al., 2013; Cantamutto, 2017; Mancera Rueda, 2016). Internet writers use different resources in CMT that refer to the mode or channel (Halliday, 1985), since they entail mechanisms of adaptability to different technologies. Furthermore, as technology advances, there may be important differences between computer-mediated communication and the use of mobile devices (Gianmateo, Gubitosi and Parini, 2017). The latter allow for faster and more immediate writing, with less planning. Mobile devices sport predictive text features that often lead to typographical errors or misspelled words and may also lack punctuation marks. By contrast, computerised digital writing can more stably preserve the traits of traditional, normative writing. Undoubtedly, these differences can be clearly seen in hotels' reviews and the responses. We computed a set of features that appear regularly in digital interactions in the two subsets of the corpus, although, as we will see, it is not a generalised phenomenon. These features include: abbreviations, spelling errors, typographical errors, expressive punctuation (use of several exclamation points or question marks or ellipsis); the use of capital letters to

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indicate emphasis, but also emotion, mainly negative, such as anger or indignation; emoticons or emojis, and oralisations, that is, written forms that imitate or evoke elements of orality, such as onomatopoeia or interjections.

Table 5. Typographical symbols, spelling and punctuation marks in hotel reviews and responses. Number of appearances and [ratio of appearances per review] hotel responses

Forms	Reviews		Hotel responses	
	No.	[ ]	No.	[ ]
Abbreviations	95	[0.79]	-	-
Spelling mistakes	749	[6.24]	24	[0.23]
Typographical errors	105	[0.88]	20	[0.19]
Expressive punctuation	92	[0.77]	-	-
Capital letters	242	[2.02]	-	-
Emoticons/emojis	7	[0.06]	-	-
Oralisations	6	[0.05]	-	-
	1296	[10.80]	44	[0.42]

Source: Prepared by the author

Table 5 shows the results of the automatic counting and supports the general hypothesis, according to which reviews and responses show radically different styles. In this case, reviewers use numerous resources that have been identified by previous studies as characteristic of CMC, such as abbreviations, expressive punctuation, capitalisation, and make numerous spelling and typographical errors. The frequency of these suggests that reviewers do not pay particular attention to the writing and final editing of the review, which they publish immediately and send from their mobile devices (as shown in the review heading, which specifies 'opinion uploaded from mobile device'). In particular, spelling and typographical mistakes appear most frequently, something that can be considered a feature of adaptability to the mode/channel; actually the use of mobile devices has given rise to this style feature. Another important factor of the writing through mobile devices is the lack of planning. These traits show how digital writing of reviews is immediate, spontaneous and unplanned. Other interesting features are the use of emoticons and/or emojis and oralisations, which also appear but much less frequently. This result is worth highlighting since it shows that these consumer reviews are very different to other internet interactions, such as social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) or WhatsApp, where emoticons and emojis are abundant and increasingly common. Undoubtedly, this characteristic is due to the non-interactive nature of the review. The emoticons and emojis and oralisations used in our corpus serve as intensifiers of positive reviews, do not play and interactive role like in social media. Another important factor is social distance, since Tripadvisor platform users do not know each other, and therefore do not show the affective interactivity of social media.

Table 5 shows that hotels' responses show different stylistic choices.

Hotel responses feature few cases of spelling and typographical errors, which can be explained in terms of the level of communication skills and literacy exhibited by the staff in charge of the hotel digital communication. The absence of

abbreviations, as well as the use of conventional punctuation, suggest that hotel responses are based on letter writing models, and are not real examples of digital writing, since they do not show features of adaptation to the technology being used (16).

(16) Opinion 7 Hotel C
Pésimo!!!!!!
El peor hotel y además es carísimo las habitaciones de cuarta!!!!! Pierden agua por todos lados,los servicios horribles la piscina es para 5 personas como mucho y los bares un desastre no es ni 3 estrellas este hotel perdimos tiempo y Plata cambiando de hotel el show una vergüenza no lo recomiendo para nada!
Appalling!!!!!!
The worst hotel and apart from being expensive the rooms are fourth rate!!!!!
Water leaks everywhere, the restrooms are horrible the pool is for 5 people at most and the bars are a disaster it's not even 3 stars this hotel we lost time and money changing hotels the show is awful I do not recommend it at all!
Estimado cliente,
Le agradecemos que nos haga llegar sus impresiones.
Sentimos mucho que en general su experiencia con nosotros no fuera lo que usted esperaba y que haya dejado nuestro hotel con una impresión totalmente opuesta a la que procuramos transmitir siempre.
Nos gustaría poder recibirle de nuevo en uno de nuestros hoteles.
Un cordial saludo,
Hotel C
Online Reputation Manager
Dear guest,
We thank you for sending us your impressions.
We are very sorry that in general your experience with us was not what you expected and that you have left our hotel with a totally opposite impression from the one we always try to convey.
We would like to be able to welcome you back to one of our hotels.
Kind regards,
Hotel C
Online Reputation Manager

Thus, we can see the major differences between the review and its response in (16). While the former lacks punctuation marks, reflecting lack of planning and text revision, as well as writing from a mobile device, it also uses multiple exclamation marks to add expressiveness, which is a widespread feature in digital writing. The hotel, on the other hand, does not use those features typical of digital writing on a device and shows care in crafting the copy. The use of a formal and elaborate style, where care is also given to the final editing, is in line with the projection of an image of professionalism that the hotel wishes to convey.

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6. Style variation and language standard

The corpus of hotel reviews and responses has been examined using different parameters that have made it possible to observe the variation in style of these interactions, and in particular the differences between reviews and responses. The results have shown that there is significant variation in all the parameters studied, and that therefore a generalised overview of the language that appears in this type of digital communication is not possible. On the contrary, it has been possible to verify that the variation in style rests on a complex set of factors that play out in the communicative situation, such as recipient design or target audience, accommodating others and prestige, as mentioned Garrido Medina (1997: 117) in his study of style in language. In addition, it is worth highlighting the notion of adaptability of Verschueren (1999) to the possibilities and limitations (so-called 'affordances') of the environment. Thus, the style of reviews and responses differ and is even opposed in the following ways: (i) directionality, (ii) formality and (iii) planning, which reflect, as Herring said, the presence of different social actors. Also worth noting is the variation in number of (sub) standard uses, as well as a different level of observance of standard.

The directionality of reviews and responses has been shown to differ, since the review is built around two possible schemes, similar but variable, which are topic + opinion, or '*yo*' (I) + opinion, without addressing a specific reader, it being understood that readers are users of the platform, or other travellers. This characteristic shows that the main purpose of the review is to evaluate their stay at the hotel, and to recommend it or not to other travellers. The relationship established with these potential readers is one of equality or solidarity, which is why an informal tone is used. Hotels, on the other hand, base their responses from a 'we' in representation of the hotel team and marks a corporate stance. Hotels address guests in a formal and elaborate way, projecting an image of professionalism and mastery of the standard, formal uses of language. These traits are closely related to both the locus (the field) and the functional and interpersonal tenor.

Hotels' responses appearing in the corpus are marked by greater formality. Almost all studies on technology-mediated communication, both in English and Spanish, emphasis informality as a distinctive feature. In our corpus, on the other hand, the selected hotel brands address guests formally, unlike users, who use informal language. It seems, therefore, that these companies intend to portray a professional and corporate image with this formal language.

In other words, hotels seek to use elements that readers unequivocally identify with formal language, such as the use of polite forms of deference (*usted / le / Sr. /Sra.*), politeness formulas and elaborate writing styles. Hotels' responses are framed in a model that pre-dates and exists outside the digital medium, that of the commercial letter. They are presented as a form that sits apart from reviews and the medium, and that, again, seeks to project a professional and corporate image (Suau Jiménez 2019). Reviews, however, share informal traits, but do so to different degrees, suggesting a more spontaneous approach that lacks a clear model, depending on individual users (their digital writing skills and level of use). In this sense, this work provides new results, which contrast with previous studies. Thus, Cantamutto's (2107) work on SMS messages sent between employees and managers in a work environment showed that they used a fundamentally informal and vernacular style. In addition, studies carried out on responses from companies to customers on Chinese digital platforms (Feng & Ren 2019) found that companies addressed the guest using informal and familiar language, with

which the company sought to establish a familiar relationship with clients and thereby mitigate possible errors in the service. On the contrary, our data has shown that the selected hotel brands address the guests using a formal tone.

Finally, it is possible to study and compare the different approaches used by reviewers and hotel brands through their level of planning. Reviewers frequently write from mobile devices and show little planning in writing the text, with the appearance in addition of numerous orthographic traits often founds in digital writing using devices, such as punctuation errors (either due to the author's carelessness, or due to the device's autocorrect function) and spelling. Expressive punctuation (multiple use of question marks or exclamation points), as well as abbreviations, are increasingly being consolidated in digital writing, at least that which is done using electronic devices. Other typical elements, such as emoticons, emojis, do not appear here, reflecting again, the social detachment between users, who do not know each other. At the other end of the spectrum, responses from hotels reflect an elaborate style, based on prestige varieties of language and modelled after offline letters. Formulaic repetition can also be due to hotels using letter templates to write clearly identifiable texts.

It is also possible to analyse two concepts of linguistic standard in users' productions. In the prescriptive sense, hotels' responses clearly show a formal register that conforms to the standard, or attempts to do so, since spelling and typographical inconsistencies indicate levels of written language competency and mastery of cultured norms. Despite this almost involuntary variation, hotels respond using normative linguistic models. However, reviewers use linguistic models that are commonly used online, a style that fully fits into what we could characterise as digital writing. In the case of these reviews, digital writing involves writing from mobile devices, little or no planning of the text, as well as the absence of mechanisms for reviewing or editing the text. This writing style is spontaneous and fully adapted to the medium. Users adopt a model that has already become common in Spanish on the Internet, using abbreviations for example, and a relaxed approach to, and acceptance of, typographical errors and the use of expressive punctuation (the use of several exclamation or question marks). According to current punctuation rules published by the RAE (Royal Spanish Academy of Language), only the double use of the exclamation point would be considered correct, to provide greater expressiveness. The abundant use of exclamation and question marks suggests that readers are not bearing in mind the prescriptive linguistic norms established by the RAE, which they may not know (level of literacy). However, they are following a series of uses that have become widespread and been consolidated on the Internet, and that therefore refer to that standard in the descriptive sense, of what has become 'normal' or 'usual' in digital interactions. In this sense, these uses can over time become the accepted features of digital writing, which does not correspond to a offline model, but rather entails the consolidation of this form of writing.

7. Conclusions

The analysis of hotel reviews and responses on Tripadvisor reveals a significant degree of style variation in all the parameters studied, greetings and farewells, T-V distinctions and orthotypographic features, which suggests that both participate in the platform as 'social actors' with different social realities (Herring et. al. 2013) and that they use the platform for communication purposes and different audience designs. On the one hand, prosumers evaluate their

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experiences in hotels, and on the other, hotel brands seek to preserve or improve their reputation by reacting to reviewers' comments. Furthermore, the difference in stylistic features shows very different degrees of writing skills and perception of the linguistic norm, according to the models that social actors have in mind. However, it is an initial study on a specific product (reviews of medium and high-quality hotels), which should be compared with other products or other types of accommodation. Therefore, the results of the analysis were not predictable; on the contrary, previous studies showed that digital interactions, also in the company-client sphere, prefer informal and familiar styles. In this sense, this work unveils new results, which will need further research, to discover if these are characteristics of the selected product, of the language-culture or are due to other factors.

The notion of language standard in technology-mediated communication must be applied to the analysis of styles and registers that are associated with specific discursive practices. In them, we can see to what extent the principle of adaptability (Virtannen 2017) creates linguistic habits that are consolidated in communication and that other users recognise to the point of becoming discursive conventions. However, these new habits continue to transmit / be indices of sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic information, with users projecting an image of themselves through these styles. For all the above, the communicative style of Internet users is particularly significant and relevant in the configuration of what can be considered 'normal' or 'usual' in digital writing, and perhaps one day will become part of a standard encoded for technology-mediated communication. In the words of Méndez García de Paredes, 'custom becomes a precept when it is codified, and once it is made a norm, it is adopted as an element of judgement and establishes the model of what should be, that is, it functions as an exemplary norm' (Méndez García from Paredes 1999: 111).

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