

**SPEECH ACTS IN TRAVEL BLOGS: USERS' CORPUS-DRIVEN PRAGMATIC INTENTIONS AND DISCURSIVE REALISATIONS****ACTOS DE HABLA EN EL BLOG DE VIAJES: INTENCIONES PRAGMÁTICAS Y REALIZACIONES DISCURSIVAS EN UN ESTUDIO GUIADO POR CORPUS***Daniel Pascual**Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain*[dpascual@unizar.es](mailto:dpascual@unizar.es)**Abstract**

Travel blogs epitomise an informal, digital environment where international users engage in dialogical interactions about their travelling experiences. While doing so, they deploy a range of pragmatic intentions to exchange information and build discussion. Speech acts (Searle, 1975) encapsulate those intentions, and are generally assumed to differ in their illocutionary force depending on users' communicative needs, and on whether hosted in posts or in comments. This paper explores the frequency and saliency of speech acts in travel blogs, by undertaking a contrastive study as regards generic features in an exploratory corpus of 18 English-mediated travel blog posts and 367 travel blog comments. The three circles of English (Bolton & Kachru, 2006) are used to balance bloggers' sociolinguistic background and represent native and non-native speakers. A corpus-driven typology of speech acts for the travel blog is designed, since aprioristic, traditional classifications

may not match users' intentions in asynchronous, globalised, computer-mediated settings. Connections of particular speech acts with each of the generic instances, whether posts or comments, are revealed, and prototypical discursive realisations of those speech acts are qualitatively provided. The study unveils bloggers' communicative practices and yields pragmatic and discursive resources users can handle to encode their pragmatic intentions in travel blog posts and comments.

*Keywords:* digital communication, speech acts, travel blogs, posts and comments, discursive realisations.

### **Resumen**

Los blogs de viajes proporcionan un entorno digital e informal en el que usuarios internacionales pueden interactuar sobre sus experiencias de viajes, intercambiar información y establecer un diálogo, respondiendo de esta manera a sus intenciones pragmáticas. Los actos de habla (Searle, 1975) recogen esas intenciones, variando en su fuerza ilocutiva según las necesidades comunicativas de los usuarios, y dependiendo de si aparecen en posts o comentarios. Este artículo explora la frecuencia y relevancia de los actos de habla en blogs de viajes, basándose en un estudio contrastivo de posts y comentarios centrado en rasgos genéricos y basado en un corpus exploratorio de 18 posts y 367 comentarios de blogs de viajes escritos en inglés. Se han escogido los tres círculos del inglés (Bolton & Kachru, 2006) para equilibrar el contexto sociolingüístico de los blogueros y representar a hablantes nativos y no nativos. Se ha diseñado una tipología de actos de habla derivada del corpus, ya que las clasificaciones tradicionales apriorísticas pueden no recoger las intenciones de los usuarios en entornos

mediados por ordenador, globalizados y asíncronos. En el estudio, se exploran las conexiones entre ciertos actos de habla y cada género (posts y comentarios), y se ofrecen realizaciones discursivas prototípicas de los mismos de forma cualitativa. Así, se reflejan las prácticas comunicativas de los blogueros y se ofrecen recursos pragmáticos y discursivos para que los usuarios transmitan sus intenciones pragmáticas en los posts y comentarios del blog de viajes.

*Palabras clave:* comunicación digital, actos de habla, blogs de viaje, posts y comentarios, realizaciones discursivas.

### **1. Digital discourse and the environment of the blog**

The ‘discourse’ users produce and consume, and therefore share and expect, is influenced by the host of platforms and media enabling digital communication. Their specific technical and communicative affordances “make possible very different forms of social interaction than those found in face-to-face conversation and traditional written texts” (Jones, Chik & Hafner, 2015, p. 1). This interaction is usually developed in English, as the international language of contact among speakers holding diverse sociocultural backgrounds. The ubiquity and immediacy of such encounters also trigger the evolution of digital discourse through the ways users shift and adapt their discursive and linguistic choices. Hence, users’ digital practices are worth analysing, as they are embedded in purposeful, context-sensitive communicative events. This premise is approached in this paper by focusing on the travel blog and by sketching users’ salient pragmatic intentions in the form of speech acts.

Research into blogs as an object of enquiry portraying features of digital settings has long sparked academic attention from various

analytical approaches. Blogs are “notoriously hard to define since there is widespread variation with regard to their social properties, i.e., the aim, purpose, topic, size of blog, number of active participants, etc.” (Bolander, 2012, p. 1608) and “possess an explicit social orientation and a purpose of interaction with other users” (Yus, 2011, p. 94). Furthermore, they enable an informal style falling in-between the oral and the written modes. Accordingly, blogs render a potentially high level of dialogicity and interactivity, and drive users to leverage Web 2.0 affordances in their practices to fulfil their communicative needs. Efforts to conceptualise blogs have recurrently revolved around two main concerns: their generic integrity and the (dis)similarities among blogs of diverse topics.

In trying to define the generic features of blogs and identify their structure, conventions and affordances, they have been differently conceived of by scholars as texts, documents, genres, media and digital platforms. Such lack of consensus is emphasised by the instability and hybridity present in blogs with respect to other texts and genres, both online and offline (Herring et al., 2005). The pragmatic analysis in this paper departs from the vantage point of blogs as *digital genres* (Herring et al., 2005; Myers, 2010; Heyd, 2016), more precisely understood as a multiplicity of discursive genres, and not as a single one (Miller & Shepherd, 2009). Lomborg (2011) contends a finer distinction between the blog as a software genre, “based on [its] communicative characteristics and interactive functions” and functional genres within the blog, “characterised by specific communicative purposes and social uses” (p. 58). This divide is employed to consider travel blog posts and comments as situated generic instances in the overall digital setting of the travel blog (Pascual, 2018). As such, they have clearly defined communicative

purposes, and together make up a “genre chain” (Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 2004), evidenced in the necessary appearance of posts for comments to be produced.

The structural and linguistic features of blogs have also been researched in relation to their overriding topic, with analyses focusing on corporate blogs (Puschmann, 2010), science blogs (Mauranen, 2013, Jarreau, 2015), economics blogs (Bondi, 2018), academic blogs (Kirkup, 2010; Kuteeva, 2016) and travel blogs (Goethals, 2013; Luzón, 2016). The travel blog, as the present object under scrutiny, entails an instance of informal, globalised, non-face-to-face digital communication involving speakers from heterogeneous sociocultural backgrounds. Whereas the study of users’ linguistic practices in travel blogs has been undertaken from the standpoints of English as a Lingua Franca (Luzón 2016), ethnography (Goethals, 2013, Magasic, 2014) and narrative analysis (Bosangit et al., 2015), in my view there is still a gap in analysing travel blogs from pragmatic approaches, which may look further into their communicative potential and the construction of users’ intents. Moreover, “the pragmatic ties that exist between blog posts and their associated reader comments [...] have not been studied extensively from a linguistic perspective to date” (Lutzky & Lee, 2018, p. 173). In view of the above, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What are the most frequent speech acts employed in English-written international travel blogs?
- RQ2. How are speech acts distributed, in terms of frequency and choice, in travel blog posts and in comments?
- RQ3. What prototypical discursive features instantiate speech acts prominent in travel blogs?

## **2. Affordances in the travel blog: a communicative, digital setting**

In the broad discourse of tourism, the travel blog coexists with other digital genres, for example, travel community fora, travel-rating sites, online touristic guides and multimodal trip videos. Its overarching aim is to widely circulate knowledge, experiences and attitudes concerning travelling to establish a dialogic bridge between promoters of tourist destinations and prospective tourists of those destinations (Gotti et al., 2017). More specifically, the communicative purpose of travel blog posts is “to describe to the audience trustworthy information about a place and the experiences that a person has lived there”, while comments are geared towards showing “the reader’s attitude towards the narrative of a post, in terms of structure, content and style” (Pascual, 2020, p. 183).

Most features of the travel blog, both technical and user-dependent, comply with general affordances and constraints of the blog space: asynchronous communication, sustained participation, immediate response and reverse chronological order of publications. Yet, some specificities nuance the situated communicative exchanges in this digital environment, and shape the deployment of users’ pragmatic intents. Travel blogs “straddle the boundaries between publication and process, between writing towards others and writing for oneself” (Mortensen & Walker, 2002, p. 256). They channel the tourist’s voice through the eager publication and evaluation of testimonials about trips. This brings about the interweaving of the intrapersonal and the interpersonal, since texts are neither entirely private and conventional, as in a diary, nor entirely public and sophisticated, as exclusively produced to be read or seen (Pascual, 2018). The resulting interplay reinforces a strongly hybrid generic nature, promoting a great level of engagement in the travel blog, and

a supportive and collaborative nature that users maximise in order to share information, thoughts and experiences (Luzón, 2016).

The travel blog is also prominent in its intertextual potential, since bloggers and readers can make multiple connections with a network of other texts. These may be authored by members of the same discourse community (mainly in the form of other blog posts and comments, and *About* pages where users can meet bloggers) or may drive users to external sources related to a post or a comment published (e.g. Wikipedia entries, hotel websites, YouTube videos). This complex level of intertextuality may not be as exploited in other thematic blogs and is overly evidenced in the recurrent provision of hyperlinks. In agreement with Vásquez (2015), meaning does not lie in a unique text in travel blogs (posts or comments), but is fully constructed by attending to users' textual practices and to the many embedded layers of already existing texts. Publishing texts constitutes, simultaneously, the reaction and result of an earlier utterance and the beginning of a new communicative situation, letting interactants give each other instant input and feedback. Discursive resources support those intertextual connections so that users can clearly convey their pragmatic intentions and bloggers can invite readers to choose their own "navigating mode" (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005). Users, then, create individual paths to consume the travel blog content as desired, based on its saliency and appeal and their communicative needs.

Travel blogs also imply a high degree of intersubjectivity, in that "knowing or understanding is not an individual endeavour but rather is socially situated" (Anderson, 2008, p. 468). Both writers and readers share close interests and concerns, which are (un)consciously conveyed in the roles they play when interacting, and are captured in

their pragmatic and linguistic decisions. Travel blogs leverage dynamic exchanges that challenge the conceptions of what it means to be writers and readers, as much as the boundaries of what frames a text in online environments (Davies & Merchant, 2007). Unlike other blogs (e.g. research, science or academic blogs), commenters are naturally invited to introduce their own narrative in an entry, offering a complementary –similar or fully different– perspective to the blogger's. By publishing comments, a sequence of turns is enacted in which all users co-construct the interaction and go beyond the blogger-reader dichotomy (Bolander, 2012). Hence, intersubjectivity in travel blogs is a decisive aspect in the expression of users' autobiographical narratives and communicative purposes, as it fosters individual reflectivity and social intelligibility and has an effect on the active readers of both generic practices: posts and comments. Thus, users' discursive choices carry pragmatic and subjective value and contribute to the meaning-making processes which build the space of the travel blog, and which can involve linguistic and multimodal mechanisms, i.e. pictures, videos and hyperlinks.

The affordances shared with other types of blog and the specific characteristics of travel blogs as a digital genre where posts and comments emerge have been discussed in this section, stressing their engaging potential and their level of intertextuality and intersubjectivity. Next, users' communicative intentions are pragmatically explored from the framework of Speech Act Theory.

### **3. Speech acts: from intention to realisation**

Speech Act Theory “has been one of the most important pillars of pragmatic research” (Jucker, 2018, p. 7) to conceptualise how utterances employed in interactions perform a particular action, and thus reveal

users' various pragmatic intents. Five categories of speech acts were proposed by Searle (1976) to cater for users' overriding intents when communicating: representatives, directives, expressives, declaratives and commissives, which then may encompass more fine-grained speech acts disclosing speakers' intended purposes. These can be made explicit from the propositional content of an utterance or can be occluded. If occluded, implicatures are triggered, which the recipient needs to retrieve to figure out speakers' full intended meaning from what is meant, but not openly said (Mey, 2001). This distinction sets the limits between locutionary and illocutionary forces, that is, between direct speech acts, where there is textually literal evidence, and indirect speech acts, where "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, [and] the general powers of rationality and inference" (Searle, 1975, p. 61).

Therefore, there is a *hidden agenda* which speakers encode in the meaning of their utterances surreptitiously because they do not need or want to state it openly (Robinson, 2006) and which, in turn, recipients should decode and understand to ensure fruitful interaction. Reasons to conceal speakers' utmost intents in an utterance include common knowledge between speaker and audience that renders unnecessary spelling them out, the pursuit of spontaneous or humorous effects, and the accomplishment of a communicative intent without speaker's overt recognition. Potential implicitness in speakers' utterances makes us regard speech acts as doubly pragmatic, as their illocutionary force conveys more complex or sophisticated meanings than simple statements, and they may also instantiate these meanings in unconventional implicit ways substituting expected typical realisations (Grundy, 2000). Yet, "[w]here to draw the line between an explicit and an implicit speech act or

between an implicit speech act and a hint can become confusing” (Stadler, 2011, p. 37). This blurriness in the explicit/implicit meaning and the variability of ways to embody speakers’ intentions into words is particularly salient in digital informal contexts, where interaction among users may be greatly featured by dynamicity, spontaneity and rapport.

The sociolinguistic component surrounding discourse in general should also be emphasised in the formulation of speech acts (Cutting, 2002). Their instantiation is inherently shaped and modified by speakers’ motives to use a certain level of (in)directness in their discourse. Besides social components such as status, age, gender, education and ethnicity, the communicative contextual constraints prevail online when deciding on the pragmatic force of an utterance. Given users’ potentially undisclosed identity in most computer-mediated environments, the digital nature of the travel blog levels off issues of power and authority, thus lowering the level of imposition among interactants and allowing for a negotiated level of (in)formality and (in)directness in their communicative exchanges. In that sense, the sociocultural setting further influences users’ pragmatic decisions and discursive choices.

A clear-cut distinction of items concerning how indirect speech acts are deployed may seem even more vague in online interactions, i.e. in travel blogs. What is more, illocutionary indicators presenting a very dissimilar locutionary may both strengthen the force of an utterance and increase its locutionary potential based on digital affordances of the texts and users’ intertextual references. Sbisà (2009) claims that “what is conventional in the performance of speech acts is not their means, or at least not necessarily, but their ends, that is, what is done in them” (p. 43). These assets point towards

a high degree of malleability and informality in the way users' speech is constructed in the blogosphere and may turn any attempt to establish a fixed cline of pragmatic indicators oversimplified and inaccurate. Therefore, situated analyses of speech acts in delimited digital environments are beneficial to establish associations between them and their linguistic realisations –lexico-grammatical, syntactic and orthotypographic.

Generally, speech acts have been largely considered in printed or traditional genres, but, to the best of my knowledge, there is still a compelling need to grasp how users utilise them in various digital genres and media. This will enable both analysts and users to comprehend not only how pragmatic intentions are encoded in speech acts online and how they may differ from offline discursive practices, but also how speech acts can be instantiated and efficiently conveyed in light of the technical and communicative affordances of the digital setting in question.

#### **4. Corpus and procedure**

An exploratory corpus of six representative English-authored travel blogs containing 18 posts and 367 related comments and amounting to 60,306 running words was compiled following a number of criteria. First, travel blogs were proportionally collected to cater for the “circles of English” (Bolton & Kachru, 2006), which comprise the inner circle (L1 speakers), the outer circle (L2 speakers) and the expanding circle (EFL speakers), hence balancing international speakers' various sociocultural relationships to English.

Second, the *ad hoc* sample of two travel blogs per each of Bolton & Kachru's circles was randomly made out of webpages listing widely popular blogs (e.g. [placepass.com/blog/best-travel-blogs/](https://www.placepass.com/blog/best-travel-blogs/);

[expertvagabond.com/travel-blogs](http://expertvagabond.com/travel-blogs)). The selected travel blogs also display an ample coverage in media such as National Geographic, BBC Travel and BBC World News (e.g. *Nomadic Matt, I Am Aileen*), and have been nominated for or awarded with prizes on blogging and travelling (e.g. *Girl Astray, The Shooting Star*). Thus, the convenience corpus (see Table 1 below) is representative of the level of interactivity in travel blog posts and comments. The sample of blog entries, comprising posts, users' comments and blogger's replies, was retrieved between September 2014 and June 2017. All comments by users in the gap of one year from the publication of the original post were incorporated into the corpus<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1: *Corpus of travel blogs and total number of words of their posts and comments.*

	Travel blog name and tag	Blogger's origin	No. of posts/comments	No. of words in posts	No. of words in comments
INNER CIRCLE	Helen in Wonderlust (HW)	England	3/44	8,762	4,632
	Nomadic Matt (NM)	United States	3/78	4,498	5,341
OUTER CIRCLE	The Shooting Star (SS)	India	3/59	2,976	2,805

	I Am Aileen (IA)	Philippines	3/57	4,012	1,541
EXPANDING CIRCLE	Girl Astray (GA)	Slovakia	3/80	3,487	6,060
	Lili's Travel Plans (LT)	Belgium	3/49	7,324	8,868
			18/367	31,059	29,247

The choice of a small sample of travel blogs compensates for the difficulty in analysing pragmatic data in a digital, complex environment, since “[o]ne of the main challenges when approaching [...] speech acts in large corpora is that they cannot, for the most part, be identified automatically” (Lutzky & Kehoe, 2017, p. 38). Consequently, systematic codification of the speech acts was undertaken by manually tagging the corpus through the software UAM CorpusTool. The quantitative and qualitative data about prototypical pragmatic functions and discursive realisations provided in the following section stem from the textual close reading. To warrant consistency and escape researcher’s subjectivity, an intrarater reliability test was carried out with a six-month time gap in order to revise the annotation. There was a 94% of coincidence and cases of disagreement were properly reviewed and solved.

Drawing on Jucker’s (2009) three methods for speech act research, this study adopts a field method, as it “is based on

observation of naturally occurring data, and as such it is strictly empirical” (p. 1615). Subsequently, a corpus-driven approach was leveraged, as opposed to aprioristic classifications, to underpin the integrity of the features in the dataset of travel blogs. This inductive process is employed to reflect users’ most salient pragmatic intents, in a way that is “fully consistent with, and reflect[s] directly, the evidence provided by the corpus” (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001, p. 85). Benefits of this method are remarkable for pragmatic analysis, since speech acts are not easily identified on a one-to-one correspondence and the variability in their instantiations may hinder the automatic identification of patterns. Such typology is nevertheless rooted in seminal frameworks (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Norrick, 1978), but not limited to their rigid boundaries, as the analysis of informal, asynchronous, digital practices requires updating traditional theoretical tenets. By way of findings, the speech acts singled out in the corpus –within the categories of representatives, directives, and expressives– uncover users’ current pragmatic and discursive situated practices in travel blogs.

## **5. Results and discussion**

In this section, corpus-driven results are presented and implications are drawn to understand the use and saliency of speech acts in travel blogs. 5.1 justifies the situated typology of speech acts identified and applied and conceptualises the categories included. 5.2 focuses on the contrastive analysis of representatives, directives and expressives in posts *versus* comments. A function-to-form approach is followed to qualitatively explore realisations of each speech act and gain insights into their generic features.

## 5.1. A corpus-driven typology of speech acts

The close reading of the corpus has brought about a typology of corpus-driven, analytical categories dictated by the data, which yet find their basis in developed frameworks. This approach reflects an emphasis on analyses embedded in their contexts and ruled by their instantiation, rather than a systematic perspective of a language system and its constitutive elements. Out of Searle's five-part classification of Speech Acts (1976), three categories are the basis of the present study, namely representatives, directives and expressives (Table 2). No declaratives are found in the sample, and the few instances of commissives are discarded, assuming that travel blogs provide an interactional space for users who rarely know each other and, therefore, will unlikely make offers and promises to be carried out in the future. Rather, the focus is on speech acts fostering intersubjectivity and interactivity among users in travel blog posts and comments.

Table 2: *Corpus-driven typology of speech acts in travel blogs.*

SPEECH ACT CATEGORY	REPRESENTATIVES	DIRECTIVES	EXPRESSIVES
SPECIFIC SPEECH ACTS	Claiming	Commanding	Thanking
	Exaggerating	Asking	Wishing
	Hypothesising	Advising	Praising
	Agreeing		Criticising
			Lamenting

Instances of representatives comprise claiming, hypothesising, exaggerating and agreeing. They all “commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition” (Searle, 1976, p. 10). These are salient speech acts by which bloggers and commenters negotiate their discourse choices and assess them in terms of what is true or false. Exaggerating entails claiming one’s reality out of proportion, thus deploying categorical, biased assertives for additional effects on the readership, such as persuasion and alignment. In turn, hypothesising refers to personal predictions, future intentions and speculative situations, by which users guess the (un)truth of a situation, but are not certain about it. Lastly, agreeing has been fitted into this category, as it refers to the explicit expression of concordance with a proposition. Therefore, it does not imply an expressive speech act, and what others (e.g. Ronan, 2015) have considered within this category as “(dis)agreement” in connection with politeness.

Directives standing out in the corpus include commanding (stating an order), asking (including questioning and requesting) and advising (when suggesting recommendations to blog participants). They contribute to enhancing the addressivity and the bidirectionality in the travel blog in an asynchronous way that might or might not be taken up. Even in the case of commanding, these three categories may constitute “qualitatively different forms of *social action* from utterances which strongly urge the reader to act in a certain way” (Hyland, 2002, p. 216).

Finally, five salient expressives have been identified as speech acts helping speakers put into words the way they feel about a particular situation (Searle, 1975). The categories of thanking and lamenting stem from Norrick’s framework on expressive speech acts

(1978), and reinforce positive feelings and expressions of regret based on users' actions. In turn, wishing is borrowed as an emotive highlighted by Maíz-Arévalo (2017) in her research on e-chats. Praising and criticising are proposed by Searle & Vanderveken (1985), assuming that “to express approval (or disapproval) of something always commits the speaker to presupposing that is good (or bad)” (p. 191). Taken together, the speech acts of wishing and praising would embody what Jucker (2009) contends as “compliments”.

After this account of the corpus-driven typology of speech acts serving as the analytical tool for studying discourse in travel blogs, the function and frequency of these speech acts are explored, and connections with their recurrent discursive and linguistic instantiations are offered.

## 5.2. Intergeneric frequency of speech acts in travel blogs

In this section, results of each speech act are presented from an intergeneric perspective to underline possible differences in frequency and use (Table 3)<sup>2</sup>. Prototypical realisations of speech acts are then identified when repeatedly traced in the corpus, to represent “the predictability of [...] expressions which frequently occur in connection with a particular type of speech intent” (Stadler, 2011, p. 39).

Table 3: *Occurrences and frequencies of speech acts contrasting travel blog posts and comments.*

Speech act typology	Total in corpus	Posts		Comments	
	Tokens	Tokens	Ratio	Tokens	Ratio
REPRESENTATIVES	2139	1070	50%	1069	50%

Claiming	1248	732	59%	516	41%
Exaggerating	338	180	53%	158	47%
Hypothesising	362	148	41%	214	59%
Agreeing	191	10	5%	181	95%
DIRECTIVES	1115	778	70%	337	30%
Commanding	356	281	79%	75	21%
Asking	207	117	57%	90	43%
Advising	552	380	69%	172	31%
EXPRESSIVES	1791	548	31%	1243	69%
Thanking	233	30	13%	203	87%
Wishing	142	20	14%	122	86%
Praising	892	278	31%	614	69%
Criticising	367	161	44%	206	56%
Lamenting	157	59	38%	98	62%

Within the scope of representative speech acts, which are found in the corpus as frequently in travel blog posts as in comments, *claiming* occurs slightly more frequently in travel blog posts. Bloggers deploy claiming speech acts to make generalisations and share assertive opinions through their narratives, thus attempting to increase their credibility and trust on the audience and showing expertise and knowledge about the experience described. This is the case of the aside shown in (1). The performative verb *say* positions the claim as plainly visible and the full capitalisation of the word functions as an attention-getter for readers to believe what they are

reading. Likewise, commenters use claiming to a great extent (41%) in order to emphasise the validity of the information they provide, whether conforming or contesting to the blogger's. Most users, therefore, deploy this speech act to position themselves as much trusted authors as the blogger and to make readers certain that their comments are genuine. In example 2, this trustworthiness is highlighted by the use of an emphatic *do*.

(1) *(And I say that as someone who NEVER goes on guided tours.)*(GANN1)

(2) *But, I do remember falling off the board, forgetting it was tied to my leg.* (NMNS2-9)<sup>3</sup>

*Exaggerating* also shows a balanced distribution, although it is a little higher in posts (53%) than in comments (47%). This speech act expresses a rhetorical change in users' discourse based on hyperbolic and potentially biased accounts of the places and the anecdotes reviewed. This brings about an easy identification of the illocutionary force and evaluation conveyed by bloggers or commenters, and makes the narrative more memorable for the audience. A great variability of linguistic resources may allow for the instantiations of these exaggerations, for instance, similes (3), metaphors (4) and boosting devices (5). While in (3), *exaggerating* is introduced in the post as a figure of speech conveying a poetic effect in the narration, examples (4) and (5) display the use of the speech act to catch the readership's attention, by offering hyperbolic, visual images and by seeking a humorous effect, respectively.

(3) *I've spent my days indulging in the country's sumptuous gastronomy [...], as though nothing else in the world matters.* (SSNN1)

(4) *I'm literally dying to know what camera you're using?*  
(IANN2-7)

(5) [...] *–particularly the humidity... my goodness it really made me look awful in some of my photos there haha!*  
(HWNS1-18)

*Hypothesising* is more frequent in travel blog comments (59%) than in posts (41%), but is similarly employed in both to provide users in the blogosphere with imaginary and alternative situations. These are interwoven in the monologic narrative unfolded by bloggers and interspersed in the dialogic discussion among users. By hypothesising, users purport to integrate their reflective and inventive insights, creating intimacy with the audience (6). Consequently, it fosters intersubjectivity in the travel blog and invites the audience to react to unreal scenarios that they may encounter in the places described or to analogous situations they have already experienced. In both posts and comments, it is geared towards the assumption and anticipation of what readers might think or feel about something (7, 8). Characteristic mechanisms to instantiate this speech act include adverbials conveying uncertainty and probability (6, 7); syntactic constructions such as conditional sentences and modal verbs expressing deduction (8) and performative verbs like *imagine*, *wonder*, *look like* and *guess* (9).

(6) *Maybe the hope of finding yourself somewhere just like that is a bit too much pressure to put on a place* (LTNN1)

(7) *Be sure to take at least two days – quite probably you will be left longing for more.* (GANN1)

(8) *Georgia must be like a go to place for Lord of the Rings fans* (SSNN1-14)

(9) *I usually hate crowds, but I guess I'd bear them for a book fair though!*(SSNN2-4)

*Agreeing* is markedly characteristic of travel blog comments (95%), in that it enables users to support the narrative read and concur with the blogger's experience, thus matching the communicative purpose of this generic instance. Consequently, the positive face of the users being agreed with is fostered. An interesting finding lies in the instantiation of this speech act: only 31 occurrences (16% of the total) have to do with the performative verb *agree* –as in (10), so users tend to favour an illocutionary force that does not disclose the agreement in such an explicit way. The use of second pronouns is normally promoted to do so, accompanied by markers such as *like* (11) and *same* (12) as complementary resources.

(10) *I'd have to agree with you Ashley!*(NMNS3-2)

(11) *I know that for the most part, like you said, that the drivers are normal people like you and me* (GANN2-5)

(12) *I feel the same way as you, Censie!*(IANN1-8)

In the set of directives, *commanding*, which implies stating an order to other users, is visibly more prominent in posts (79%) than in comments (21%). This is due to an authorial position of the blogger and to the inclusion of descriptive and invitation moves in the posts, where users are invited to perform an action related to the trip or to participate in the blog (Pascual, 2018). Typically realised through imperative forms, this speech act entails a strong locutionary force, but rarely represents a threatening act for readers. Actually, users' commands are regularly encoded through indirect

choices, not aimed at imposing something, but rather at suggesting it, in the shape of a more straightforward resource, as shown in (13) and (14):

(13) *Rest assured, you can easily survey your choices because there is a directory of all the shops on every floor* (IANN3)

(14) *Sit back and watch Sri Lanka go by – you won't be disappointed.* (HWNS1)

Remarkably, *asking* turned out to be more frequent in travel blog posts than in comments (57% vs. 43%). This finding may hint at the dialogical nature of travel blogs, which is already fostered in the original posts that will enable subsequent discussion. Bloggers bear in mind their audience and pose direct questions users are supposed to answer. Linguistic realisations for this speech act are constrained to direct questions, which may omit the question marks as traits of informal digital discourse, and the performative verb *wonder* (15). In (16), the open direct question finishes the post and prompts the readership's response in the comments section. In comments, asking is addressed to directly elicit extra or missing information from bloggers and to request their help straightforwardly (17). Other questions, of a rather rhetorical type, are also offered as engagement mechanisms to invite readers to reflect on travelling issues (18)

(15) *Me again! Just wondering if there are trains to the following locations because I am potentially planning a trip to Sri Lanka next summer.* (HWNS1-9)

(16) *What were (are) your impressions of Georgia, the country?* (SSNN2)

(17) *We did try to book a trip via intrepid with your discount code. However this seems not to work. Is this because our departure will be in 2017?* (NMNS1-18)

(18) *What's the use in traveling to the other side of the world if it were to see the same thing we see at home every day?* (LTNN3-20)

The speech act of *advising* is framed within the communicative purposes of both travel posts and comments, since it involves sharing recommendations and tips with blog participants. Yet, it displays a higher frequency in posts (69%), because the blogger's ultimate aim is to offer detailed advice and feedback on their trip experience. It is called for to acknowledge that boundaries between *advising* and *commanding* represented most cases of disagreement in the intra-rater reliability coding due to their potential overlapping and their illocutionary force. This speech act entails the greatest variety of discursive realisations in the sample analysed. Prominent resources embodying this speech act comprise performative verbs (*recommend, suggest, advise*) and modal verbs (*should, ought to*), reinforcing the locutionary force in speakers' intention, as well as imperative forms (e.g. *Be sure to, Don't forget to*), the conditional phrase *If I were you* and the inclusive expression *Let's + verb*. Example (19) is a post excerpt, displaying many of the mentioned features, where the blogger strongly shares useful tips to prospective travellers. Example (20) epitomises the milder way of advising distinctive of travel blog comments, where users are eager to offer further advice back based on their experience.

(19) *Avoid sunburn and cover your upper arms [...] I advise you to wear pants, [...] You should have your stuff in a*

*single bag [...] Don't carry too much stuff around –pack lighter and smarter. (GANN2)*

*(20) I think you should visit Tbilisi [...] I guess it will be better if you choose a guest house in Stepantsminda. In Tbilisi your hostel should be near to old Tbilisi [...]. (SSNN1-18)*

With respect to expressive speech acts, *thanking* is clearly associated with the communicative purpose of travel blog comments (87%), where users may express their stance and gratitude for bloggers' narrative and advice as a way of politeness and feedback (21, 22). Likewise, the blogger may also participate in the discussion and thank users back (23). This is actually the most recurrent speech act in bloggers' replies to preceding comments. Evidence from the sample of comments underlines a predominant locutionary force in users' intention to make thanking explicit. In posts, examples hint at a different usage, as thanking normally involves an external addressee –a person or institution out of the tourism sector – that somehow contributed to the travelling experience (24). Furthermore, this speech act is sometimes performed as a narrative strategy to offer general reflections geared towards abstract entities or specific places, like in (25), referring to the city of Trinidad, Cuba. Linguistic realisations for *thanking* someone are fairly limited to two main instantiations: the phrase *Thank(s) (you) for*, followed by either a noun or a gerund (23), and adjectives semantically conveying the same function, like *grateful* or *glad* (22). Other resources sometimes discerned comprise the expression *cheers* (21), and the use of the verb *appreciate* performatively (23).

(21) *Beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing. I agree with Raastha: this is a bucket list landscape. Cheers. Wendy* (SSNN3-11)

(22) *I still have to visit Iceland, but it's on my list and I'm grateful for your post about Reykjavik.* (NMNS3-10)

(23) *Thank you, Naomi! I really appreciate your words, thank you for reading!* (GANN3-2)

(24) *Disclaimer: Thanks to Hidden Hills Villas for hosting me* (IANN1)

(25) *You made me realize this, you showed me the kind of traveller I want to be, and for that I want to thank you.* (LTNN2)

As in the previous case, *wishing* falls into the rationale of travel blog comments (86%) rather than posts (14%). This speech act is enhanced to make users' thoughts on the blogger's narrative explicit and public, and to show positive stance towards the blogger or a situation. As such, it may perform more nuanced illocutionary functions, for instance, conveying users' deep hopes towards a person (26) or a place (27), longing for past memories in a reflective and subjective way (28), and bidding farewell to the blogger (29). As exemplified in the extracts below, realisations are not so varied and tend to be enacted by the use of the performative verb *wish* and verbs mediating an analogous meaning (*hope, want*), or by adding emphasis through boosters like *really* that level up the emotion conveyed in the utterance (30).

(26) *I hope the same for you too! You will absolutely love it, I'm sure ;D* (IANN1-9)

(27) *I really wish I was able to use those 14 hours to explore the city but the problem was, the airport staff never told us anything about when the aircraft is actually going to arrive.* (GANN1-6)

(28) *I wish the new you all the best of luck and happiness.* (LTNN1-11)

(29) *On a serious note, keep writing as I am sure you will and best wishes* (SSNN1-22)

(30) *This trip has 100% made me want to travel more in the region. I really want to go to Tallinn also.* (HWNS3-4)

*Praising* and *criticising* can be perceived as opposite speech acts to make positive or negative judgments, respectively, on somebody or something involved in the travel experience. They are both more recurrently displayed in travel blog comments than in posts, although praising shows a more unbalanced distribution in that sense (69% in comments), since users within the travel blog community may feel like complimenting someone with an important role in their trips. Additionally, praising in comments serves to flatter bloggers or other users, as well as acclaim posts and their content or style (31). In posts, it is typical for bloggers to praise the places described due to their characteristics, traditions or the memories they trigger, in a sort of personification (32). Altogether, in both genres the readiness for interaction and discussion encourages a high frequency of praising utterances, acting as a face-saving act in an asynchronous digital setting. Linguistically, various features stand out to convey praise, for example, positive attitude markers in the form of adjectives, likely in superlative form, and boosters (33). Other meaningful structures traced include flattering clausal units without

a verb to reward one's effort at the beginning or ending of comments (e.g. *Great read!*, *Solid post!*), and idiomatic verbal expressions to positively value particular objects or items mentioned in the texts, such as *blow one's mind*, *steal one's heart* or *bring something to life*, as in (34).

(31) *Just love the way you portray the events that occur at the places you visit.* (SSNN2-9)

(32) *I've learned so much from you [...]. You were the first to not only teach me but to actually make me see...* (LTNN2)

(33) *Seriously the most beautiful (and wild) place I have ever been* (NMNS3-20)

(34) *Beautiful post, Liesbeth! You really brought the place vividly to life!* <3 (LTNN2-2)

*Criticising*, as the negative counterpart of praising, is also integral of the description and evaluation of an experience in travel blogs. The presence of criticising speech acts is also more prominent in posts than in comments (56%), but not as frequent as the speech act of praising. Sometimes users are critical and the illocutionary force of the speech act is blunt, as in (35) where the verb *hate* and the exaggerated repetition in *too* make the reader picture someone screaming, as well as in (36) through the reiteration of negative evaluative adjectives and a concluding harsh remark. However, there is a permeating tendency towards mild criticism, by which writers and readers avoid being overcritical and excessively stern. Example (37) illustrates a judgement where the user's intention is rather hidden and implicit. As with praising, the reason for this mildness lies in travel blog users' preference to highlight a positive image and save

bloggers', paraphrasing possible face-threatening acts to prevent others from feeling attacked or uncomfortable. What is more, patterns in the corpus indicate that praising tends to target bloggers or readers, whereas criticism is rather addressed to non-personal elements of the trip and to problems and drawbacks that made the travelling experience somewhat unsatisfactory –see examples (37) from a post and (38) from a comment. Among relevant discursive markers to transmit criticism, adjectives abound, consistently preceded by the verbs *be* (*I was pissed off*) and *find*, which was not characteristic of praising utterances (39). Resources to avoid intense criticism and make the pragmatic force of utterances weaker comprise strategic conditional sentences (38), rhetorical questions asking the audience for empathy (e.g. *Who would like to...?*), and discourse markers introducing criticism in the second part of the utterances (*even though, even if* and *even when*), as noticeable in (40).

(35) *I hate the condescending writing of people telling how I travel the world for free and you could do it tooooooo!*  
(GANN3-2)

(36) *Iceland is overrated. Went a few months ago, crowds were awful, food sucked, and the people were rude. Not worth it.* (NMNS3-3)

(37) *The only downside, was that it was midday, there were loads of stairs to climb and it was really hot.* (HWNS2)

(38) *If Sydney was just a little closer and wasn't as expensive [...]*(NMNS2-1)

(39) *Ugh, I am not into voluntourism at all. I find it really weird.* (GANN3-18)

(40) [...] *so glad you've enjoyed the city! (even though it's not in its best right now)* (HWNS3-3)

*Lamenting* is far more salient in travel blog comments (62%) than in posts (38%), often being a component of users' reaction to the bloggers' narrative. While in posts this speech act enables bloggers to create intimacy with the audience and admit aspects of the trip they would have wanted to happen differently, lamenting in comments addresses the additional function of regretting about things not covered in the travelling experience described. Discursively, disjuncts tend to mark the beginning of this speech act in a locutionary way, as words or phrases that signal the style or manner in which an event happened and that shape users' subsequent utterances. Examples (41) and (42) below evidence these cases in a travel blog post and a comment. The formulaic expression *I wish* is also indicative of this speech act, and should not be confused with the speech act of wishing (43).

(41) [...] *we turned out the lights and watched the sky, keeping an eye out for the shooting stars. Sadly, I didn't see any like the one I'd seen in Tamrag* (HWNS2)

(42) *To be honest, I did not enjoy mine. I never got used to the spitting, smells and rudeness* (LTNN3-2)

(43) *I wish I had seen your blog before going; I would certainly have decided to stay one more day* (GANN1-9)

In this section, a corpus-driven typology of speech acts has been explored in terms of the frequency and usage of representatives, directives and expressives based on the intergeneric comparison between travel blog posts and comments. The analysis has been complemented with illustrative instances from the corpus and a

qualitative exploration of discursive realizations to delve into the ways speakers transmit, pragmatically, their intentions, emotions and opinions in the travel blog, and the resources at their disposal to do so.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

This paper has analysed the frequency and use of speech acts following a corpus-driven approach in the digital setting of the travel blog, where speakers from global backgrounds are involved in non-face-to-face, informal interactions and usually express their communicative needs and intentions through English. A typology of speech acts resulting from the corpus observation has been of help to specifically reflect travel bloggers and users' intentions, as well as to offer a situated, context-sensitive analysis that may help better understand the generic nature of travel blog posts and comments and their interactional and intersubjective potential. Then, a function-to-form method has been followed to move from the analysis of salient speech acts to a qualitative identification of their characteristic realisations. Altogether, it has been showed how the travel blog is an online space featured by hybridity and interactivity where sequences of asynchronous turns enable a bidirectional dialogue, and instant input and feedback are exchanged in promoting individual reflectivity and social intelligibility.

Research question 1 was tackled by, first, collecting a balanced sample of English-written international travel blogs based on the three "circles of English" (Bolton & Kachru, 2006). Then, a textual close reading of the corpus was undertaken in search for prominent and frequent speech act categories, and a resulting typology sensitive to the communicative events developed in travel blogs was devised. Such a corpus-driven typology comprises 12 types of representative,

directive and expressive speech acts that reflect users' fundamental pragmatic intentions in travel blog posts and comments. Commisives were scarce and declaratives were absent in the sample scrutinised. The analysis of speech acts using the UAM CorpusTool software enabled me to revisit the typology and to provide the subsequent codification with a greater methodological consistency, which helped ensure the validity of the results. An intra-rater reliability test helped solve cases of doubt and overlapping, especially involving the pairs of *commanding and advising* and *thanking and praising*.

In answering research question 2, findings reveal clear associations between the categories of speech acts and the travel blog post and comment. Generally speaking, speech acts identified as representatives display a similar distribution between both generic instances, whereas directives are far more salient in posts and expressives show a higher number of occurrences in comments. More specifically, frequencies of concrete categories of representative speech acts are also balanced in posts and comments, except for the case of *agreeing*, which is clearly favoured by users in comments as a way of stating their conformity and opinion in a brief way. *Hypothesising* is slightly more significant in travel blog comments as an indicator of the intersubjective position that commenters easily adopt when establishing any interaction. Directives are more frequent in travel blog posts, especially *commanding* and *advising*, as bloggers may want to indicate the reading path to the reader and to suggest tips and recommendations based on their experience. Surprisingly enough, *asking* also turns out to be more recurrent in travel blog posts as an asset to encourage addressivity and engagement with the audience. Lastly, expressives are much more abundant in travel blog comments, because of the communicative purpose of that genre and

the rhetorical effects sought by users. *Thanking*, *wishing* and *praising* stand out as dialogic speech acts that contribute to the positive image of the addressee, whether bloggers or other readers. This is confirmed by the strategic use of other speech acts like *criticising*, where the predominance of the illocutionary force is clearly recognisable in users' mild utterances.

Concerning research question 3, dissimilar insights have been gained as for the variability of the discursive and linguistic realisations of the speech acts analysed. While some speech acts are rather limited in their discursive configuration to performative verbs and formulaic expressions and tend to be deployed with a clear locutionary force (e.g. *commanding*, *lamenting*, *thanking*), users favour illocutionary instantiations for other speech acts that were expected not to follow this trend and, thus, open up a broader array of discursive choices (e.g. *claiming*, *agreeing*). In general, remarkable speech acts at the core of the communicative purposes of the travel blog post and comment show a great deal of mechanisms to instantiate users' intentions, those cases including *advising*, *praising*, *criticising* and *hypothesising*. Patterns traced in the realisations of these speech acts comprise, among other options, modal verbs and conditional clauses for *advising*; boosters and non-verbal phrases for *praising*; rhetorical questions and concessive linkers for *criticising*; and adverbials and expressions of deduction for *hypothesising*. In any case, the overarching heterogeneity in users' choices evidenced in the corpus to encode their intentions points at malleable pragmatic indicators and informal discursive traits to interact online in digital settings like the travel blog. Such a complexity in decoding users' intentions reinforces the need to carefully consider the context and

the co-text in travel blog communication so as to grasp the full meaning potential in users' interaction through posts and comments.

As regards the limitations of this study, it would be advisable to compile a larger corpus keeping the balance among the three circles of English, and then to replicate the typology and confirm the findings and implications drawn in this paper. Yet, this would require a large amount of time, considering that a one-to-one correspondence between users' intentions and speech acts is not possible. To that respect, subjective decisions might have been made in the identification and analysis of speech acts, because of the great fuzziness of pragmatic boundaries and the variability of linguistic realisations to convey users' intended meanings, even when the typology and the codification of the corpus have been exhaustively revised. Finally, retrieving more detailed sociolinguistic information about bloggers and readers may also enhance the understanding of the context where travel blog communication takes place.

In future research, results from the travel blog could be also contrasted with the use of speech acts in other thematic blogs (e.g. academic, scientific, food blogs) and other digital genres within the discourse of tourism, to observe similarities and differences in the range of speech acts employed and the realisations preferred. The role played by multimodal items (e.g. pictures, videos, logos) in the architecture and layout of travel blog entries, on the one hand, and in the narratives of travel blog posts and comments, on the other, can be worth exploring, too.

Overall, analysing digital genres, such as those developed in travel blogs, may be fruitful from a linguistic and especially pragmatic perspective to comprehend how communication is taking

place and evolving online. A situated speech act analysis that is not entirely aprioristic and considers the context of communication is advantageous to recognise digital users' expectations and possibilities when interacting through a particular digital genre. The variability of instantiations of the pragmatic intents, as shown in the analysis above, enables international speakers to choose the forms and structures that best fit their communicative purposes. Following this functional approach may be useful to international speakers of English to appropriately develop pragmatic and communicative skills, while engaging in real-life meaningful global digital interactions.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The corpus was compiled at the end of 2018 as part of a larger study. Sufficient time after the publication of posts was needed to ensure a representative number of comments and replies.

<sup>2</sup> Ratio per 1,000 words has not been provided due to the very similar size of the corpus of travel blog posts *versus* comments. Hence, speech act distribution may be more clearly illustrated through frequencies.

<sup>3</sup> References to examples display the tag for blogs (two first letters), users' relation to the English language (NS for native speakers and NN for non-native speakers), the number of post (up to three), and a dash and an extra number for comments in the respective post.

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