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# Global Expectations, Local Realities: All-Inclusive Hotel Reviews and Responses on TripAdvisor

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## Abstract

In this article we examine online reviews and hotel responses of Spanish hotel chains in two overseas tourist destinations: the Caribbean and Mexico. Drawing on a dataset of 96 hotel reviews we examine the intercultural experience of travellers as mediated by direct or indirect prior knowledge of the tourist destination and subsequent knowledge that results from visiting the host country and interacting with the locals, primarily with resort staff. The analysis shows, on the one hand, the global stance taken by the travellers to construct their reviews where the creation of an “intercultural space” is typically resisted and challenged in favour of expected global standards. The hotels’ responses, on the other hand, are constructed from a local rather than a global perspective. Findings reveal the intercultural tension that arises when lived experience of the specific culture cannot be married with the expectancies of homogeneity created by an increasingly globalised experience of tourism. The article concludes with a discussion of the role of interculturality, as conceived of in pragmatics, in a contemporary era characterised by discontent with digital information systems. It includes a discussion of some of the challenges in deploying the contrastive pragmatics toolkit

to capture the intercultural space reported here and the extent to which it allows us to portray interculturality in the present day.

### Keywords

glocalization – personalisation – all-inclusive holiday – compliments – complaints – intercultural

## 1 Introduction

Online consumer reviews have opened up new possibilities to express opinions and give feedback on products and experiences. Traditionally mainly limited to formal written complaints or word-of-mouth views of friends and colleagues, the internet has enabled consumers to share and expand their opinions via electronic Word-of-Mouth (ewom) and this has been shown to change consumers' behaviour and loyalty (Schwab and Rothenberg, 2015).

The reach and scalability of the internet has reshaped the travel experience. It has enabled travellers to share their views and experiences globally and instantaneously (Litvin et al., 2018). Holidays and hotels belong to a range of products that are “experience goods” (Vásquez, 2014b), that is, goods whose quality must be experienced before they can be evaluated. Indeed, reviewers' previous travel experiences have been reported to influence tourists' future decisional behaviour insofar as they shape the individuals' choice of destination (Pavesi et al., 2015). A recent Ipsos MORI study found that 81% of people consult online platforms before booking their holiday and that 49% will not make a reservation for a hotel that has zero reviews (TripAdvisor, 2019). Moreover, negative reviews appear to have more impact on consumer behaviour (Casado Díaz et al., 2020). It would thus seem that despite contemporary disenchantment with digital information systems (Cramer, 2014), potential travellers trust hotel reviews more than other information sources as they are considered independent and unbiased (Dickinger, 2011). Indeed, Search Engine Land found that 88% of people trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations (DeRise, 2022).

Tourism represents one of the largest global industries and population movements of all time (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2011) and opens up opportunities for intercultural and multilingual encounters (Jack et al., 2020). Surprisingly, however, increased mobility does not always result in greater intercultural knowledge or exchange. Consider, for instance, how the asymmetric power relations that facilitate travel experiences are rarely confronted (Jaworski and Pritchard, 2005: 12) or

how a singular cultural authenticity is generally commodified (Heller et al., 2014) in tourism materials to the detriment of cultural diversity. According to Jaworski and Thurlow's (2011) textual and visual research, tourism creates similar travelling experiences, independent of the site visited. The authors' view coincides with that of some tourism scholars who suggest that "rather than facilitating intercultural encounters, the tourism industry erects barriers between tourists and hosts in order to maximise profit" and that "the promotional material and travel press predispose travellers to a narrow view of the host country" (Tomljenović, 2010: 17). This is especially relevant to the data examined in this article: all-inclusive package holiday experiences, where tourists visit destinations from the confines of a resort, principally selected based on textual and visual imagery. Despite the fact all-inclusive package holidays offer a taste of the local culture mainly through guests' interactions with hotel staff, the guests' reviews examined in this article are intermeshed with other constructions of interculturality. These constructions are the focus of this article.

The article examines travellers' reviews (96 reviews) of all-inclusive package holidays, a form of tourism that has not until now received attention in (intercultural) pragmatics research, and the hotel responses (87 responses) on the travel website TripAdvisor.

It is organised as follows. In Sections 2 and 3 we provide an overview of prior research on online consumer reviews and interculturality in tourism, and Section 4 introduces the background, dataset and methods. Finally, in Section 5 we present the results of our research with an analysis of the guests' reviews and hotel responses, followed by a discussion of the intercultural lived experiences emerging from the interaction between guests and hotels.

## 2 Prior Research on Online Consumer Reviews

Online consumer reviews have attracted the interest of scholars in marketing, tourism, computer mediated communication studies and discourse analysis. Tourism and management studies have focused, among others, on the way the internet has changed the behaviour of tourists and travellers (Briggs et al., 2007; Schwab and Rothenberger, 2015). The hugely popular travel website, TripAdvisor, is a case in point, where over one billion user reviews and opinions were posted in 2021 (Statista, 2022). As Law (2006: 76) notes, "the large collection of travellers' views and recommendations enables the website to appear as one of the very few online sources that can provide impartial viewpoints from consumers' perspective". The perceived impartiality of the platform (cf. Cramer, 2014) constitutes an important means of consumer-generated content, opening up the possibility of collecting tourists' experiences

and evaluations, as well as recommendations or advice of other travellers or locals (Miguéns et al., 2008). It can, however, pose challenges for the companies that receive negative reviews and complaints, with detrimental reputational and financial consequences.

The way online complaints are formulated and the reasons for the complaint play a role in influencing the reader (Sparks and Browning, 2010). For instance, Ruytenbeek, Verschraegen and De Cock (2021) compared a sample of negative reviews on TripAdvisor and Booking.com and found that the functional affordances of TripAdvisor's blank template invited longer, more explicitly nuanced complaints than Booking.com. Vásquez's (2011, 2014a, 2014b) studies of consumer and online travel reviews showed that complaints are often accompanied by recommendations and advice and frequently include expressions featuring "expect" or "expectations" in their construction. The explicit presence of "expectations" provides us with a direct metapragmatic link to what reviewers, in this case tourists, understand should have been in place based on their lived experience as tourists and/or what they conceive of as a mismatch between what they saw on the hotel webpages and imagined their experience would be versus what they experienced during their stay.

Although studies have found that the majority of travel reviews show positive polarity (Bridges and Vásquez, 2016; San Martín Gutiérrez et al., 2018), negative reviews have constituted the main focus of research (see Ruytenbeek et al., 2021 for an overview). Studies that have explored positive reviews have shown how they contribute to improving both the hosts' and guests' reputation (Hernández López, 2019; Cenni and Goethals, 2020). Research on Airbnb found that positive reviews revolve around the quality of the product's attributes (the quality of the house, room, furniture, location, etc.) and over half commented on interpersonal or relational attributes (the interaction with the hosts) and entailed compliments and praises (Hernández López, 2019). Relatedly, Cenni and Goethals' (2020) cross-linguistic face-work study of English, Dutch and Italian TripAdvisor reviews found that, while different communicative norms were evident when providing evaluations (Italian reviews were more emphatic and displayed stronger interpersonal communication), interaction with staff was central to a positive touristic experience. Overall, research highlights the importance of positive reviews and of responding to both negative and positive reviews as an opportunity to boost the reputation and/or professionalism of the host, according to lingua-cultural politeness orientations (see, for example, de Hoop et al., 2016 for Dutch; Brown and Levinson, 1987 for English and Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997 for English vs. Italian).

Due to the spread of eWOM, responding to online reviews has become an important part of reputation management (Vásquez, 2014b; Sparks and

Bradley, 2017). However, only a limited number of studies have explored this aspect of hotels' communication strategies. For example, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) analysed hotel responses to negative reviews of 5-star hotels in China and found that various strategies were employed, such as explicit and implicit denials or apologies, to minimise negative face damage and maintain the hotel's reputation. Ho (2017) identified similar strategies and found that, as well as denials in their responses, hotels also attempted to enhance rapport with customers to mitigate any potential damage caused by the denial.

### 3 Interculturality and Tourism

The data we examine focus on all-inclusive experiences in Mexico and the Caribbean, the most significant markets for this kind of tourism. Since their beginning in the 1950s, the all-inclusive tourist experience progressively lost its attractiveness as the demand for authentic, experiential local travel gained ground (hospitalitynet.org, accessed on 14/02/2023). In the past five years, however, all-inclusive holidays have become an increasingly popular option owing to the global economic crisis (Girma, 2021).

All-inclusive package holidays bring to the fore the assurances of a comfortable holiday stay, often at the expense of the destination's place-based attributes (Wall-Reinius et al., 2017), including its people and culture. Even though tourists typically experience the destination culture within the limits of the hotel and few opportunities are provided to interact with the locals outside the resort boundaries, interculturality is evoked in the reviews.

We understand interculturality as the contact between speakers who do not share the same language, language variety or cultural ways (Márquez Reiter, 2011). This contact (potentially) creates an interactive space where different repertoires and styles meet, creating "interculture" through spoken and/or written interaction (Márquez Reiter and Hidalgo Downing, 2020). The data examined show that when the travellers' experiences differ from similar experiences in the past, or from those imagined before travelling, interculturality is resisted and negatively assessed by them. Differences are challenged in terms of travellers' expectations in the light of the hotel's brand to the disregard of the local realities of the destination country, including interactions with hotel staff.

A question that emerges from our data is the extent to which reviewers are aware of the intercultural space arising from the structural conditions of the destination country, or rather, expect similar touristic experiences wherever they go. From the point of view of hotel companies, the question is how the

effects of “glocalization” (Robertson, 1992) are managed. In our case, how the all-inclusive holiday package as a service product developed and distributed globally is adjusted or not to accommodate travellers to the conditions of the local market. That is to say, how hotels offer a product with similar standards in different locations and manage problems ensuing from the local context. Previous studies on online consumer reviews have not paid sufficient attention to the role of context in the expression of clients’ (dis)satisfaction or the intercultural contact arising from the touristic experience.

Contact with the culture and people in the host country is an important part of the touristic experience (Gao and Sharma, 2022), however, it has not been explored in pragmatics research of tourist settings. The often-fleeting nature of contact between tourists and locals (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010) possibly explains why the discursive practices of guests and holiday providers on online travel platforms have not been the focus of intercultural studies. Intercultural studies have generally focused on the analysis of interactions between speakers of different lingua-cultures in primarily localised settings and have therefore tended to ignore contexts where speakers may share the same basic language, come from divergent backgrounds, and engage with one another in globalised contexts (e.g., Márquez Reiter, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

This article provides an analysis of the intercultural experience of travellers as mediated by direct or indirect prior knowledge of the tourist destination and subsequent knowledge that results from visiting the host country and interacting with the locals, primarily with resort staff.<sup>2</sup> It explores guests’ reviews and hotels’ responses and examines those in which interculturality is invoked and discussed in the light of what seems to be a normative expectation of being surrounded by members of one’s cultural “tribe” while overseas. It thus fills a gap in the discourse pragmatic literature on online consumer reviews by homing in on travellers’ intercultural experience in the context of the all-inclusive package holiday in destinations where Spanish is spoken and contributes to discursive studies of tourism.

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- 1 For instance, in transnational working contexts, speakers of the same language may show dissonances in interaction due to divergent cultural assumptions associated with communicative routines (see Márquez-Reiter, 2011 for an analysis on interculturality in business settings).
  - 2 Existing reviews of the hotel may also form part of travellers’ prior knowledge, however, our dataset does not have any instances where prior reviews are mentioned.

## 4 Background and Methods

The dataset on which our study is based comprises 96 TripAdvisor reviews from three Spanish hotel chains and 87 hotel responses in the most popular all-inclusive holiday destinations in the Spanish-speaking world: Cuba, Mexico and the Dominican Republic (Esquembre Martínez, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

The data cover a period of high-season months (September–March) in the Caribbean hotel chains covering 2018, 2019 and 2020. The data entail both positive and negative reviews and their corresponding responses. From this, reviews in which there was evidence of interculturality or intercultural conflicts were selected for analysis. Out of the 96 reviews gathered, 45 were found to invoke unmet expectations of a cultural nature. The hotel chains selected were located in Varadero (Cuba), Cancún (Mexico) and Punta Cana (Dominican Republic),<sup>4</sup> as these are the most popular all-inclusive experiences offered by Spanish hotel chains.

The star categorisations of the hotels were: 5 stars (highest level), 4 stars (medium-high level) and 3 stars (low-medium level).<sup>5</sup> The reviews collected for each location related to travel during high season (October 2018 to March 2020). Hotel responses to reviews were also collected, where available ( $n=87$ ). See Table 1 for breakdown. According to CEHAT (Confederación Española de Hoteles y Alojamientos Turísticos, 2019), hotel star categorisation is mainly based on architectural and structural elements, such as size of bedrooms and bathrooms, as well as the presence of certain basic services such as bars or restaurants.<sup>6</sup> However, hotel classification does not take into account the quality of such facilities or the quality of the service offered by the hotel

3 All available reviews on TripAdvisor for this period were collected; the total number of reviews collected from the six hotels was 120. After cleaning the dataset to remove elements such as reviews in languages other than Spanish, the final number of reviews analysed was 96.

4 The names of the hotel chains have been removed for anonymisation purposes. Throughout the article, the hotel chains will be referred to with their star rating, 5, 4 or 3 stars.

5 The ranking of Spanish hotel chains is established according to the number of hotel branches and “number of beds” in the world. The main touristic sites are also established according to the number of hotel and beds in each site (Ministerio de Comercio y Turismo, 2019).

6 According to CEHAT (Confederación Española de Hoteles y Alojamientos turísticos, 2019), hotel star categorisation is based on the following criteria: room and bathroom size in m<sup>2</sup>, telephone, heating, air conditioning, bar, safe in room. For instance, a 4-star hotel should have a lift and bar and room sizes should be at least 16 m<sup>2</sup> for a double bedroom, 9 m<sup>2</sup> for a single, 4.5 m<sup>2</sup> for the bathroom. All rooms should have telephone, heating, air conditioning and a safe. A 5-star hotel should have all of the features of a 4-star hotel, but should have a 17m<sup>2</sup> double bedroom, a 10m<sup>2</sup> single bedroom, and a 5m<sup>2</sup> bathroom. Therefore the only difference between a 4- and 5-star hotel is the bedroom and bathroom space.

staff. These services, however, are often mentioned in consumer reviews and, as we will see in our study, are one of the most valued features of hotel services.

The all-inclusive package offered by the hotels in our study means that all meals beverages, snacks, facilities and services at the hotel are included in the total price paid upfront for the holiday, suggesting an enclaved tourist environment in which interactions with the locals, apart from the hotel staff, do not form part of the main experience. The hotels in question are situated in beach resorts and have ample spaces for relaxation, such as swimming pools, bars and restaurants as well as organised entertainment and leisure activities. In this sense, the all-inclusive package offers more than standard hotel services since it provides a complete holiday experience within the enclosure of the hotel. In fact, very often this type of arrangement offers few opportunities for tourists to plan their own itinerary and many guests do not leave the hotel at all for the duration of their holiday.

Package holiday tourists tend to behave abroad as they would back home, albeit with changes to their eating patterns and dress mode, among others. They rarely interact with locals beyond the confines of their secure hotel complex and tend to engage in what may be described as passive tourism: beach, sun deck and the “all-inclusive”. In the fully inclusive holiday experiences we examine, guests expect familiarity in the light of the fact that all-inclusive holidays constitute a controlled mass tourist situation. The type of novelty expected is the sensory exuberance of a new location, experienced from the security of what is culturally known.

Table 1, see page 9, shows the total number of positive and negative reviews and hotel responses in our dataset.

TripAdvisor use a 1–5 rating scale (terrible, poor, average, very good, excellent). Positive reviews indicating customer satisfaction correspond to ratings of 4 and 5 (very good or excellent), while negative reviews correspond to ratings of 1 and 2 (terrible and poor). All the hotel chains have a higher number of positive reviews, although the 3-star chains have lower percentages of client satisfaction. Also of note for the 3-star hotels is the high number of reviews with no hotel response (77%), suggesting a difference in the attention devoted to digital communication and marketing compared with the 4- and 5-star chains.

As previously discussed, hotels have also become aware of the impact of online reviews and more reviews receive replies than in the past (O'Connor, 2010; Vásquez, 2014).<sup>7</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, in our data there were more

<sup>7</sup> Vásquez (2014) observed that while hotel responses were infrequent on TripAdvisor reviews sampled in 2008 (only 1%), this proportion had risen to over 10% in reviews sampled just a

TABLE 1 Reviews and responses across hotel chains

Hotel categories and locations		Positive reviews	Negative reviews	Total reviews	Reviews with no response
5*	Varadero, Cuba	12 (67%)	6 (33%)	18 (100%)	–
	Cancún, Mexico	4 (40%)	6 (60%)	10	2
	<b>Total 5*</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2 (7.14%)</b>
4*	Varadero, Cuba	13 (72%)	5 (28%)	18	–
	Punta Cana, DR	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	20	–
	<b>Total 4*</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	–
3*	Punta Cana, DR	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	20	13
	Cancún, Mexico	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	10	10
	<b>Total 3*</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23 (77%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>63</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>96 (100%)</b>	<b>25 (26%)</b>

negative reviews left unanswered than positive reviews. The hotels thus seem to respond to positive reviews in order to enhance their reputation and worth to the detriment of addressing and/or acting on potentially negative feedback, as discussed earlier (see Section 2).

In terms of the ethical considerations of internet research, the public nature of TripAdvisor means that no permissions to compile or store the data were required (Page et al., 2014). Notwithstanding this, and in line with the recommendations of the Working Ethics Committee of the Association of Internet Researchers, online users have expectations of privacy even when their posts figure in public digital spaces (Markham and Buchanam, 2012). Therefore, the names of posters, hotels and any other identifying information have been removed.

The first part of the analysis will examine the discursive construction of guests' dissatisfaction and the hotels' responses. The second part will focus on the creation of an intercultural space as a result of tourists' (implicit) appraisals of their global expectations of the all-inclusive tourist experience in the hotels in contrast to the local realities they experienced during their stay.

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few years later. Similarly, in 2010, O'Connor found that approximately 10% of the TripAdvisor reviews in his sample included a response from the hotel.

#### 4.1 *Constructing Legitimate (Dis)Satisfaction in Guests' Reviews*

As observed in previous studies (see Section 2), travel reviews comprise factual and evaluative content and may consist of descriptions, narratives or arguments. The style is quite varied; some reviewers express themselves informally, even colloquially, while others do so with a more formal register. The TripAdvisor interface enables the hotel's response to appear after the guest's review so both review and response can be seen as a pair-sequence, showing the interaction between guest and hotel. For potential travellers viewing the site, this reveals the different views consumers and hotel chains have on the services offered, providing insights into the (subjective) reality found by guests and the image projected by the hotels.

The review entails the guest's assessment of the quality of the hotel and the location (the beauty of the place, the hotel facilities and the proximity and accessibility of the beach or swimming pools), as well as services on offer, such as catering and entertainment. The guest's review is built on two main standpoints: (i) knowledge acquired prior to their stay, normally through previous stays at the same or similar destinations, and (ii) evidence of the actual stay. These two basic forms of knowledge help to construct the review as reliable (the reviewer is someone with legitimate knowledge or authority) and truthful (based on what happened during their stay). The reviewer's knowledge and authority towards their audience is built by invoking notions of being an "experienced traveller" or even the "intercultural expert". This is done by providing an evidential statement of their lived traveller experience before offering their evaluation. This allows them to present themselves as legitimate reviewers with sufficient epistemic authority to provide an (impartial) review, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (1) He viajado a otras playas de mexico/I've travelled to other beaches in Mexico (3\* Cancún)
- (2) En mi experiencia en hoteles All inclusive .../In my experience of other all-inclusive hotels ... (4\* Varadero)
- (3) Es la tercera vez que vamos en los últimos tres años/It's our third trip in the last three years (3\* Punta Cana)

The reviewers thus present themselves as experienced travellers at the first available opportunity. Detailed information on the facts of the day, including photographs, third-party evidence and name dropping, support the authenticity and truthfulness the reviewer wishes to establish, as seen in Example (4):

Example (4) 4\* Varadero<sup>8</sup>

Cambió de malo a regular, sin embargo no volveré

La primera vez que fui, comenté por esta vía que no lo recomendaba, la respuesta del hotel fue que volviera y que les diera otra oportunidad, les di 4 oportunidades, más que suficiente para esperar las mejoras. La verdad es que tiene una excelente playa. Las habitaciones han mejorado ya que estaban limpias y todo como nuevo (bungalow), recibimos buena atención por parte del personal de recepción, bares y restaurantes de especialidad. Sin embargo, algo que ya no es tolerable, es la atención en el sector de comedor y la comida. De los 5 días que estuvimos 2 tuvieron comida adecuada, el resto lo de siempre, este sigue malo, no todos pero en general no están preocupados de atender bien. El hotel en general mejoró, pero no su comida ni su atención en los sectores de alimentación. (dos días pusieron pan normal bañado en azúcar granulada, esto ya es demasiado, de seguro ellos no comen eso (ver fotografías).



Le agradecemos sinceramente que nos haya compartido sus impresiones acerca de su estancia en nuestro [hotel name]. Nos complace leer que usted haya podido disfrutar de nuestra bella playa, de la amabilidad y profesionalismo que caracteriza a nuestros trabajadores y de los altos estándares de limpieza e higiene de nuestras habitaciones. Sin embargo, nos entristece leer que en esta ocasión su estancia no haya sido tan satisfactoria como esperaba, ya que [hotel name] tenemos como objetivo prioritario que nuestros clientes estén totalmente satisfechos y prestamos atención especial a aquellos clientes que repiten su experiencia [hotel chain]. Le ofrecemos nuestras más sinceras disculpas por cualquier incomodidad causada por el servicio gastronómico, como [hotel name],

<sup>8</sup> See the Appendix for translations into English.

sabemos lo importante que son las comidas y bebidas para la experiencia general de nuestros huéspedes.

In example (4), the reviewer invokes experience as a benchmark for assessing service. In doing so, they assess the hotel in accordance with what the hotel actually promised in previous interactions. The reviewer mentions meta-pragmatically (i.e., through reported speech, Lucy, 1993) the hotel's response of an invitation to return (*la respuesta del hotel fue que volviera y que les diera otra oportunidad/the hotel's response was that I should return and give them another opportunity*). This is articulated as if it was taken at face value as they returned four times (*4 oportunidades les di/I gave them four opportunities*), only to find that the catering services had not improved. The fronting of the quantifying noun (i.e., 4) in the subordinate clause following an earlier negative review by the guest and the hotels' response intensifies (Albelda Marco and Briz Gómez, 2020) the guest's dissatisfaction. It helps to legitimise the guest's view by way of repeated negative lived experiences and inferentially (Levinson, 1983) suggests that while the hotel responds to negative feedback, it does not necessarily act on it. Whilst overall this is a negative review, some positive evaluation is provided first, following the review structure found in previous research (Vásquez, 2011). The reviewer foregrounds the beach as one of the prime facilities of the hotel (see Section 3), even though beaches are not privately owned in Cuba, hence, showing lack of knowledge of the destination country or perhaps disregard for what the country versus what the hotel's emplacement has to offer. They do this with the concessive and mitigating phrase (Soler Bonafont, 2016) "la verdad es que/the truth is", and go on to describe the improved rooms, good staff and speciality restaurants. The adverb "sin embargo/however" then follows to contrast the concession made, and present contrasting views of the catering services, including photographic evidence to add legitimacy to their viewpoint. The review ends with "de seguro ellos no comen eso/certainly they don't eat that". The humorous tone of the closing, which aims at presenting the food as substandard, shines further light on the guest's lack of knowledge of the local conditions in the destination, namely Cuba's food rationing government policy. This means that locals or indeed most of the hotel staff are likely to be precluded from the catering choices offered to guests. The reviewer's gaze (Urry, 2002), then, falls upon what the gazer expects to see (Turner et al., 2006), in this case, service uniformity in 4-star hotels regardless of local structural dimensions.

The hotel's response mostly follows the formulaic reply identified in the review response genre (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014; Ho, 2017). It is written in the first-person plural showing a collective corporate response on behalf of the hotel (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014). It begins by thanking the guest for their comments and strategically highlights the aspects that the guest valued

positively, which are echoed in a self-compliment move (que caracteriza a nuestros trabajadores y de los altos estándares de limpieza e higiene de nuestras habitaciones/that characterises our staff and the high standards of cleanliness and hygiene in our rooms). Notwithstanding this, in offering a perfunctory (Goffman, 1967) thank you to acknowledge the review, the hotel categorises the guest's comments as "impressions". The choice of this metalexeme (Kádár and Ran, 2015) helps to position the guest's experience as subjective. The guest's claims are only mentioned in the second paragraph of the response, showing concern for the client's dissatisfaction, although this is framed as more of an isolated incident (en esta ocasión/on this occasion). There follows an explicit apology for the services considered deficient as an intertextual response to the guest's complaint (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014); however, the response fails to fully address the claims made. It does not present any counterarguments in response to the guest's criticism, including intertextual deletion or reference to the photographic evidence provided. The generic response offered does not attempt to counter the guest's view on the hotel's repeated failure to meet expectations, which may imply that the hotel does not manage to restore its positive image for the damage caused to the customer. Previous studies show that hotel responses positively affect the consumers' perception of trust and concern, pointing out the importance of such responses in aspects such as the speed of response and the expression of empathy (Min et al., 2015; Sparks et al., 2016; Wang and Chaudhry, 2018).

A contrasting example of legitimation in the construction of dissatisfaction is found in Example (5) which we have termed the "intercultural expert" in the light of the title of the review. "El reflejo de Cuba con lo lindo y lo no tanto/the image of Cuba, the beautiful and the not so beautiful" implicitly suggests the reviewer has visited Cuba before and, therefore, has relevant experience of the destination. Besides legitimising their position as experienced, the content of the title suggests impartiality for it announces that the review will focus on both positive and negative aspects of their stay. The reviewer details their assessment of the hotel through a fact-building sequence of negative evaluative statements, from the more generic and verifiable by the reader to the more specific based on their lived experience:

Example (5) 4\* Varadero

Es el reflejo de Cuba, con lo lindo y lo no tanto.

El complejo esta un poco alejado de lo que sería la zona más céntrica de la península, [...] Las comodidades son las indispensables, y las instalaciones están en correcto estado. Ahora, tiene cancha de tenis, pero raqueta en mal estado, no tiene pelota de ningún estilo, la animación diurna, (por lo menos en el periodo que me toco estar, en donde el complejo estaba

mayormente ocupado por personas mayores a los 60 años, era justamente para ese tipo de personas. No tiene Wi Fi, el pool, se paga aparte?¿? la utilizacion de PC tambien, Los periodos de desayuno, almuerzo y cena, son cortos, de 2 horas y para mi costumbre demasiado temprano, por lo cual si llegaste 1 hora despues, es posible que ya no encuentres algo. tv de tubo. La animación nocturna variada y cumple con el panorama general. Se la puede pasar bien, pero ateniéndose a estas circunstancias (No hotel response).

The reviewer lists a series of deficiencies, gaining veracity and intensification: distance from the centre (el complejo está un poco alejado de lo que sería la zona más céntrica de la península/the complex is a little bit far from what would be the most central area of the peninsula). From this delicately constructed (Hansen and Márquez Reiter, 2016) initial geospatial comment, as observed by the presence of mitigators “un poco/a little” and the use of the conditional in “sería/would be”, they move on to a generic description of the facilities as “essential” and in “a generally good state” before detailing their problems. The insertion of the discourse marker “ahora/now” contrasts the minimally positive generic description offered with the negative unpacking of the facilities which follows (see, for example, López Quero, 2019). Thus, while a tennis court would not normally be expected in a hotel featuring basic facilities, that the rackets were in a bad state and that no tennis balls were available indicate absurdity. Along this line, the absence of Wi-Fi, a tube tv, and having to pay to use computers and the pool table are mentioned to substantiate the paradoxical nature of the assessment and presented as a rhetorical question (Badan and Cenni, 2021) with repeated interrogative signs. The rhetorical question provides a metadiscursive (Hyland, 2017) window into the reviewer’s unmet expectations. The relative impartiality observed thus far is contrasted with the subjective description of other areas of the services provided which did not meet with the guest’s satisfaction (i.e., meal times). These are carefully couched in terms of personal preferences (para mi costumbre demasiado temprano/too early for what I’m used to). Despite the overall dissatisfaction expressed, the closing includes some positive evaluation (Cenni and Goethals, 2017), albeit under the proviso of the hotel’s “circumstances”. The choice of “circumstances” connects the closing to the impartiality announced in the review’s title and potentially relates to the reviewer’s lived experience of the conditions of the country. With this the reviewer presents themselves as a seasoned traveller to the host country and hotel guest, adding thus legitimacy to their review. Despite their previous experience of the tourist destination, their assessment does not consider some of the conditions of the country visited (i.e., access to the internet).

#### 4.2 *Personalisation*

Interaction in hospitality service encounters is central to customer satisfaction (Wang et al., 2015) and evaluation of services is often based on guests' interaction with staff (Koc, 2021). In our data, staff interaction was highly rated and, in particular, personalisation was a very salient element in the guests' reviews, evident in 45 of the positive reviews, and 13 of the negative reviews. This accounts for 46,8% and 13,54%, respectively, of the total 96 reviews. As noted in previous research (Cenni et al., 2020), reference to hotel staff in negative reviews was impersonal through the use of collective references to "personnel", "waiters" or simply by the pronoun "they". In this way, staff were mentioned as part of the hotel resources, i.e., as human resources in an activated role (Fairclough, 2003), hence making the hotel rather than its non-agentive staff accountable for the negative experience. See examples 6 and 7 below:

- (6) No reponen ... mal servicio en el salón/They don't replace [food] ... bad service in the lounge (5\* Varadero)
- (7) No los limpian adecuadamente/they don't clean them properly (4\* Punta Cana)
- (8) La atención del personal, desganada y cero atentos/apathetic staff service and zero care (3\* Punta Cana)

Conversely, in the positive reviews, guests assessed the service received by praising specific members of staff. This was done by mentioning staff by their first names (and surnames, when known), and their roles. Explicit naming leaves an imprint of the interpersonal contact during the stay and indicates the contact as welcomed and desirable. Interestingly, some of the comments focus on the staff's ability to make guests feel at home, as illustrated in examples (9) and (11). We argue that these orient to desirable cultural relational expectations and the value attributed to relationality in primarily goal-oriented exchanges:

- (9) Agradecimientos especiales a Luís Rodríguez<sup>9</sup> de la recepción del hotel (Conciierge) quien nos atendió muy bien y nos dio muy buena información. A Roberto mesero del excelente restaurante Grill Market, nos hizo sentir muy a gusto/Special mention to Luís Rodríguez from the hotel reception who looked after us very well and gave us very good information. To the waiter Roberto from the excellent Grill Market restaurant, he made us feel very comfortable (5\* Cancún)

9 Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

- (10) Excelente la atención del personal, destacas Isabel, Rosa y todas las chicas del servicio de mesa/Excellent staff service, especially Isabel, Rosa and all the girls of the table service (4\* Punta Cana)
- (11) Destaco a José, Ramón y Miriam García. Encabezando a cada uno de ellos y quien lleva gran parte del mérito es el supervisor Felix, quien logra liderar a un tremendo equipo de profesionales!!! Los felicito y espero volver algún día y sentirme nuevamente como en casa!!! Un millón de estrellas par ustedes!!/I highlight José, Ramón and Miriam García. Heading them all, and who takes a large part of the merit is Felix, the supervisor, who succeeded in leading a great professional team. I congratulate them and hope to return one day and feel at home once again. A million stars for you!! (4\* Punta Cana)

Given that the TripAdvisor platform is open to unspecified audiences, the mention of names is a powerful statement of identification. Moreover, reviewers appear to be aware of the “double audience” of their reviews – prospective travellers and the hotel (Cenni and Goethals, 2020:34). In some way, reviewers may see themselves as helping to improve the working conditions of staff with their overt appraisals as hotels may use reviews to evaluate staff performance (Cenni et al. 2020). At the discourse level, it provides the review with authenticity and experiential authority, as well as emotional, affective tones with which audiences may empathise. It also helps to construct the positive face of both the reviewer and the hotel staff. The thanks, congratulations, greetings and, most of all, compliments where staff are mentioned, are understood here as instances of interculturality. Staff acknowledgements are the result of the intercultural contact experienced by the guests whilst remaining within the safety of the hotel enclosure.<sup>10</sup>

The appellative function of vocatives can also be seen in example (12) below, where the guest describes the staff with a series of hyperbolic expressions:

Example (12) 5\* Varadero<sup>11</sup>

Unas buenas vacaciones ! Para repetir !!!!

Ha sido 8 días fantásticos ! La atención del personal a sido espectacular !

El Sr. Soler nos llevo en volandas ! Genial , la gente que trabaja allí super agradable ! Me apunte los nombres de dos camareras para nombrarlas aqui Martha y Olga! Estoy seguro que aun va a mejorar mucho mas por

10 It is possible that impersonal references to hotel staff may have also resulted from the intercultural context. However, this cannot be ascertained on the basis of the data examined here. This would require interviews or questionnaires conducted with the reviewers.

11 See the Appendix for the translation into English.

lo hablado con el Sr. Soler ! Nos llevamos los 6 que eramos una grata sensación !!! Volveremos ! El Hotel es una pasada ! Con buenas vistas !

Permítame agradecerle el tiempo empleado en su comentario y el hecho de compartirlo con todos los usuarios de esta web. Nos enorgullece conocer que sus vacaciones en nuestro hotel hayan sido fantásticas y que pudiera comprobar que para [hotel name] nuestros huéspedes son lo más importante y su satisfacción nuestro principal objetivo. Le trasladaremos sus comentarios a nuestro personal que sin dudas estará muy feliz con sus elogios. Especialmente las dos camareras Martha y Olga así como el Sr. Soler apenas está comenzando con nosotros y ya está ganando el aprecio de nuestros clientes por su gran profesionalismo y maravillosa atención. El hecho de saber que hemos cubierto sus expectativas nos anima a seguir esforzándonos día a día para mantener nuestra filosofía de excelencia en el servicio.

The reviewer summarises their holiday experience with a recommendation to other travellers (Unas buenas vacaciones! Para repetir!!!/A good holiday! To repeat!!!). They build the review with a very informal and affective style with praise and compliments, characterised by the “linguistic euphoria” of emphatic language to attract the reader (Cappelli, 2006: 132). This is reflected in the use of expressive marking through exclamations, such as “El hotel es una pasada!/The hotel is amazing!” and intensifiers “la gente allí super agradable!/The staff there are super friendly!”. The guest recalls that “han sido 8 días fantásticos/we’ve had 8 fantastic days”, highlighting the staff contact that has been instrumental to their stay (la atención del personal ha sido espectacular/the staff service has been spectacular). With this comment, the guest acknowledges that the service has gone far beyond their expectations of what a hotel guest can expect from an all-inclusive package and that their experience has been made special due to the interpersonal contact during the stay. The relatively high number of exclamatory clauses in the review convey the reviewer’s counter expectation, expressing thus their surprise. The reviewer mentions the names of the staff they interacted with, using expressions such as “El señor Soler nos llevó en volandas”,<sup>12</sup> meaning that the guests felt like they were waited on hand and foot. The reviewer also compliments two of the waiting staff by name, giving further visibility to the workforce. They endorse their experience by using the inclusive first person plural nosotros: “nos llevamos los 6 amigos que

12 *En volandas* is a highly expressive expression used in European Spanish to indicate someone who is lifted up in the air by a group of people. The expression originates from bullfighting; when bullfighters have done an excellent job, they are lifted up in the air by the other bullfighters.

éramos una grata sensación/there were 6 of us and it gave us a really good feeling”, thus reinforcing the authenticity of the contact between them and the hotel staff and of the whole extraordinary experience.

By contrast, the hotel responds in a formal style, evoking the written letter format. It begins with a formulaic thanking for the positive review and consolidates the guest’s comments through self-promotion (Ho, 2017): “Nos enorgullece conocer que sus vacaciones en nuestro hotel hayan sido fantásticas y que pudiera comprobar que para [hotel name] nuestros huéspedes son lo más importante y su satisfacción nuestro principal objetivo/We are pleased to hear that you’ve had a fantastic holiday in our hotel and that you have been able to see for yourself that for [hotel name] our guests are the most important and their satisfaction is our main objective”. This type of positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), using the style of advertising language, is common to commercial communication, particularly in those sectors where it is important to meet the customers’ face needs, and constitutes the “homogenizing agency of globalization” (Ferenčík, 2018: 193). The hotel accepts the guest’s compliments and promises to transmit them to the staff. However, the response does not fully acknowledge that the guest’s experience has gone far beyond their expectations and the explicit name of staff which signals the guest’s (emotional) stance. The hotel responds from a corporate and global perspective that does not fully acknowledge how special the guest’s experience has been. They miss the chance to affirm the identity of the hotel in relation to other hotels in the chain, and thus reveal a local vision of its staff and services. In this interaction, interculturality emerges as the interactive space created between the guests and staff during the stay. This local and marked stance clashes with the broader, globalised, normatively polite response of the hotel, that fails to grasp the locality of the tourist experience. While reviewers acknowledge a real interpersonal and affective connection with the hotel staff, the hotel’s response highlights distance and homogeneity. This finding challenges the idea that all-inclusive guests expect homogeneity in hotel service. This may be the case with respect to general hotel services (such as material conditions) but not with respect to the guest’s stay understood as experience.

In our data, personalisation was present in reviewers’ positive evaluation. This indicates that the experience and the personal treatment of the staff is an element that lasts in the guest’s memory and somehow goes beyond the standard expectations of a hotel. In many cases, the relationship established between guests and hotel staff is often the only contact with the local population. The all-inclusive package offered that includes accommodation, meals, entertainment and a whole series of activities, can be understood as a

“complete experience” rather than just a service. The tourist that buys this type of package frequently stays in the hotel complex throughout their stay, and the hotel thus becomes a “home”, and an almost domestic and familial relationship with the hotel is established, in particular with the staff. Let us recall examples (9) and (11) where the reviewers described their experience as “feeling very comfortable/at home” and that “they arrived as strangers and left as friends”. This feeling of being at home was also reported by Hernández López (2019) to describe guests’ Airbnb experiences, especially after the end of their stay where they had interacted with the host.

The reviewer mentions the hotel staff to express gratitude for the service given and highlight the interpersonal and affective features of their stay through lived “intercultural contact” with the staff. In this sense, the reviewer notes the importance of personalised attention in their assessment of the service provided by the hotel, as in (12), where the reviewer recalls the names of two waiting staff. The representation of the staff’s labour plays a fundamental role in transmitting the tourist experience, since their work can be clearly seen (e.g., clean rooms and bathrooms, well-presented buffets). In luxury hotels, though, staff must also remain invisible: the room must appear immaculate but the cleaner must not be seen as the presence or direct contact with hotel staff may cause discomfort (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2014). However, in the all-inclusive package, the hotel guest lives an immersive experience becoming part of the “family” of that small hotel community, with its entertainers and staff. This experience produces a direct contact with the hotel staff. The personalisation discourse observed here is, then, a direct consequence and reflection of the contact between the guests and the hotel staff and of the relationship that has been forged, even if short-lived.

#### 4.3 *Between the Global and the Local*

The tourism sector has expanded through hotel chains that represent large corporations. These chains offer homogeneous services in tourist destinations and represent transnational brands that are identifiable partly through the maintenance of the same quality standards and style in all tourist destinations, regardless of the socio-economic situation or cultural features of the country in which it is located. Consider the following examples:

- (13) No tiene la calidad que se esperaría de [hotel chain]/It doesn’t have the quality I would have expected of [hotel chain] (3\* Cancún)
- (14) Por ser un hotel de ese precio y categoría esperaba una mejor calidad en la comida y bebida/I expected better quality food and drink from a hotel of this price and category (5\* Cancún)

- (15) Yo tenía otro concepto de [hotel chain] por lo menos en España los hoteles están bastante bien/I had another concept of [hotel chain] at least in Spain the hotels are pretty good (4\* Punta Cana)

Hence, tourism produces paradoxical or even contradictory experiences. On the one hand, the traveller moves in search of immersive experiences in the host country, but on the other hand they are influenced by a complex set of “banal” representations of the culture (Billig, 1995), based on previous experiences or on the information assimilated through advertising and web pages. However, tension between the global and the local can be an issue when the intercultural space is actually resisted. The guest’s expectations and their global identity as knowledgeable travellers is juxtaposed with their lived experience of the all-inclusive holiday. Example (16) exemplifies this juxtaposition:

Example (16) 5\* Varadero<sup>13</sup>

#### Decepción

Estuvimos 4 noches en este hotel, como parte del combinado Habana/Varadero contratado en la agencia de viajes. Independientemente de que el clima no nos acompañó, he de decir que este hotel es lo peor que he encontrado en mis múltiples viajes al Caribe. El hotel se ve nuevo, con habitaciones bonitas e instalaciones a priori adecuadas. Hay que caminar un poquito y cruzar un puente para llegar a la playa, ya que ésta se encuentra al otro lado de la carretera.

Lo peor, con diferencia es el buffet; yo entiendo que hay restricciones en la comida, pero nunca jamás había estado en un buffet libre de un resort 5 estrellas y me había quedado con hambre. Nunca. Las personas alojadas allá teníamos todas la misma queja. Variedad nula (papas fritas congeladas, hamburguesas de burger barato, y puntualmente arroz y frijoles), calidad nefasta, presentación inexistente. Cómo puede ser que no hubiera fruta, ni zumo en el desayuno. A veces había yogur líquido en una jarra ... un desastre absoluto.

No puedo hablar mal de la calidad de los tragos, puesto que sólo bebo ron, cerveza y agua, y eso es rico, en Cuba, pero de nuevo, la presentación deja mucho que desear. Y agua para la habitación, también en vaso de plástico????

En resumen, no recomendaría este hotel, no entiendo cómo la cadena [name of chain] permite estos estándares de calidad en sus hoteles.

13 See Appendix for the translation into English.

Sentimos enormemente que su experiencia con nosotros no haya sido satisfactoria. Todo el equipo se esfuerza al máximo para poder ofrecer una estancia de ensueño a nuestros huéspedes y nos entristece saber que en su caso no lo hemos conseguido. Sabemos que el clima es un punto muy relevante durante las vacaciones de cualquier cliente en un resort de playa y teniendo en cuenta que en este sentido no tuvieron suerte, podemos entender hayan tenido un mal comienzo. Sin embargo nos ha sorprendido mucho su comentario acerca del buffet y queremos hacerle saber algunos detalles al respecto. Siguiendo precisamente los estándares correspondientes contamos invariablemente con tres tipos de carnes: cerdo, pollo y res y a ello se adicionan tres tipos más de carnes que alternan entre conejo, pavo y cordero. De la misma manera se encuentran siempre tres variedades de pescado, cinco variedades de embutidos y cuatro de queso. Las modalidades de cocción de estos alimentos también varía y permanece unido a ello la plancha para aquellas personas que así lo prefieran.

No obstante a ello rogamos acepte nuestras disculpas por no haber conseguido alcanzar sus expectativas.

The reviewer presents themselves as an experienced traveller who is an expert in the Caribbean and understands what qualifies as a 5-star hotel (note the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) and his Caribbean experience “el peor que he encontrado en mis múltiples viajes al Caribe/the worst I have encountered on my numerous trips to the Caribbean”). It is the frequency and supposed range of travel within the area and their past experience at other hotels of the same chain that has vested the reviewer with the epistemic authority to evaluate the service received as substandard. Interestingly, the reviewer’s misgivings indicate, on the one hand, an awareness of the local environment (e.g., the shortage of consumer goods in a country with economic restrictions such as Cuba) and, on the other, their global expectations of a 5-star hotel experience regardless of local structural conditions (yo entiendo que hay restricciones en la comida, pero nunca jamás había estado en un buffet libre de un resort 5 estrellas y me había quedado con hambre/I understand that there are food restrictions, but I had never been to a 5-star resort buffet and left hungry). It is the image and lived experience of the latter, coupled with the guest’s constructed image of the country, culture and stereotypical habits (ron, cerveza y agua/rum, beer and water) (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2011) that makes their on-the-ground experience difficult to understand and accept. They recur to global expectations to legitimise the critical assessment of the service received, thus resulting in the erasure of the lived, local, cultural circumstances. Further, the client constructs evidence of their negative evaluation by complaining in the

name of all guests (Las personas alojadas allá teníamos todas la misma queja/ Everyone that stayed there had the same complaint). Speaking on behalf of those who stayed in the hotel at the same time as them helps to substantiate their stance for it comprises the alleged voices of the collective, adding, then, credibility to their viewpoint by claiming consensus over potentially contestable claims by the hotel (e.g., Wodak, 2022).

As Thurlow and Jaworski (2010) point out, the key to the tourist experience is the expectations projected over the visited site, in this case the hotel's website and brand by which the chain is known, and how they correspond or not with reality. "Tourism seldom merely represents cultural difference or reflects existing socioeconomic relations within and between countries; instead, it is instrumental in producing the very culture that tourists set out to know, and in (re)organizing relations between groups, communities and entire nations" (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2011: 4). The intercultural experience and, more specifically, the creation of an intercultural space is resisted and challenged in favour of expected homogeneity. The hotel's response, unlike the customer's review, is constructed from a local rather than a global perspective (i.e., a branch of the hotel chain). That a range of four different types of meat (i.e., pork, chicken, beef and an alternate fourth), as well as fish and dairy products, was offered indicates that this, contrary to what the customer claimed, represents a good spread.

## 5 Concluding Remarks: Interculturality in the Digital Era

In this article, we have examined TripAdvisor reviews from hotel guests and their responses through the shaping of the touristic experience based on the creation of an intercultural space through personal contact in the visited site, and attitudes of intercultural resistance, including actual rejections of the local realities found in favour of global touristic expectations. We have seen the way in which travellers tend to adopt a global stance to construct their reviews where the creation of this intercultural space is resisted and challenged in favour of expected global standards, regardless of the local conditions of the tourist destination or interactions with local staff. Conversely, the analysis of the hotels' responses indicate that they tend to be constructed from a local rather than a global perspective and any issues that might be seen as lowering its standards are addressed. We have also seen two cases in our dataset where guests offered a more local stance and hotels' responses were corporate-like. This indicates that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. They are suggestive of the pressure for homogeneity brought about by

globalisation and the desire for an “authentic” traveller experience, despite the mass experience of the all-inclusive product and its cultural banality (Billig, 1995). In this sense, these two instances of mixed reviews could be understood as glocalised (Robertson, 1992) comments.

We have shown the intercultural tension that arises when lived experience of the specific culture cannot be married with the expectations of homogeneity created by an increasingly globalised experience of tourism. The author of the review becomes the voice of the traveller and assesses their holiday based on their own parameters of quality and enjoyment. In the tourist sector, where information and advertising (not always clearly distinguished) create powerful images, the traveller’s voice provides authenticity. Reviewers use different resources to support their opinion, such as presenting themselves as experienced travellers with prior knowledge or experience of their chosen tourist destination or hotel chain. The expert traveller positions themselves with the authority to judge the adequacy of the service, pointing out to potential guests the discrepancies between the expected service and the reality found in the hotel. This was, in a few cases, supported by photographic “evidence” of flawed service or unforgettable moments of their holiday to substantiate their point.

Personalisation was a particularly salient feature in the data. Reviewers acknowledged the service received by hotel staff and frequently mentioned them by name. These revealed instances of the interpersonal contact built during their stay which often exceeded hospitality expectations, indicating how an intercultural space is created despite the mass touristic experience that all-inclusive holidays represent. While tourism constitutes an important site for potential intercultural contact and exchange (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2011), the examination of the reviews and their responses in our collection suggests that the creation of an intercultural space cedes to preconceived or imagined ideas (Urry, 2002) of the destination sites. This leads to guests’ dissatisfaction and, in some cases, to the erasure of the local circumstances of the host destinations.

Although cultural representations and intercultural contact constitute an essential part of speakers’ experiences in the current context of mobility and contact, as object of study from a pragmatic perspective, interculturality has received sparse and scant attention in the literature. This should not come as surprise in the light of the findings reported in the present study. Contrastive pragmatics has followed a highly productive path, centred on the analysis of pragmlinguistic forms and sociocultural norms. This has enabled a better understanding of the cultural dimension associated with discursive practices; however, this has been done principally from the idea that there is an almost direct correspondence between a language and a culture. This focus has resulted in a comparison between languages or varieties of the same language,

an approach that can be especially useful when the studied languages are clearly different (e.g., Chinese-Spanish), but it does not necessarily produce significant results in other communicative contexts, such as the digital context described in this study. In both the fundamental notions that structure it and the methods it employs, contrastive pragmatics hinges on the idea that it is possible to identify linguistic elements that reflect differences between lingua-cultures, which frequently entail an idealised vision of those lingua-cultures and the concept of the native speaker as a model of linguistic inquiry. However, in the last decades, sociolinguistics and studies on of globalisation (among which tourism is found) have demonstrated some of the challenges of working with these notions in today's societies, where we find that hybrid practices and languages are no longer viewed as codes that encapsulate everyone from the same country, state or culture.

In the reviews and hotel responses analysed in this study, the users express themselves in Spanish and, to some extent, certain characteristics of their geolectal varieties can be identified (European, Rioplatense, Caribbean). However, these differences are assimilated by a medium (internet, TripAdvisor) that is used by the reviewers to reflect shared travel and service experiences. In our dataset, we have found examples of interculturality as discursive practices that reveal the tension between reviewers' representations and the realities they experienced. For example, how a complaint is legitimised through direct experience and the gaze of the seasoned and expert tourist, the contrast between expectations built up from previous images of the location and the reality they encounter and, finally, personalisation – the resource employed by guests to directly reference the people with whom they established (personal, affective) contact during their stay.

The findings in our data suggest that the actual notion of interculturality, and its method of study, need to be expanded. Whilst intercultural pragmatics (which is not always clearly distinguished from contrastive pragmatics) has approached discursive practices in migration and globalisation contexts (see Raga Gimeno, 2005 on migration), it is generally defined as the encounter between speakers of different languages.

In view of this, we maintain that interculturality needs to be approached from a broader, more flexible framework: a perspective that incorporates speakers of the same basic language and considers factors beyond strictly pragmlinguistic forms and sociocultural norms, such as the metapragmatic dimension examined in the reviews presented here. This is because the creation of an intercultural space is not just related to linguistic factors, but also to the users' knowledge, based on their personal experiences and the images and stereotypes that circulate. It is also related to the homogenisation of certain

services (such as tourism) in transnational organisations that produce the same model in distinct, often disparate, locations throughout the world, and the local realities experienced by the users that come into conflict with their expectations.

### Appendix – English Translations of Reviews

#### Example (4) 4\* Varadero

It has changed from bad to average, however I will not return. The first time I went I posted a comment here saying I would not recommend it. The hotel's response was that I should return and give them another chance. I gave them 4 opportunities, more than enough to expect improvements. They do have an excellent beach. The rooms have improved as they were clean and looked like new (bungalow), the staff from reception, and especially from the bars and restaurants, treated us well. However, the thing that was intolerable was the service and food in the dining room. Out of the 5 days we were there, we had decent food on two days. The rest of the time is was like before, still bad. Not everyone, but generally they were not interested in providing a good service. Overall the hotel has improved but not the food or the service on the catering side. (Twice they served normal bread soaked in sugar, this was too much, certainly they don't eat that (see photos)

We would like to thank you for sharing your review of your stay in our [hotel name]. We are pleased to hear that you were able to enjoy our beautiful beach, our courteous and professional staff and the high standards of cleanliness of our rooms. However, we are sorry to hear that on this occasion your stay has not been as satisfactory as you hoped as at [hotel name] our main objective is ensure our clients are completely satisfied and we pay special attention to [hotel chain's] regular customers. We would like to offer our sincere apologies for any inconvenience caused by our catering service, as [hotel name], we understand the importance of the food and drinks for the overall guest experience.

#### Example (5) 4\* Varadero

The image of Cuba, the beautiful and the not so beautiful. The complex is a little bit far from what would be the most central area of the peninsula, [...] the amenities are the essential ones, and the

facilities are in good working order. Now, they have a tennis court, but the racquets are in bad condition, there's no balls at all, the daytime entertainment (at least during my stay, when the guests were mostly over 60 years old, was exactly suited for that type of person. There's no Wi-Fi, you pay extra for pool?;? to use the computers as well. The 2-hour meal times for breakfast, lunch and dinner, were short and too early for what I'm used to so if you arrived an hour late you probably wouldn't find anything left. Tube tv. The evening entertainment was varied and suited the general panorama ... You can have a good time, taking into account these circumstances (No hotel response).

#### Example (12) 5\* Varadero

A good holiday! To repeat!!!!

We've had 8 fantastic days! The staff service has been spectacular! We were waited on hand and foot by Sr. Soler! Amazing, the staff there are super friendly! I made a note of two of the waiting staff to mention them here Martha and Olga! From speaking with Sr Soler I'm sure they're going to improve even more! There were 6 of us and it gave us a really good feeling !!! We will return! The hotel is amazing! With great views!

I would like to thank you for taking the time to post your comments and share them with all the users of this webpage. We are pleased to hear that you've had a fantastic holiday in our hotel and that you have been able to see for yourself that for [hotel name] our guests are the most important and their satisfaction is our main objective. We will pass on your comments to our staff, without doubt they will be very pleased by your compliments. Particularly the two waiting staff, Martha and Olga, and Sr Soler, who has only just joined us but is already earning appreciation from our guests for his great professionalism and wonderful service. Knowing that we have lived up to your expectations encourages us to make continued efforts every day to maintain our philosophy of excellence in customer service.

#### Example (16) 5\* Varadero

Disappointment

We spent 4 nights in this hotel as part of a combination trip Habana/Varadero that we booked with the travel agent. Apart from the fact that the weather wasn't as good as we had hoped, I have to say that the hotel is the worst I have encountered in my many trips to the Caribbean. The

hotel looks new, with attractive rooms and a priori adequate facilities. To reach the beach you need to walk a bit and cross a bridge as it's on the other side of the road. The worst thing by far is the buffet; I understand that there are food restrictions, but I had never been to a 5-star buffet and left hungry. Never. Everyone that stayed there had the same complaint. No variety (frozen chips, cheap burgers and occasionally rice and beans), terrible quality, non-existent presentation. How could there be no fruit or juice at breakfast. Sometimes there was liquid yogurt in a jug ... an absolute disaster. I can't say anything bad about the drinks as I only drink rum, beer and water and this is all good in Cuba but, again, the presentation left much to be desired. And water in the room, in a plastic cup as well???? To summarise, I don't recommend this hotel, I don't understand how [hotel chain] allows this standard of quality in their hotels.

We are really sorry that your experience with us has not be satisfactory. All our team make every effort to ensure our guests have a dream stay and we are saddened to hear that on this occasion we have not managed it. We know that the weather is a very important factor for everyone's holiday at a beach resort and we understand that as you were unlucky in this respect, your holiday got off to a bad start.

However, we were very surprised by your comments about the buffet and we would like to share a few points regarding this. Following the pertinent standards, we invariably have three types of meat: pork, chicken and beef, plus an additional one that alternates between rabbit, turkey and lamb. Similarly, we always have three types of fish, five types of cold meats and four cheeses. Our cooking methods of these foods vary, and we always offer a grilled option.

Nevertheless, we hope you will accept our apologies for falling short of your expectations.

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