Negative hotel reviews on TripAdvisor: A cross-linguistic analysis

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A B S T R A C T

In this empirical study, we investigate whether English-, Dutch- and Italian-written negative hotel reviews on TripAdvisor show similar or divergent characteristics. The main goal is to find out whether users writing in different languages constitute differentiated speech communities with different discursive norms or rather share the same norms and discourse habits. To answer this question, we examined 100 reviews for each language and analysed three features, namely the types of speech acts that they use, the specific topics that they evaluate and the extent to which they up-scale or down-scale their evaluative statements. The main conclusion of the cross-linguistic analysis is that there is a general trend towards similarity between the three language user groups under examination. We found analogous (although not identical) patterns for the three features. Within this overall trend towards similarity, specific divergences can be detected, for example regarding the status of positive comments in English-written reviews, or the status of the 'interpersonal' topic in Italian-written reviews.

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1. Introduction

Online travel reviews have become a popular forum for tourists to share their travel experiences, and, in particular, to "recommend a tourism product/service or complain about it" (De Ascaniis and Gretzel, 2013:157; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). Potentially, every product or service can be reviewed and evaluated online by its consumers, and these reviews are an increasingly important source of information for consumers and service providers. However, online travel reviews have not only attracted the attention of tourism marketing researchers (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015), but also of discourse analysts (Vásquez, 2014a).

In this paper we will present an empirical analysis of how several discourse features are realized in (negative) hotel reviews written in three different languages (English, Dutch and Italian). Our aim is to investigate whether these features reveal similar or divergent cross-linguistic tendencies in (negative) hotel reviews. In Section 2 we will identify our main sources of inspiration, as well as the linguistic features we will focus on, and we will define the specific contribution of our study.

2. Travel reviews

2.1. A multi-layered approach to travel reviews

Web 2.0 tourism discourse has caught the attention of both tourism researchers (Crotts et al., 2009; Ekiz et al., 2012; Zehrer et al., 2011) and discourse analysts (De Ascaniis and Gretzel, 2013; Vásquez, 2015, 2014a, 2014b, 2012, 2011; Tian, 2013). Both groups are attracted by the fact that this new technological environment may lead to new communication patterns, and may provide new possibilities for researching tourism communication. Broadly speaking, tourism researchers are mainly interested in *what is said* in the reviews, as a source of information about, for example, tourist satisfaction or destination image, and in *what readers do* with this type of information (e.g. to what extent it influences their pre-trip purchasing decisions). On the other hand, discourse analysts are mainly interested in *how the message is worded* and in *what writers (intend to) do* when they write a review. Whereas almost all studies concentrate on one or two dimensions, we will combine three, namely 'what writers do', 'what is said', and 'how it is said', and thus, at least partially, combine the two research traditions. For each one of these layers, we will elaborate a coding grid that selects and operationalizes one specific aspect that previous research has identified as a salient characteristic of hotel reviews. The combination of these aspects will provide the *tertium comparationis* for the cross-linguistic comparative analysis.

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With respect to the question 'what writers do' in negative reviews, obviously, one of the most salient aspects is that they express (negative) evaluations (Vásquez, 2011). However, as Vásquez (2011) has shown, negative reviews also typically contain other speech acts, such as positive commentaries, wishes, advice, references to remedial action, or warnings: these speech acts interact with each other as a complex "speech act set" that as a whole functions as a complaint, but also activates pragmatic strategies such as politeness or credibility enhancement (Vásquez, 2014b). In Section 3.2.1 we will present a hierarchical taxonomy of recurrent categories of speech acts that operationalizes Vásquez' work and that will allow us to quantify the frequency of the different speech acts in the different reviews.

The second layer of codification concerns 'what is said' in the reviews. Again, we focus upon one salient dimension, namely the topics of the evaluative statements, in order to find out whether reviews written in different languages evaluate the same topics or not. We found descriptions of recurrent evaluation topics in Vásquez (2011) and Ekiz et al. (2012), which we will operationalize into a hierarchical coding grid that should facilitate the replicability of the coding process (Section 3.2.1). This procedure is inspired by research in the field of Natural Language Processing applied to tourism-related discourse (De Clercq and Hoste, 2016).

Also the third layer of codification ('how it is said') is directly related to the core evaluative dimension of travel reviews, namely the degree to which evaluations are hedged (up-scaled or down-scaled, in the terminology of Martin and White (2005)). As has been shown in a statistical analysis of different language features in hotel reviews (Crotts et al., 2009: 143), the features that are most significantly correlated to the expression of tourists' evaluative stance are emphatics, degree adverbials, and amplifiers, which are well-known linguistic hedging features. In Section 3.2.2 we will illustrate the categories.

2.2. Travel reviews on the multilingual Internet

A second source of inspiration for this study is not related to the discourse features of travel reviews per se, but rather to the multilingual dimension of the 2.0 Internet and travel platforms in particular (Barton and Lee, 2012; Danet and Herring, 2007; Johnson and Milani, 2010; Lenihan, 2011). Although it might be tempting to consider the Internet, globalization and English as "three sides of the same coin", this does not correctly reflect the current reality on the 2.0 Web, which is far more multilingual than predicted in the early days of online English-language dominance, and is expected to become even more multilingual (Hale, 2016). Yet, the multilingual character of the primary data contrasts with the tendency of (socio)linguistic and discourse research to focus mainly, if not exclusively, on English data (several authors already made this claim, see e.g. Smakman (2015) or Thurlow and Mroczek (2011)). Obviously, the generalizations that are based on English data should be checked and confirmed or refined by considering data from other language communities as well.

Yet, multilingualism is not only a challenge for academic researchers, but also for 2.0 (travel) platform providers such as TripAdvisor. Typically, 2.0 platforms do not opt for an English-only policy, but develop multilingual policies and strategies (Hale, 2016; Lenihan, 2011; Goethals, 2016). In what follows we highlight two divergent strategies which are applied simultaneously by TripAdvisor in order to deal with multilingualism, and we will also explain how our research results might orient future developments of these strategies.

On the one hand, TripAdvisor deals with multilingualism by facilitating language-defined user groups. Language is one of the main filters for viewing and ordering the reviews: by default, reviews in the interface language appear first, and reviews in other languages get demoted. The user can manipulate this selection/ordering, but again language (and not nationality, for example) is one of the main filters for doing so. Thus, the user can select reviews in English, for example, but not reviews written by British tourists. The strategy of facilitating interactions between users from the same language group is probably motivated by the practical ease of reading in one's own language, but perhaps also by the assumption that users have more confidence in reviewers with whom they feel some kind of closeness (Kuehn (2011), quoted in Vásquez (2014b:70)) or in-group identification (Giles et al., 2013). On the other hand, TripAdvisor also facilitates communication between people with different linguistic backgrounds, mainly by providing automatic translations of user-generated content. This practice blurs linguistic frontiers, and, instead of promoting language-defined in-groups, it rather suggests the emergence of a "global speech community", with shared norms, beliefs and communication practices.

In the current design of TripAdvisor (and other 2.0 platforms), both strategies are realized simultaneously, in a multi-modular architecture that can be manipulated by the user by (de)selecting ordering possibilities and automatic translation of the reviews. Although it remains an open question whether in the future one strategy will be favoured over the other, the results of our research can possibly give a hint: if we mainly find convergent cross-linguistic tendencies (i.e. similar speech acts patterns, content topics and hedging strategies), this is support for the strategy of promoting a global speech community, for example with automatic translations. However, if we mainly find divergent tendencies, this would mean that review discourse is not directly comparable or equivalent in different language communities, and it would rather support the strategy of promoting language-defined user groups.

2.3. Contribution of this research: summary

Summarizing, this paper aims to make several contributions. On a descriptive level, we will elaborate a quantified cross-linguistic comparison of three features that are related to the core evaluative dimension of hotel reviews, namely (a) the frequency of the different speech acts that typically occur in negative reviews, (b) the topics of the evaluative statements, and (c) the extent to which the evaluations are hedged. This multidimensional comparison should allow us to formulate a tentative answer to the question whether the English, Italian and Dutch user groups constitute differentiated speech communities, with different discursive norms or rather share the same norms and discourse habits. On a methodological level, we will present explicit coding grids, which should improve the replicability of existing research. Moreover, as we will explain in the next section, we will also present two different counting methods for the quantification of the data. Finally, on the level of multilingual policy, our research may help platform providers to orient decision-making regarding the development of different multilingual strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

The corpus consists of 300 negative hotel reviews from TripAdvisor.com: 100 reviews written in English by travellers who reportedly reside[1] in the U.K. or the U.S., 100 in Italian, and

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[1] Among the demographic information that a reviewer can include in his/her TripAdvisor profile, the state of residency can be specified in the profile of the user, but cannot be used as a filter.

100 in Dutch. In order to make the corpus maximally comparable, all reviews concern hotels in Rome[2] (Italy), and showed a rating of 1 bullet ('terrible') or 2 bullets ('poor') out of 5. The collected texts are all in their original language and no translations are included. The researchers are native or near native speakers of the languages under examination.

3.2. Codification

The data was coded in several rounds of manual coding, using NVivo. In order to ensure consistency in the coding, a first inter-coder reliability test was conducted after coding 10% of the corpus, after which the coding grids were fine-tuned. A second reliability test after coding another 10% of the corpus yielded >90% unanimity, which was judged sufficient. The first step in the codification consisted in a 'horizontal' segmentation of the reviews, subdividing the text in sequential functional units. We will call these units 'speech acts' (Section 3.2.1). In the second step, we focused upon specific units or speech acts, namely the negative and positive evaluative statements, and added an extra codification layer concerning the hedging of these statements (Section 3.2.2).

3.2.1. Segmentation

The first step in the coding procedure consisted in subdividing the reviews in functional units. The categories in our coding grid are inspired by Vásquez' (2011) description of the speech acts that typically occur in negative reviews, slightly adapted in order to facilitate the exhaustive corpus codification.[3]

As can be seen in Table 1,[4] we primarily distinguish between retrospective, future-oriented and metapragmatic speech acts. The retrospective speech acts comprise evaluative statements and descriptions. We further subdivided the evaluative statements according to the topic of the evaluation, distinguishing between six categories, namely accommodation, services, interpersonal judgments, price, location and a general evaluation.[5] The category of 'accommodation' includes references to the appearance and functionality of the hotel, the rooms or specific elements such as furniture, beds, shower, swimming pool, etcetera. The category of 'services' covers topics such as cleanliness, breakfast/food and the availability of transport or safety issues. It is important to notice that this category includes statements on the result of human intervention, but not on host-traveller interaction, which is the topic of the next 'interpersonal' category. In this latter category, we included references to the staff in general but also to specific employees, as the ones working at the reception desk, the bar/restaurant facilities or the cleaning staff. 'Price'-related evaluations referred to the price of the hotel in general, or its services. In the category of 'location', we find general references to this aspect, or more specific comments on the proximity or distance of the hotel to the city centre or the train station, or on the neighbourhood. Within the category 'general', we included references to the general quality of the hotel and comments about the whole stay experience.

The retrospective speech acts also include descriptions. Following Vásquez (2011), we separated one specific category, namely descriptions of speech acts that were realized by the tourists during their stay at the reviewed hotel, demanding a remedial action for any kind of inconvenience during their sojourn. The other descriptions are grouped together, under the "umbrella" category of 'extra information', and may concern various kinds of informative sentences (when, where and with whom the trip takes place, and for how long it is; neutral descriptions regarding the hotel, its services, the neighbourhood and public transport statements that explain the reasons for traveling or for choosing this hotel or the planning activities that preceded travel).

The label 'future-oriented speech acts' encompasses speech acts which do not describe the past experience but are in some way future-oriented, by expressing some type of advice, recommendation or intention.[6] More specifically, we defined four sub-categories based on the intended addressee of the speech act: speech acts directed to fellow travellers, to the owner/management of the hotel, or to other instances, such as the police or travel agencies, and speech acts expressing (future) intentions of the reviewers.

Finally, we coded separately all instances of metapragmatic comments, such as, for instance, reviewers' explicit references to the act of complaining.

Below, the reader can find an example of a typical negative review with the described coding method labelled in-text. The example also illustrates the main practical coding principles, namely (a) that the units do not coincide necessarily with sentence or clause boundaries; and (b) that the same unit continues until a unit of a different type starts: this means for example that successive negative statements on different accommodation issues (bathroom, shower, toilet, etc.) are coded as one negative statement on accommodation.[7]

> "Worst hotel ever" **[negative evaluation: general]**
> I don't have enough bad words to describe this hotel. **[metapragmatic comment]** // Check in was a slow and agonizing experience **[negative evaluation: services]** // matched only by the horrific ride in the cage elevator. The bathroom is beyond description. The shower was so tiny that I constantly ran into the walls trying to wash. **[negative evaluation: accommodation]** // I have been all over the world, **[extra information]**// and this hotel still stands as the worst experience of my travels. **[negative evaluation: general]**// However, it was only $50. **[positive evaluation: price]**

It is important to emphasize that the main purpose of the coding grid is to provide an objective *tertium comparationis* for the cross-linguistic analysis. Although it is based on previous research and has been further refined in order to reflect optimally the empirical data, the number of categories and subcategories is to some extent arbitrary.

3.2.2. Coding of the hedging of the evaluative statements

In a following step, negative and positive evaluative statements have been coded for the presence of hedging phenomena. Although this study should not be seen as a full application of Appraisal Theory, we will use some elements of its terminology. The very fact

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[2] Hotels located in other Italian cities (such as Venice, Milan or Florence) did not yield a sufficient number of negative customer reviews in Dutch.

[3] Specifically, we integrated Vásquez' (2011) categories of negative and positive statements (labeled by Vásquez as "complaints" and "positive commentary"), metapragmatic statements and reference to remedial action; the categories of "recommendations", "warnings" and "advice" were merged and reformulated as "future-oriented speech acts"; finally, the category of "reference to expectations" was not maintained as a separate speech act category.

[4] In this overview, we quote English-written examples for reasons of space.

[5] This list operationalizes the description by Vásquez (2011:1710): "As for the content of complaints, the range of topics included: cleanliness, size, and condition of the room; location, price, security, and customer service in the hotel; and restaurant service and food quality." Ekiz et al. (2012), on the other hand, report that their coding grid included a total number of 54 different "themes", but, unfortunately, they do not quote this exhaustive list.

[6] In fact, our main motivation for doing this was to avoid the rather vague differences between categories such as wishes, warnings, recommendations, advice, intentions, etc. These semantic labels turned out to be very difficult to handle during the codification process.

[7] The latter decision was taken after the first reliability test, since it appeared to be extremely difficult to further segment the text in a reliable and consistent way. If the different subthemes were to be coded, it would be preferable to use another methodology, such as a keyword count. Yet, the purpose of this paper is not to give a full account of all possible topics and subtopics, but rather to provide a reliable coding grid for the cross-linguistic comparison of the reviews.

Table 1
Segmentation of the reviews' text.

Retrospective speech acts	Evaluative statements	Negative	Accommodation	"*The rooms were the worst.*"
			Services	"*Don't start me on the blanket it was filthy dirty!*"/"*Terrible food!*"
			Interpersonal	"*They do not speak proper English and then raise their voices at their customers.*"
			Price	"*The worst of it all was a $200 charge for a 30 min phone call. Rip off!*"
			Location	"*It was inconvenient to most things to see.*"
			General	"*Horrible place!*"/"*Not a pleasant experience!*"
		Positive	Accommodation	"*The beds were comfortable.*"
			Services	"*Breakfast was of a good standard.*"/"*The rooms were clean.*"
			Interpersonal	"*All the staff was very helpful and friendly.*"
			Price	"*Price was reasonable.*"
			Location	"*The location was great*"
			General	"*We really enjoyed our stay in the hotel. However…*"
	Descriptions	References to remedial action during the stay		"*We had paid for a double room, so we asked the manager for a different room.*"
		Extra information		"*Recently stayed here as part of a group tour.*"/"*We stayed at the hotel for 3 nights.*"
Future-oriented speech acts	Recommendations for peer travellers			"*Do NOT stay here.*"/"*I wouldn't recommend staying at this hotel.*"
	Intentions (self-orientation)			"*Never ever going back to ***** Hotel.*"
	Advice for hotel owners/staff			"*They should have made the breakfast available starting by 07.00.*"
	Advice for other instances			"*Thomas Cook need to be more honest when recommending hotels to customers.*"
Metapragmatic speech acts				"*Normally we wouldn't complain, but…*"

that an evaluation can be rendered in an unmarked way or can be intensified will be called 'graduation of force' (Martin and White, 2005:140), and among the intensification strategies we distinguish between 'up-scaling' strategies and 'down-scaling' strategies (Martin and White (2005:135)). Table 2 summarizes the most recurrent realizations of these strategies, although it should be noted that these realizations were not quantified or codified separately.[8] Positive and negative evaluations that did not contain one of these up- or down-scaling strategies have been coded as unmarked (Table 2).

3.3. Counting methods

A final methodological observation concerns the fact that we have used two different counting methods for reporting the corpus results.

The first method counts the number of reviews in which a certain category has been found, independently of the fact that it may appear more than once in the same review; henceforth we will refer to this method with the label **#reviews**.

The second counting method is based on the total number of occurrences of each category. For instance, when a review contains two services-related negative evaluations separated by the presence of other functional units, they have been counted as two occurrences of negative evaluations within the 'services' category. Henceforth we will refer to this method with the label **#occurrences**.

We decided to apply the two counting methods because they represent complementary perspectives. Moreover, since our case study is based on a relatively limited number of reviews, it is possible that some cross-linguistic differences may emerge which, although meaningful, do not pass the threshold of statistical significance. This will mainly be the case with the first counting method, where, by definition, lower numbers are used. In this sense, the second counting method can act as a heuristic tool, to signal possible "rich points" that could be tested on larger corpora. Secondly, the two counting methods are synergic, in the sense that if divergences among the three language groups emerge in both counting methods, this leads to a stronger observation.

4. Results

In this section, we will compare the overall frequency of the different types of speech acts in the three language groups (4.1), as well as the frequency of the specific topics of the evaluative statements (4.2) and the proportions of up- and down-scaling of the evaluative statements (4.3). We will consider different reporting methods, based on the two counting methods #reviews and #occurrences (see Section 4.3).

4.1. Speech act distribution

First of all, the data presented in Table 3 show that the categories suggested by Vásquez (2011) constitute recurrent and relatively similar patterns in the three languages under examination. Although it can be deduced that reviews written in English contain a slightly higher number of speech acts, with on average 3.2 different speech acts per review, against 2.9 for Italian and 2.7 for Dutch, the data regarding the relative frequency reveal a clear tendency towards similarity among the three language groups.

Negative evaluations are by far the most frequent category in the three languages, which is unsurprising. Yet, a more striking result emerges when we consider the frequency order of all the speech act categories taken into consideration. It is remarkable to note that the hierarchy that goes from the most frequent speech act category to the least frequent one, is almost uniform cross-linguistically, namely: negative evaluations > positive evaluations > future-oriented > extra information > remedial action > metapragmatic. The only deviation from this pattern is represented by the categories 'positive comments' and 'future-oriented' in the Italian subset (and even then only in the #reviews counting method).

The tendency towards similarity is confirmed by the statistical results in Table 4. Indeed, when we apply pair-wise chi-square tests[9] in order to identify possible statistically significant frequency differences, we notice that, on a total of 18 pair-wise comparisons, in 15 cases no significant differences have been detected. In three cases we have found a significant difference (negative evaluations EN-NL,

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[8] This means that we are able to compare the frequency of up- and down-scaling in the three languages, but not the frequency of the different realizations.

[9] The chi-square tests applied to the #reviews data take the total number of reviews (100) as reference point, while the test applied to the #occurrences data take the total number of speech acts as reference point (865, 760, 771, respectively). For each test, the critical p value was set at the 0.05 level of confidence.

Table 2
Up-scaling and down-scaling strategies, and unmarked evaluations.

	Negative	Positive
Up-scaling strategies		
Expressive punctuation	"Not even a one star !!!"	"The terrace-the best part of this hotel!"
Emphatic orthography	"HORRIBLE place"	"(BTW the other hotels we stayed at in Italy were Fantastic!)"
Adverbial high degree markers	"The Wi-Fi was awfully expensive"	"Receptionist was very nice"
Superlative lexical expressions	"Disgusting hotel!"	"Wonderful location"
Explanatory aggravating comments	"I didn't sleep much even with windows and shutters firmly closed."	/
Irony/sarcasm	"Hotel Hell. Gordon, they need you!"	/
Rhetorical questions	"Customer service skills? – Zero!"	/
Description of a serious negative episode that took place during the stay	"We got robbed in the room"	/
Down-scaling strategies		
Downgrading adjectives/ "Staff was friendly enough"	adverbs/expressions	"The rooms are a bit small"
Negation preceding a positive/negative adjective	"The breakfast wasn't so good."	"Location wasn't too bad!"
Underlining a personal point of view	"I don't mind that the rooms were old.."	/
Juxtaposing a positive/ negative comment	"I would have given this 1 star but the breakfast was pretty good"	"All in all wouldn't have been too bad except for the lack of hot water."
Explanation/ justification attenuating the circumstances	"Furthermore there was a bit rude waitress (rude with anyone), probably because she was stressed. She was the only waitress taking care of all the tables and she was kind of panicking."	"Our room, was clean, at least, but our door handle was partially hanging off which made opening/closing traumatic."
Unmarked utterances		
	"The lobby was small"	"The room was big"
	"The walk-in shower was tiny"	"There was a swimming pool"
	"Breakfast was the typical European fare"	"The lobby is renovated"
	"the A/C didn't work"	"Breakfast was ok."

and future-oriented speech acts EN-NL and IT-NL), and in only one case this is confirmed by both counting methods (future-oriented IT-NL). In what follows, we will take a closer look at the examples

representing the different categories. In Sections 4.2 and 4.3, we will deepen the analysis of the evaluative statements, by discussing their topics and the intensification strategies.

4.1.1. Future-oriented speech acts

As already mentioned, the category of 'future-oriented' speech acts includes all instances through which the reviewers convey advice, suggestions and recommendations or express intentions. This category occurs in two thirds of the reviews written in English and Italian, but is less frequent in Dutch reviews. Table 5 shows that this lower frequency is entirely due to the very low frequency of the advice/recommendations directed to the hotel and "other" targets. In our opinion, this shows that review authors who write in a language such as Dutch, which is not a lingua franca nor the language of the destination, assume that their language reduces the scope of the audience, and assume that it is not useful to address potential addressees who (supposedly) do not master their language. This might seem obvious, but in fact it means that review authors do not really integrate the idea that their messages will be automatically translated, and thus made accessible for non-Dutch speakers/readers.

In a limited number of cases, reviewers referred to other instances. In the English corpus, some reviewers referred to their travel agencies (1). And in the Italian subcorpus, we found several cases in which the reviewers even referred to institutional instances, such as the police, or special units specialized in health-care (NAS, ASP) (2).

(1) "Thomas Cook needs to be more honest when recommending hotels to customers."

(2) "Da segnalare all'ASP....." [to be signalled to ASP]

4.1.2. Extra information

The category 'Extra information' shows a similar frequency pattern in the three groups, being present in 42–48% of the reviews. Very often, reviewers place extra information at the beginning of the text, as a framing unit that orients and 'prepares' the reader for the rest of the text (Vásquez, 2014b, 2012). In most cases, these speech acts offer some extra information concerning the context of the described stay, for example about the people they travelled with or the period of year in which they stayed at the reviewed accommodation. In some instances (Vásquez, 2014b), these statements may function as a tool to boost the credibility of the authors, for instance by underlining that they have been travelling for work very often, or that they know the hosting country very well. In our corpus, statements connected to the credibility of the reviewer seem to emerge more often in reviews written in English (3),

Table 3
Speech acts, ordered in decreasing order of mean frequency.

Speech acts present in negative reviews	#reviews (/100)			#occurrences		
	English	Italian	Dutch	English # (%)	Italian # (%)	Dutch # (%)
Negative evaluations	100	100	100	515 (60%)	471 (62%)	514 (67%)
Positive evaluations	67	56	56	149 (17%)	115 (15%)	110 (14%)
Future-oriented[a]	66	66	50	96 (11%)	92 (12%)	68 (9%)
Extra information	48	42	44	63 (7%)	53 (7%)	57 (7%)
Remedial action	22	14	14	26 (3%)	17 (2%)	15 (2%)
Metapragmatic	13	10	7	14 (2%)	14 (2%)	7 (1%)
TOTAL				865	760	771
#different speech acts/review	3.2	2.9	2.7			

[a] For practical purposes, at this point we report only on the head-category of future-oriented speech acts, postponing the discussion concerning the addressees of these speech acts within the qualitative discussion (3.1.1). Also the topics of the evaluations will be discussed below (Section 3.2).

Table 4
Overview of the statistically significant differences, comparison between language groups.

Speech acts present in negative reviews	Statistically significant differences					
	#reviews			# occurrences		
	EN-IT	EN-NL	IT-NL	EN-IT	EN-NL	IT-NL
Negative evaluations	–	–	–	–	X	–
Positive evaluations	–	–	–	–	–	–
Future-oriented	–	X	X	–	–	X
Extra information	–	–	–	–	–	–
Remedial action	–	–	–	–	–	–
Metapragmatic	–	–	–	–	–	–

Table 5
Future-oriented speech acts.

Future-oriented speech acts				
	Recipients	English	Italian	Dutch
Advice/suggestions/recommendations	Tourists	67%	63%	68%
	Hotel	5%	9%	1%
	Other target	9%	9%	1%
Intentions (of the reviewer him/herself)		19%	20%	29%

whereas in Italian and Dutch, the extra information statements mostly seem to convey practical information, for example about public transport (4). However, we should add that the quantification method and the size of the corpus do not allow yet to explore more in depth this possible difference.

(3) "I have been all over the world"
(4) "Hotel is via buslijn 360 gemakkelijk te bereiken, stap uit bij laatste halte" [The hotel is easy to reach through bus line 360, get out at the last stop]

4.1.3. References to remedial action

While references to demands of remedial action are smaller in number, they show a similar distribution in the different languages. In approximately two-thirds of the examples, the reviewer describes the demand for remedial action as a run-up to say that the problem was not solved (5). Also, reviewers want to underline that they requested remedial action on more than one occasion, which is especially noticeable in the case of the Dutch-written reviews, where this extra specification occurs in half of this type of speech acts (6).

(5) "Told reception who sent someone to look at it, but it never got repaired."
(6) "Op die avond zijn we 4 keer bij de receptie geweest" ["That night we went to reception 4 times"]

4.1.4. Metapragmatic comments

Although the number of metapragmatic comments is too limited to yield statistically significant results, we observed that these speech acts occurred twice as often in reviews written in English and Italian than in Dutch. Furthermore, taking a closer look at the actual instances in the corpus, metapragmatic comments were produced by the reviewers to profile themselves as "non-complainers" (Vásquez, 2014b:77) (7, 8), or were realized as instances of *meta*-discourse (9). In example (10) the metapragmatic utterance seems to function as a preparative and mitigating sentence for the comment that follows.

(7) "Normalmente come è evidente dal mio profilo, non scrivo mai per lamentarmi…" [Normally, as it is evident from my profile, I never write to complain…]
(8) "This is the first time I have written a negative review"
(9) "I don't have enough bad words to describe this hotel."
(10) "I almost didn't include this but we were informed by our driver that the area is known as "Chinatown"."

4.2. Topics of the evaluative comments

As explained in Section 3.2.1, the evaluative statements have been subdivided into 6 topic categories. The top section of Table 6 shows the results for the negative evaluations, while the lower section contains the positive ones. As before, we report the results of both counting methods (#reviews and #occurrences) and include also a table presenting the results of the pair-wise chi-square tests (Table 7).

The first observation is that the topic categories follow similar, although not identical, frequency hierarchies in the three languages, both for negative and positive comments. Italian and Dutch negative comments even follow exactly the same hierarchy of topic frequency (services > accommodation > general > interpersonal > price > location; Table 6); English deviates from this pattern at two points, namely regarding the hierarchy positions of the topics 'services'/'accommodation' (#reviews) and 'price'/'location' (#reviews, # occurrences). However, when we consider the chi-square tests, there are significant differences in eight out of 18 pair-wise comparisons, four of which are confirmed by both counting methods. In fact, except for the category 'general', we found at least one significant cross-linguistic frequency difference for all topic categories. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, most differences are found between the English- and Dutch-written reviews.

Analysing the frequency hierarchies of the positive evaluations' topics (Table 6), we find again similar patterns in the three languages (location > services > accommodation > interpersonal > price > general), with two exceptions: one concerning the categories 'price' and 'general' in English, and one concerning the category 'interpersonal' in Italian. The results of the chi-square

Table 6
Content distribution of negative comments. Topics ordered in decreasing order of mean frequency.

	#reviews (/100)			#occurrences		
	English	Italian	Dutch	English # (%)	Italian # (%)	Dutch # (%)
Negative evaluations						
Services	82	91	95	148 (29%)	162 (34%)	183 (36%)
Accommodation	83	86	78	140 (27%)	127 (27%)	134 (26%)
General	64	67	58	104 (20%)	100 (21%)	78 (15%)
Interpersonal	52	36	49	77 (15%)	47 (10%)	63 (12%)
Price	11	18	25	13 (3%)	20 (4%)	37 (7%)
Location	23	12	18	33 (6%)	15 (3%)	19 (4%)
TOTAL				515	471	514
Positive evaluations						
Location	32	32	35	36 (24%)	39 (34%)	37 (34%)
Services	29	16	23	39 (26%)	21 (18%)	26 (24%)
Accommodation	25	15	18	29 (19%)	18 (16%)	20 (18%)
Interpersonal	24	22	13	26 (17%)	26 (23%)	13 (12%)
Price	6	5	8	6 (4%)	5 (4%)	9 (8%)
General	11	3	2	13 (9%)	6 (5%)	5 (5%)
TOTAL				149	115	110

Table 7
Statistical significance, comparison between language groups.

	#reviews			# occurrences		
	EN-IT	EN-NL	IT-NL	EN-IT	EN-NL	IT-NL
Negative evaluations						
Services	–	X	–	–	X	–
Accommodation	–	–	–	–	–	–
General	–	–	–	–	X	X
Interpersonal	X	–	–	X	–	–
Price	–	X	–	–	X	X
Location	X	–	–	X	X	–
Positive evaluations						
Location	–	–	–	–	–	–
Services	X	–	–	–	–	–
Accommodation	–	–	–	–	–	–
Interpersonal	–	X	–	–	–	X
Price	–	–	–	–	–	–
General	–	X	–	–	X	–

tests reveal statistically significant differences among the three language groups in four out of 18 pair-wise comparisons (one of which is confirmed by both counting methods).

It stands out that the content category 'interpersonal' yields divergent results for Italian when compared to the other languages: it appears more frequently in positive evaluative statements (#occurrences IT-NL) than in negative ones (#reviews IT-EN). These divergent patterns found in Italian-written reviews in the 'interpersonal' sphere could be caused by a deeper knowledge of this group of domestic tourists of the Italian ways of managing social relations and their familiarity with it. By carefully reading the instances of this topic category, we observed that the divergences not only lie in the frequencies but also in the content that is conveyed. In the interpersonal utterances produced in English and Dutch, the reviewers mainly focus on the rudeness and unhelpfulness of the hotel staff (11–12) while in Italian these comments are clearly less recurrent. Instead, we detected several (slightly) xenophobe utterances, where negative comments regarding the nationality of the hotel's workers were made in quite a direct way, as we can see in examples (13–14). For these reasons, we believe that this topic is a sensitive one, which requires further research, especially to verify the possible impact of being a domestic or a foreign tourist on the way in which the interpersonal domain is described in tourism reviews.

(11) "Rude waiter!"
(12) "Ignorant and non-attentive staff!"
(13) "Il personale straniero non all' altezza." ["Foreign staff falling short"]
(14) "Hotel mal tenuto gestito da cinesi." ["Hotel badly kept, managed by Chinese people"]

When comparing the topic hierarchies in the negative and positive evaluations, it is interesting to note that 'location' is the least frequent topic in the negative comments, and the most frequent one in the positive comments (15, 16). One hypothesis might be that this type of positive comments, besides its informative value, can also function as a face-saving strategy, both for the hotel that is negatively evaluated, and for the reviewers themselves, because location is one of the factors that they can control beforehand. In this sense, a positive comment upon the location of the hotel also prevents the reviewers from having to admit that they made a bad choice.

(15) "On the positive side, the location is ideal for the main termini railway station (5 mins walk)".
(16) "The only good thing about this hotel was the location!"

Table 8
Graduation of force of negative and positive comments.

	# occurrences			Statistical significance		
	EN	IT	NL	EN-IT	EN-NL	IT-NL
Negative evaluations						
Reinforced	267 (72%)	235 (66%)	255 (68%)	–	–	–
Unmarked	66 (18%)	98 (28%)	87 (23%)	X	–	–
Moderated	36 (10%)	22 (6%)	34 (9%)	–	–	–
Total	369	355	376			
Positive evaluations						
Reinforced	48 (37%)	27 (26%)	17 (18%)	X	X	–
Unmarked	53 (41%)	70 (67%)	69 (73%)	–	–	–
Moderated	28 (22%)	8 (8%)	9 (9%)	X	X	–
Total	129	105	95			

4.3. Hedging

In this section, we will analyse to what degree the different language groups up- or down-scale their negative and positive evaluations. As can be seen in Table 8, the main conclusion is that the languages follow very similar intensification patterns, especially in the case of negative comments. For example, the most frequent category of up-scaled negative evaluations oscillates minimally between 66% and 72%, and only 1 out of 9 pair-wise comparisons yields a significant frequency difference (unmarked EN-IT). In the case of positive comments, differences are more important: 4 out of 9 pair-wise comparisons show significant differences (up-scaled EN-IT and EN-NL, and moderated EN-IT and EN-NL), which means that positive comments in English-written negative reviews receive more emphasis than in Italian or Dutch. Among the most recurrent strategies adopted to up-scale positive evaluations are adverbial high-degree markers (17) and superlative lexical expressions (18), whereas down-scaling of positive evaluations has been mostly realized through a negation preceding a negative adjective (19).

(17)	"All the staff was <u>very</u> helpful."
(18)	"Our host was <u>excellent</u>."
(19)	"But the location <u>is not that bad</u>."

Regarding the positive evaluations patterns, it is worth bringing together several findings. First, in Section 4.1 we found that positive comments are more frequent in English (67%) than in Italian (56%) or Dutch (56%). Now, we found that these positive comments are also more frequently up-scaled in English. Finally, Table 9 shows a subtle difference concerning the position of positive comments in the English reviews, namely a lower rate of positive comments in the middle of the review, which is the least salient position (English 36%, Italian 43%, Dutch 49%). So, there seems to be a slight tendency in English to insert the positive comments at relatively salient parts of the review, such as the beginning or the end of the review. Although differences are subtle and should be further confirmed, the hypothesis can be that English-writing reviewers pay more attention to inserting, and elaborating on positive comments in overall negative reviews.

Table 9
Position of positive comments in the text. Highest frequencies highlighted in bold.

	EN	IT	NL
Title	10%	10%	11%
Beginning	30%	29%	20%
Middle	**36%**	**43%**	**49%**
End	23%	18%	20%

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study on negative TripAdvisor hotel reviews written in English, Italian and Dutch is to contribute to the incipient field of discourse-oriented research on user-generated texts, and especially to questions related to the multilingual or cross-linguistic dimension of 2.0 travel platforms. Complementing earlier research on 2.0 hotel reviews (mainly by Vásquez), we sought to investigate whether a cross-linguistic comparison of hotel reviews would mainly reveal similar, or divergent, tendencies.

The main conclusion of the comparative analysis is that there is a clear trend towards similarity between the three languages under examination. Firstly, we found parallel patterns in the frequencies of the main recurrent speech acts (as defined by Vásquez (2011)). In the three languages, negative comments represent the core speech acts, but also the other speech acts (positive evaluative comments, future-oriented speech acts, descriptive informative sentences, references to demands for remedial actions and metapragmatic reflections) appear to be relatively stable features of the reviews. Secondly, we found that the reviewers address relatively similar topics in their negative and positive comments. For example, 'accommodation' and 'services' are always the most frequent topics in the negative comments, and 'location' is the most frequent topic in the positive comments. And, finally, we concluded that the three language groups adopt relatively similar up-scaling and down-scaling strategies in their evaluative statements.

However, although there is a clear trend towards generic similarity, we also identified specific discrepancies. For example, we found that Dutch-writing authors do not address recommendations to the Italian hotel owners in question, which leads to the more general hypothesis that review writers are not conscious of the fact that their reviews are automatically translated and thus 'readable' for the Italian hotel owners. Rather, they seem to assume that, when they write in their own language, they write exclusively for their own language group (see Goethals (2015) for a similar observation on linguistically defined in-group communication). Another finding was that English-written reviews are (slightly) more elaborate than the Italian- and Dutch-written reviews, especially regarding the credibility-enhancing personal information and positive comments. Interestingly, negative reviews written in English not only include more positive comments but also up-scale these comments more than in Italian and Dutch. At a more general level, these findings can be seen as being culture-specific, face-saving politeness strategies. Finally, we found that the evaluative comments about the interpersonal dimension differ among the language groups. In particular, the Italian-written reviews include less negative and more positive comments on this specific topic. In fact, in our data, this is the dimension that is most plausibly to point towards possible differences between foreign and domestic tourists' evaluations. The Italian data appear to confirm

this hypothesis, since we found that part of their negative evaluations precisely occurred in contexts of cultural distance, when they were confronted with non-Italian hotel keepers.

As we stated in the introduction, 2.0 travel platforms constitute fascinating contexts for rapidly evolving, cross-linguistic and global communication processes. We have concluded that possible intercultural differences in communication habits do not seem to hinder the emergence of new genres with relatively homogeneous, cross-linguistic characteristics. Eventually, this could lead to a reinforcement of strategies such as automatic translation that promote global communication dynamics, rather than the reinforcement of strategies that promote language- defined in-group communication. In fact, one of the main remaining obstacles, seems to be that users of a non-international language such as Dutch still conceive their communication as a form of in-group message, but this could change very rapidly, for example by a growing experience with automatic translations, or a consequence of explicit interventions by the platforms, such as the immediate visualization of a translation when one writes a review.

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