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The dynamics of complaining in a Latin American for-profit commercial setting

Rosina Marquez Reiter, University of Surrey

Abstract

This paper examines the way in which telephone conversationalists launch, develop and revisit a complaint in a Latin American for-profit commercial service encounter over a long stretch of talk. It concentrates on some of the resources mobilised by the participants to construct the complaint with particular attention to the way in which forms of address and changes in footing are mobilised to seek affiliation and/or display misalignment and indicate face concerns. The findings reveal that the complaint is carefully initiated and made explicit as soon as it becomes clear that the other party does not align with it. The adversarial nature of the talk observed stems from the resistance showed to affiliate with each other and/or align with one another's project. It is argued that the overtime development and elaboration of the complaint responds to the interpersonally delicate nature of activity, the ways in which the company conducts its business and to standing business practices in this part of the world.

Key words: complaints, telephone conversation, service encounter, face, forms of address, footing, globalisation, Spanish business talk

1. Introduction

This article was conceived when analysing a corpus of Spanish telephone conversations to and from the Latin American call centre operation of a multinational holiday time-share company for the purposes of a larger study into intercultural communication in business settings. During this process I was struck by the way in which complaints were elaborated over the course of relatively long interactions *vis à vis* extant research on complaints which has primarily focused on the first turns through which they are introduced and managed. This paper thus examines the way in which telephone conversationalists launch, develop and revisit complaints in a for-profit commercial telephone service encounter over a long stretch of talk. It seeks to contribute to extant research into complaining by focusing on one extended

piece of talk, albeit supported by conversational segments from the same database in which complaints emerge, in an institutional environment which has received scant attention (cf. Márquez Reiter 2011, Lee 2011), to our knowledge of pragmatics in general and; more specifically, to Spanish business talk. The analysis concentrates on some of the resources mobilised by the participants to construct the complaint including the ways in which face concerns are manifested interactionally (e.g. Haugh 2010; Chang and Haugh 2011, Márquez Reiter 2009, Orthaber and Márquez Reiter 2011; Ruhi 2010) given the interpersonally delicate nature of the activity.

The interaction examined is primarily task-oriented. It represents a for-profit commercial service encounter over the phone between an institutional agent and a client. The participants share the same basic language (i.e. Spanish) but come from different backgrounds and speak different varieties of Spanish. They are unacquainted with one another and unlikely to interact with each other again. Importantly, their interactional goals do not coincide: the client expresses her dissatisfaction with the service received and the agent is reluctant to offer any remedial action. Both parties thus engage in pursuing a range of (potentially conflictive) responses from each other in an effort to achieve their differing goals. These are often met with resistance, hence generating an extended interaction in which a complaint is initiated, elaborated and revised over the course of the exchange and face becomes salient.

Although the participants of these calls are unlikely to have had any contact with one another prior to the telephone conversation analysed here, a relationship, albeit a primarily transactional one, exists between the institution and the caller as observed, among others, by the caller's knowledge of the system. This is because the client has been using the services offered by the company for a given period of time. Furthermore, unlike more traditional service encounters (e.g. at open markets), telephone mediated encounters of the kind examined here seem to generate an individualisation of the link between the participants (Márquez Reiter, 2011). The telephone agents play the role of mediators in ensuring and guaranteeing access to the services being sold (Liccope, 2001) and, at other times, act as counsellors in providing holiday advice to fulfil their duties as agents while maximising their chances of obtaining a sale (Márquez Reiter, 2011). The link between the participants in these primarily task-based encounters is also evident in the way in which both participants orient towards interpersonal connectedness (Fitch, 1991), albeit for a principally instrumental

purpose given that a relationship outside the confines of business is most probably beyond their remit and interest.

In the next section (section 2) I offer a review of the literature on complaints. I report the interactional environments that have so far received attention and the resources that have been identified in the construction of complaints including face concerns. I then present background information which is available to these conversationalists and relevant for the reader to fully understand the way in which complaints are managed in the setting examined and provide a justification of the analytic framework deployed (Section 3). This is then followed by Section 4 where I discuss the way in which the complaint is constructed by focusing on the resources mobilised by the participants. Finally, in section 5, I present my concluding remarks.

2. Previous research on complaints

Complaints have principally been examined from a speech act perspective and from a conversation analytic angle. Trosborg (1995: 311) defines complaints as illocutionary acts in which the complainant expresses disapproval, negative feelings, and so on, towards the state of affairs described in the proposition, in this case, the complainable, and for which he or she holds the complaint recipient responsible, either directly or indirectly. Indirect complaintsⁱ are those in which the complainant complains to the addressee about an absent party, something or someone, whereas direct complaints refer to cases where the target of the complaint is also the recipient (Pomerantz, 1986; Edwards, 2005) and the recipient experiences the complaint as being about herself or himself (Hakulinen, 2010); this is the case of the complaint examined here, where the telephone agent becomes the complaint recipient by virtue of her role as an institutional representative and/or perceives the client's negative feelings as being about her.

Complaints are retrospective acts in that the complainant focuses on a negative past action or event (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993; Trosborg, 1995). However, they can also be prospective acts in that, by seeking remedial action, the complainant attempts to influence the behaviour of others (Trosborg, 1995; Márquez Reiter 2005). Research into talk-in-interaction has demonstrated that rather than having an adjacency pair structure, complaints often encompass extended sequences (Drew and Walker, 2009) jointly constructed as participants take on the roles of story-tellers and story-recipients (Heinemann, 2009: 2441). In so doing, narrators communicate their stance toward what they are reporting (Stivers, 2008) in order to

get the story-recipient to affiliate with the complaint and often express moral judgments (Drew, 1998) about the problem being discussed. Conversation analysts have also shown that the lack of affiliation of the story-recipient towards the teller typically results in the latter expanding and re-doing of displays of affectivity (Selting, 2010: 271).

Complaints in institutional settings have relatively recently received increased attention by conversation analysts, particularly in health care settings. Examples include the research carried out by Monzoni (2008, 2009) on complaints to an Italian emergency call centre; Ruusuvuori and Lindfors (2009) on potential complaints which are disattended and therefore not fully-fledged in Finnish medical settings and, Heinemann (2009) on the construction of complaints in caregiver visits to the elderly in Denmark. Monzoni (2008) demonstrates that by producing positive polar questions with a strong epistemic stance in the slot in which the reason for the call is typically offered, callers introduce the reason for the call in a collaborative manner. They thus establish common ground from which they can subsequently report a complainable matter related to such events, having cleverly put the complaint recipients in a position where they cannot deny the occurrence of the complained-of action. In a later study Monzoni (2009) shows that enquires realised via the negative interrogative in Italian, unlike positive polar questions, are interpreted and treated as accusations by the recipients and responded to with 'not-at-fault-denials'. She argues that in so doing, the recipients make a distinction between their own responsibility and that of the institution.

The importance of the participants' roles and relationships is also echoed by the results of complaint studies in Nordic health care settings. Ruusuvori and Lindfors (2009) contend that owing to the institutional restrictions of the settings examined (i.e. patients' visits to general practitioners and homeopathic therapists) potential complaints from the patients are often embedded in other activities (e.g. problem presentation, the reason for the visit) and may thus not develop into explicit complaints. Similarly, Heinemann (2009) highlights the importance of institutional roles and relationships in complaining. She shows that when health care professionals initiate complaints about patients, colleagues join in co-constructing the complaints, whereas when patients do so these are rejected.ⁱⁱ

More recently, Orthaber and Márquez Reiter (2011) investigated the construction of complaints and manifestations of face from a Goffmanian perspective in calls to and from a Slovenian public transport company from an interactional pragmatics perspective. They

report that customers explicitly lodged their complaints at the outset of the calls (i.e. during the reason for the call) and that irrespective of the grounds on which the complaints were based, the agents displayed non-affiliative behaviour. The agents did so by adopting a purely institutional role in order to protect the face of the company and, hence, their own institutional face in their ascribed roles. Manifestations of face were observed as a result of the agents' refusal to affiliate with the complaint. Face was also observed in the customers' escalated displays of anger triggered by the agents' reluctance to admit fault or to deal with matter in hand. Unlike previous studies of complaints in institutional settings, this interactional environment represents an essential service and constitutes the only means that customers have of travelling by train. In the light of this, the authors explain that the interactions 'seem to create an illusion for both parties that something is going on, although both eventually realise that it is a continuous status-quo, that a solution will not be offered' (p.3875).

The consumer in the complaint service encounter examined here exercises her right to lodge a complaint to the telephone agent, who is expected to deal with it because of her role as service provider. In this setting too, therefore, the telephone agent has to save her own personal face from what she might regard as personal attacks and, above all the face of the client if she wants to keep her business as well as her own job. One of the resources mobilised by the participants throughout the interaction and accompanying conversational excerpts is the manipulation of personal pronouns, forms of address and changes in footing to display affiliation and/or (mis)alignment (Goffman 1981) with respect to the interactional project, indexing thus face concerns. In bringing up a complaint, the complainant (i.e. the client) conveys to the complaint recipient (i.e. the institutional agent) that she is not satisfied with the way she has been treated, thus potentially posing a threat to the recipient's face by implying that their relationship might cease to exist.

This complaint examined here, however, is not about an essential public service. The institution, though one of the largest of its kind in the world, represents a private organisation. While it does not own the monopoly of the services offered, it enjoys an on-going relationship with the consumer, therefore making the complainant a client rather than a customer. Both the client and the agent understand this and failure to satisfy the client's needs may cause her to revoke her patronage and/or incur additional costs to the company (Vinkhuyzen and Szymanski 2005; Lee 2011), at least in theory as very little seems to be done on either part to ameliorate services.

3. Background and methods

The telephone conversation and supporting conversational excerpts form part of a corpus of circa 80 hours of recorded calls which I gathered in 2006 as part of a wider ethnographic study on intercultural communication in mediated business settings between speakers of different varieties of Spanish (Márquez Reiter, 2011). To this end, I conducted fieldwork at the Latin American call centre of a time-share company. Both agents and clients are aware that their calls may be recorded and monitored for quality control procedures. Permission was obtained to use the recorded calls, provided that an appropriate system for the safe custody of confidential information was in place. As a result, the name of the company and that of the participants are fictitious. Similarly, any information such as the names of the resorts, which might help identify the company in question, has been changed.

The telephone conversation analysed is an inbound call, that is, a call received by a call centre agent from a client. The selected conversation is representative of the pattern observed in inbound calls where clients telephone to express their dissatisfaction about a service received. Service complaints are normally dealt with by the Customer Care department of the call centre. Initially, however, they tend to be answered and dealt with by the agents working on inbound calls or may emerge in the course of the interaction. If the agents do not regard them as sufficiently serious or contentious they will attend to them rather than automatically transfer them to Customer Care. The goals of the participants in this call, that is that of the institutional agent working at the call centre and the client of the company, do not coincide with one another. The client wants to obtain compensation or some sort of remedial action (Goffman, 1976) for the inconvenience experienced while the agent wants to avoid offering a remedial action as this is likely to generate extra costs to the company, needs to be approved of by a supervisor and/or the Customer Care department and, may reflect badly on the agent's performance. Overall, 9 inbound and 13 outbound complaints have been transcribed and analysed; the inbound call and conversational fragments examined in this paper form part of this.

The examination of the complaint calls draws on Goffman (i.e. face, footing, alignment), a range of resources from pragmatics (e.g. explicitness, implicitness, directness, indirectness, implicature, social activities, pragmatolinguistic formulations) and, some tools of analysis from Conversation Analysis. That the latter is employed to inform the analysis responds to the fact that the topic of telephone conversations 'is virtually a creation of CA'

(Schegloff 2009). There is now an established body of knowledge on the activities telephone conversationalists engage in and, more recently, on the way in which (telephone) conversationalists construct complaints in various institutional environments (see section 2) . That only one complaint call, albeit supplemented by other complaint excerpts is analysed may lead some readers to cast their doubts on the worthwhileness of this study as claims about specific or generalizable aspects of the complaints may be seen as rooted on thin grounds. However, the complaint explored here unfolds over extended sequences as the responses pursued by the participants are resisted by one another, thus prolonging their encounter and providing us with an unexplored complaint context: that of the introduction, elaboration and revision of a commercial for-profit complaint over a long stretch of talk in a language that has received considerable interest in pragmatics, albeit relatively little attention from an interactional perspective. This study thus seeks to contribute to our knowledge of pragmatics in general and, more specifically, to Spanish business talk.

Before the analysis it may be relevant to explain some of the contextual information available to the participants and relevant for understanding the interaction. Clients of this time-share company pay an annual fee. In return for this, they deposit their allotted period of time, for instance, one or two weeks of accommodation in a given resort unit, in the company's database in order to have the possibility of exchanging it for accommodation at one of the various other resorts that the company has worldwide. Deposits typically entail one or two weeks of accommodation leased or owned by clients in a given holiday resort at a specific time of the year. In return for renewing their membership or purchasing other company products, the company offers its clientele the possibility of earning bonus or additional weeks. Bonus weeks are incentive weeks, however, they do not generally match the type of week(s) owned or leased by the clients. For instance, a client who owns a week's accommodation in a five-star resort for eight people during high-season may receive a bonus week for an accommodation unit with a capacity for fewer people in mid or low-season. The complaint call and conversational excerpts analysed relate to the allocation of bonus weeks.

5. Analysis

The client in excerpt 1 used an additional week to book a unit of accommodation. She now telephones the company to complain about the unit that she is currently occupying with her husband and wants to know the reasons why they were allocated this particular unit. The agent explains the institutional rules behind it, namely that additional weeks do not

necessarily match the type of unit owned by the clients in terms of their capacity or star rating. In so doing, the agent removes the factual grounds on which the client's complaint was initially built.

Excerpt 1 [10:5 resaca (dregs)]

A= telephone agent

C = complainant

- 1 A: Gracias por comunicarse con Vacaciones Inolvidables,
2 mi nombre es Johanna en qué le puedo ayudar,
Thank you for calling Holidays to Remember,
my name is Johanna how can I help you^u,
- 3 C: E:::h qué tal Johanna buenos días- buenas tardes,
U::m how are Johanna good morning- good afternoon,
- 4 A: Sí buenas tardes.
Yes good afternoon.
- 5 C: =Mirá.(.) yo te llamo:: mi nombre es Elida Pérez mi
6 esposo es Roberto Pérez,
=Look^v(.) I'm calling:: you^v my name is Silvia Pérez mi
husband is Roberto Pérez,
- 7 A: =Sí.
=yes.
- 8 C: =nosotros estamos ahora en este momento:: en un
9 condominio en Villa del Dique,
=we are now at this moment:: in a
Condominium in Villa del Dique,
- 10 A: =Sí.
=yes.
- 11 C: Que ustedes me lo vendieron a mí por-por teléfono, yo
12 lo acepté y todo lo demás.
That you^p sold me over-over the telephone, I
accepted and everything else.
- 13 A: Sí.
Yes.
- 14 C: Eh: bueno yo (.) como no estoy conforme cómo es el
15 condominio, (.)quisiera saber cuál es el criterio
16 (.)por el cual nos adjudicaron la unidad que tenemos y
17 demás,
Um: ok so (.) since I'm not satisfied with the way the
condominium is, (.) I'd like to know the criterion
(.)why we were allocated the unit that we have and

- that,
- 18 A: Bien. e:::h sabés que voy a necesita:::r? (.1) eh::
Fine. U::m do you^{T/V} know what I'm going to nee:::d? (.1)
 um::
- 19 C: El número?
The number?
- 20 A: Sí.
 Yes.
- (19 lines of contingency questions omitted)
- 39 C: [(porque yo
 [(because I)
- 40 A: [Y cuál] es el problema?= Tu nombre cómo es?
[and what] is the problem?= your^T name is?
- 41 C: Elida(.) Gómez de Pérez.
 42 A: Elida?
 43 C: Elida.
 44 A: Y cuál es el problema Elida?
And what is the problem Elida?
- 45 C: = E:::h la::: la unidad nuestra, que nos han dado ahora,
 =U:::m the::: our unit, the one that we were now given,
- 46 A: Sí,
 Yes,
- 47 C: Es mmmh basta:::nte fea.(.) pero súper fea. súper
 48 chiquita.= nada que ver con lo que es la nuestra= y
 49 como en el mismo lugar tienen otros tipos de
 50 unidades.(.) si con que- cuál es el- con qué criterio
 51 ustedes nos asignaron la habitación trescientos tres,
It's mmmh rath:::er ugly. (.)but really ugly.really
Small^{dim}. = nothing to do with ours= and
since in the same place they have other types of
units.(.) yes with what- what is the- what criterion
did you^P use to allocate us room three hundred and three,
- 52 A: Bien(.) ustedes e:::h e:::h viajaban (.) a ver (.)
 53 primero que el el intercambio que ustedes hicieron no
 54 lo hicieron con semana de propiedad.
Fine (.) you^P u::m u::m were travelling (.) let's see (.)
First the exchange that you^P did you did not
do it with your week of ownership.
- 55 C: =no no con adicional.
 =no no with a bonus week.

- 56 A: lo hicieron con una semana adi[cional].
you^p did so with a week ad[ditional].
You used an additional week.
- 57 C: [exactamente]
 [exactly]
- 58 A: Bie:::n↓ entonces cuando es con semana adicional no
 59 corre lo de que su propiedad es tal, entonces habría
 60 que darle tal, verdad?
Fi:::ne↓ so when you use additional weeks
the thing about your^u week being such does not apply, so
that we would have to give you^u the same, right?
- 61 C: Bueno. vamos a suponer que (.) como es una semana
 62 adicional no tengo por qué >porque si es adicional es
 63 adicional de algo principal< bueno vamos a suponer
 64 que no es así. (.) que ustedes me pueden asignar una-
 65 una unidad.
Well. Let us suppose that (.) as it is an additional week
I don't have to >because if it is additional is
additional to something greater< well let us suppose that
is not like this. (.) that you^p can allocate me any-
any unit.
- 66 A: Sí.
 Yes.
- 67 C: Pero cuál fue el criterio para que me den la-la unidad
 68 que tenemos ahora?
But what was the criterion used to give me the-the unit
that we are in now?
- 69 A: Ustedes viajaban dos personas?
You^p travelled two people?
Did the two of you travelled?
- 70 C: Sí (.) (obviam[ente.])
 Yes (.) (obvious[ly.])
- 71 A: [NOSO]tros cuando::: cuando:::
 72 confirmamos preguntamos cuántas personas viajan, (.)
 73 independientemente de que la semana sea para o:::ocho
 74 a suponer no,
[WE] when::: when::: we
confirm we ask how many people will be travelling, (.)
irrespective of whether the unit is for e:::ight
let's say right,
- 75 C: Sí.
 Yes.
- 76 A: Si viajan dos personas le damos una unidad de dos

- 77 personas.(.) ya? entonces en este caso el operador que
 78 le atendió le debe haber preguntado con quién
 79 viajaba,= usted le dijo con mi esposo entonces viajan
 80 dos personas se le dió una habitación que es para
tres.
*if two people are travelling we give them a unit for two
 people. (.) right? So in this case the agent that
 served you he must have asked you^u who you were
 travelling with, = you^u told him with my husband so two
 people were travelling and you^u were given a room for
three people.*
- 81 C: Está bien. [suena-
 Alright. [it sounds-
- 82 A: [Lo que] había disponible era este complejo
 83 usted se le ofreció::: e:::m me imagino que habrá
 84 tenido la oportunidad de verlo aunque sea en el
 85 directorio o por interne:::t,
*[what] was available was this resort
 it was offere:::d to you^u u:::m I'd imagine that you^u had
 had the opportunity to see it at least in the
 directory or in the interne:::t,*
- 86 C: No no. no no. no lo vimos (.) porque yo confié que me
 87 iban dar por lo menos algo similar a lo que yo tengo.
*No no. no no. we didn't see it (.)because I trusted that I
 was going to be allotted at least something similar to what
 I've got.*
- 88 A: Sí.
 Yes.
- 89 C: Entonces ahora yo estoy en u:::n- nosotros somos dos
 90 personas grandes nos dieron tipo duplex así que subo y
 91 bajo escaleras para el dormitorio,
*So now I'm in a:::n- we are two
 mature people they gave us a kind of duplex so I've to go
 up and down steps to the bedroom,*
- 92 A: Sí.
 Yes.
- 93 C: El baño es horri:::ble escuchame (.) por más que vos me
 94 digas que no me van a dar un condominio similar al
 95 condominio mío.(.) que de por sí el condominio mío es
 96 para cuatro personas.
*The bathroom is horr:::ible listen^v (.) even you^v
 Tell me that I won't get a condominium similar to
 My condominium. (.) which in any case my condominium is
 For four people.*
- 97 A: Sí.
 Yes.

98 C: =no puede ser que yo esté en un bañito que no me pueda
99 mover(.) que no tenga bañaderas. que tenga que estar
100 limpiando secando no. (.) realmente es una porquería
101 lo que yo tengo, (.) subo y bajo escaleras en el
102 condominio no tienen otro para ofrecermelo? (.) Uno peor
103 uno que fuese todavía más interno más cerrado? (.)
104 entonces cómo puede ser? ahora si vos me decís que a
105 mí me dan la resaca, (.) bueno avisame la resaca
106 entonces me avisan y yo elijo.(.) voy o no voy= pero
107 si a mí me dicen mire le damos adicional quédese
108 tranquila usted no va a usar su semana vacacional,
*-it's not possible that I'm in a little bathroom where I
can't move(.)that doesn't have a bathtub. That I have to be
cleaning and drying all the time no.(.)frankly it's rubbish
where I am, (.) I go up and down steps in the
condominium don't you have another one to offer me?(.)a
worse one that is even darker and pokier? (.)
so how is this possible? Now if you^v tell me that
they are giving me the dregs, (.)well tell^v me it's the
dregs so you^v tell me and I choose. (.) I go or I don't=but
if they tell me look^u we give you^u an additional week rest^u
assured that you^u will not use your week of ownership,*

109 A: =Sí.
=yes.

110 C: =Decime que no es lo mismo entonces bueno yo
111 decido.(.) si no es lo mismo bueno. cuénteme qué es,
112 pero yo vine acá y encontrarme con semejante cosa,
113 escuchame. donde los pisos están desteñidos, donde no
114 tengo-no tengo un silloncito, no tengo es decir -no
115 tengo la televisión dentro de un placarcito, el
116 placard como es común (hemos estado en Miami=y pongo
117 en cincuenta mil cosas mías)me metieron la televisión
118 chiquitita dentro de un placard común porque no tenían
119 dónde ponerla, no tengo cómoda no tengo silla,
*=tell^v me that it's not the same so well I
Decide.(.)if it's not the same well. Tell^u me what it is,
But I came here to find such a thing,
Listen^v.where the floors are stained, where I don't
Have-don't have a little armchair, I don't have I mean-no I
have the television inside as small cupboard,the
Cupboard as it's normal practice(we have been in Miami=I
put lots of my things)they put the tiny TV inside a normal
cupboard because they didn't have anywhere to put it, I
don't have a chest of drawers I don't have a chair.*

120 A: Bien.
Fine.

121 C: me cobraron setenta pesos de adiciona::l, qué es eso?
I was charged me seventy pesos on to::p, what's that?

- 122 A: =Bien.
Yes.
- 123 C: por qué yo pagué los doscientos dólares que ustedes me
124 pidieron, (.) y yo no podía entrar si no pagaba
125 setenta y-setenta pesos adicionales?
*Why did I pay the two hundred dollars that you^p
required,(.) and I couldn't check in if I didn't pay
seventy and-seventy additional pesos?*
- 126 A: Bien. Hagamos una cosa e:::h Usted está ahora en el
127 condominio, verdad?
*Fine. Let's do the following u:::m you^u are now in the
condominium, right?*

5.1 Introducing the complaint

In (1) once it is clear that the line of communication is open, that the client is connected to the right destination and that the participants can hear each other, the client immediately starts by lodging a complaint in the reason for the call slot (Schegloff 2007). This is illustrated at L. 5 by the inclusion of *Mirá* (look^v) in initial position which orients the contribution to ‘prefacing some kind of problem/issue by the speaker’ Márquez Reiter (2002:143) followed by *yo te llamo* (‘I’m calling you^v’). However, instead of articulating the complaint as a first item of business, she suspends this course of action in favour of providing identification instead. This indicates the client’s awareness of (some of) the steps which are necessary for her request to be processed, suggests experience in purchasing services of the kind over the telephone and underlines the institutional v. everyday nature of the call. After the opening is effected and the client has given the agent what she believes is sufficient information for the agent to retrieve the relevant records, namely self and location identification including the projecting of a potential complaint (L. 11-2), she explicitly articulates the complaint at L. 14-7.

During the projection of the upcoming complaint (L.11-12), the client blames the institution and, by default, the agent in her capacity as institutional representative for her current state of affairs. She does this via the inclusion of the second person plural pronoun *ustedes* in a variety of Spanish (i.e. River Plate Spanish, Lipski 1994) in which pronouns are normally omitted.ⁱⁱⁱ The presence of *ustedes* is thus marked. The use of such a marked syntactical format allows the complainant to design her complaint against the institution. It helps to position her as separate from the agent and the institution that she represents, an institution that she is now holding accountable for her trouble. The troubles-telling which is

explicitly articulated at L.14-7 is initially realised with some hesitation and immediately followed by *bueno* ('ok so') functioning as a bridge between the complaint background (L. 8-9, 11-12) and the actual complaint. Of note is the fact the client first formulates her troubles-telling via an explicit expression of dissatisfaction with the accommodation unit and then enquires as to the rationale for such allocation. The enquiry could thus be interpreted as question for information before launching into details of her complaint. The client thus makes manifest her discontent with the service received by engaging in what at first sight resembles a 'business as usual' (cf. Tracy and Agne, 2002) inbound call. This is because the client attempts to offer the reason for the call at the first available opportunity, that is, once it is clear that the line of communication is open, that she has dialled the right number and that there are no audible problems (L.5). However, she aborts this course of action and redirects her turn to offer a preliminary (i.e. self-identification) to the complaint preliminary (Schegloff, 1980) (i.e. essential details of the product: location identification and a statement to the effect that it was purchased under normal supply and demand conditions) and, in the reason for the call slot formulates her troubles-telling followed by a question for information. The client's behaviour so far is bleached of any emotional content; it is bland and technical.

Similar conversational behaviour is observed across the 9 inbound complaints. In (2) below after the caller establishes that he has reached the correct destination and that there are not any audible problems, he orients his contribution to launching a potential troubles-telling as observed by the inclusion of *mire* (Look^u). The projection of the potential troubles-telling is further displayed by the semantic material which follows *e:::::h la molesto::: mmmh el tema es el siguiente* ('u:::::m I'm disturbing you:::::mmmh it is about', idiomatically 'Sorry to bother you I'm phoning'). The agent responds with a continuer (L. 5) but instead of articulating his complaint in the reason for the call slot, the client offers the location identification (L.6-7) instead. This would, in theory, allow the agent to look for his records using the holiday location rather than his membership number or other personal details. Following a significant pause (L.8) in which the agent attempted to locate the client's records, the membership number is requested for the sequence to progress.

Excerpt 2 [10:6 estoy atendiendo el teléfono (I answer the phone)]

1 A: Gracias por comunicarse -con Vacaciones Inolvidables, mi
 2 nombre es Nélide, en qué le puedo ayudar?
*Thank you for calling- with Holidays to Remember, my
 name is Nélide how can I help you^u,*

- 3 C: Sí. buenas tardes.(.) mire e::::h la molesto:::, mmmh
 4 el tema es el siguiente,
Yes. Good afternoon.(.) look^u u:::m I'm disturbing you^u:::, mmm
It is about,
- 5 A: =Sí.
 =Yes.
- 6 C: Yo tengo un fax para:::: Oasis en: Miramar, a ve:r le
 7 digo bien en qué fecha.
I have a fax for::: Oasis in: Miramar, let's see I give
You^u the right date.
- 8 (.4)
- 9 A: Deme por favor su número de socio, okey?
Please give me^u your membership number, okey?

As shown in (1) and (2) instead of lodging the complaint at the first available opportunity, that is, in the reason for the call slot after the opening had been achieved, the clients projected a potential troubles-telling in which they offered identification including the holiday location details for the agent to retrieve their records and the sequence to progress. The clients' contributions constitute a preliminary (Schegloff 2007) to the complaint and the provision of location identification provides relevant background to the complaint and could, in theory, help the agent to locate the relevant records. They were both formulated via the inclusion of the particle *mirá/mire* in turn initial position drawing the agent's attention towards the potential ensuing of some problem. It is noteworthy that in the 9 inbound complaints of the corpus, the clients initiated their complaints with a preliminary rather than explicitly articulate their complaints in the reason for the call slot. This suggests that the clients treat complaints as delicate activities that should be carefully approached. One avenue for exercising caution is the delaying of the actual complaint via the performance of a complaint-implicative preliminary. That it is formulated in the slot which is typically occupied by the reason for the call, prior to the series of interrogative questions (Zimmerman, 1992) and that it contains location identification details relevant to the complaint, may be a client's way of increasing the likelihood of earlier client record retrieval by the agent. This would, in theory, allow the client to articulate the actual complaint to a more attentive agent.

5.2 Grounding the complaint

In (1) before responding to the enquiry the agent initiates a series of contingency questions aimed at locating the client's records. She does this at L. 18 by switching to the informal second person singular *tú/vos*; arguably, as a result of the client's actions so far and in an

effort to ease a potentially conflictive situation. Once the relevant information is obtained, the agent directly enquires as to the reason for the complainable (L.40). However, before the client has a chance to offer a response, in latch and in keeping with her conversational footing (Goffman 1979) the agent enquires as to her name, something which the agent may have forgotten about (see L.5) and/or a piece of information which may not figure in the records should the sole account holder be the complainant's husband. In reformulating the source of the complainable the agent uses the complainant's first name thus personalising the enquiry and maintaining a friendly stance as observed by the use of the informal second person singular and the inclusion of the complainant's first name in final turn position (L.44). In so doing, she attempts to guide the complainant to adopt a potentially less combative stance. The agent thus further seeks affiliation by recurring to synthetic personalisation (Fairclough 1993).

In contrast to the tip-toe approach with which the complainant introduced her complaint, she treats the agent's enquiry as to the source of the complainable (L. 40) as a permission signal to articulate the details of the complaint. She thus proffers a direct complaint and threatens the agent's institutional face, as observed, among others, by the choice of the passive voice (*que nos han dado ahora* 'that we were given now') with which she indicates her lack of agency *vis à vis* that of the institution responsible for its allocation. The complaint is based on three grounds: the unit's general appearance, its standard *vis à vis* their week of ownership, and the fact that better units are available at the resort. The complaint starts quite softly, at least initially as observed by the inclusion of the adverb 'rather' which helps to modulate the complainant's first negative assessment (Pomerantz 1984) (*es mmmh basta:::nte fea* 'it's mmmh rath:::er ugly' L. 47), though immediately escalates it with strong negative assessments uttered with emphatic stress (*super* 'really' L.47) and negative adjectives which help to portray the unit as substandard (*fea* 'ugly', *chiquita* 'small^{dim}' L. 47-8). The complainant compares the unit to the one she and her husband own, thus implying unfair allocation (*nada que ver con lo que es la nuestra* 'nothing to do with ours' – L.48). She also mentions the availability of other types of units in the resort, thus providing the agent with relevant information to offer a remedy (i.e. swap for a better unit).

The availability of other units at the resort is the third, therefore projectably the last (Jefferson, 1990), of a list of complainables after which the complainant reiterates her enquiry. This time, however, she recurs to the inclusion of the second person plural (*ustedes*)

and stresses it (L.51). The inclusion of *ustedes* displays the complainant's rejection of the personalisation made by the agent and the maintenance of her original footing: orienting to the call-taker as an institutional representative. Its inclusion exonerates the resort where she is currently staying of any fault with respect to the unit allocation, thus making the agent in her role as institutional representative responsible for her current state of affairs, hence threatening her institutional face. The allocation of the current unit is treated by the participants, in particular by the complainant, as having potentially damaged their business relation and being in need of repair. This is evidenced by the way in which forms of address are mobilised by the agent to ease the situation and personalise the interaction and, by the complainant to maintain a disaffiliative stance.

The agent acknowledges the complaint (L. 52) and proceeds to explain the institutional rules behind the allocation (L. 53-54, 58-60). In so doing, the agent removes the essential condition for the allocation to be considered unfair and rebuts the complainant's argument. In explaining the institutional rules the agent shifts her conversational footing to a primarily instrumental one in an effort to further protect the face of the institution that she represents and thus her own professional face in the light of the complainant's accusation at L. 50-1. The change in footing is observed by the presence of the reformulator *a ver* ('let's see') followed by a turn construction unit initiated with the adverbial *primero* ('first'). *Primero* is typically heard in the prefacing of counter arguments. It was present in 14 out of the 22 counter arguments observed in the complaint calls transcribed. It offers a bridge between a previous and a subsequent contribution, in this case the caller's complaint and the agent's answer. Furthermore, owing to its semantics, it signals that more is yet to come. Its inclusion after the reformulator *a ver* ('let's see') indicates a defensive stance towards the client's accusations and is in keeping with the way in which the complainant constructed her list of complainables (L. 47-50). This is further echoed by the agent's switch to the respectful and/or distant second person singular (*su* 'your^u' L. 59, *darle* 'give you^u' L. 60). Through format tying (Goodwin 1990), therefore, the agent reciprocates the client's change of pronoun format.

Unable to argue against the explanation given by the agent, she makes clear that she does not quite accept it on semantic grounds (L.62-3) thus redressing any potential loss of face caused by the production of what may be deemed as unfounded grounders and, reiterates the enquiry first proffered during the reason for the call: information on the criterion used to allocate the unit in question (L. 67-68). Having already explained (L.58-60) the gist of the

criterion, instead of offering an adjacent second pair part, the agent cleverly initiates an insertion sequence (L. 69-70) aimed at going over the details of the caller's order in an effort to delegitimise the complaint by claiming no institutional fault and, what is more, 'good value for money' by implicature. The agent thus utters a request for information in the form of a yes/no question with as strong epistemic stance aimed at confirming that the unit needed was for two people. This leads the caller to offer an affirmative answer where she literally states the obviousness of the agent's enquiry. Such confirmation allows the agent to answer the caller's enquiry at L. 67-68 by introducing another aspect of additional weeks (i.e. their trading power *vis à vis* weeks of ownership) and to highlight the alleged generosity of the company towards the client (i.e. two people were travelling but they were given a unit for three people, where the unit capacity is stressed L.76-80). The agent's contribution, in line with the instrumental footing adopted upon learning the motive of the caller's call (L.52-4), is that of an agent speaking on behalf of the institution she represents, as evidenced by the use of the institutional 'we' (L. 71) and the marked inclusion of *usted* at line 79. These elements indicate her stance *vis à vis* the complainant and help her to turn the tables by making the latter accountable for the unit she is now occupying. In so doing, the agent saves institutional face and threatens that of the complainant, as a potentially unfocused person. The agent does this by maintaining a professional role and displaying neutrality towards the complainant and the issue dealt with. Specifically, she deploys the institutional 'we' to display a footing in which she is only speaking on behalf of the authoritative source though strategically inserts the respectful second person singular to save the face of the institution and point the finger at the complainant instead. At this juncture, it is clear that the participants are misaligned with respect to the interactional project in hand.

The complainant acknowledges the institutional rules uttered in the agent's turn (L. 81) and in overlap the agent invokes their differing roles in the relationship to further delegitimise the complaint. The agent does this by packaging her contribution as an educated guess based on the normative behaviour of clients in these cases (i.e. check the product before purchase) and the company's obligations (L. 83-5), thus reverting the blame to the complainant (cf. L. 11 *que ustedes me vendieron* 'that you^P sold me'). An affirmative response to the agent's educated guess would mean that the complainant was fully aware of where she was going and, as a result, her complaint would not hold any water. A negative response, on the other hand, would imply an admission of fault or negligence on the part of the complainant and would thus exonerate the company from any wrong doing. In cloaking

her enquiry as an educated guess, the agent guides the complainant to her preferred state of affairs (Pomerantz, 1988), namely that there are no factual grounds for the complaint, at least as far as the institution is concerned.

As shown in (1), during the development and revisiting of the complaint the participants shift footing in an effort to seek alignment with respect to their conflicting projects. This is particularly observable in the way in which they navigate the syntactic affordances of the variety of Spanish they have in common (i.e. River Plate Spanish). At strategic junctures they include subject pronouns (i.e. the second person singular and the second person plural) where they can be omitted owing to their pragmatic inferability. This, in turn, allows them to seek alignment and/or further display misalignment and index face. The way in which conversationalists manipulate forms of address and changes in footing as vehicles for seeking alignment and/or displaying misalignment and, in so doing index face (cf. Ruhi, 2010) is also illustrated in (3) below.

Excerpt 3 [11:6 tengo el pie chiquito ‘I have small feet’]

- 149 C: Ya sea este:: Aruba, Curaçao, este::Cancún, algo así
150 >me das pa Chichiribiche me voy en mi carro rapidito
151 un fin de sema:na.<
It can be um:: Aruba, Curacao, um:: Cancún, something like this
>you^t give me Chichiribiche I can quickly go in my car
On the weeke:nd.<
- 152 A: Mmmm.para Aruba y Curaçao no tenemos para esa fecha.
153 aparte para Aruba es todo el año de temporada alta o
154 sea::: no tiene una temporada baja marcada. (.) Hay
155 países que cuando hablamos de temporada alta y baja
156 no se manejan igual que en Venezuela,
Mmm. To Aruba and Curacao we don't have anything on that date.
Besides Aruba is high season all year round I
Mean::: it doesn't have a specific low season.(.) there
Are countries that when we talk about high and low season
Don't work in the same way as Venezuela,
- 157 C: Cómo dice?
Pardon^u?
- 158 A: Que la fecha que yo le di de temporada alta y
159 temporada baja, señora es para:::↑ la fecha que yo
160 le di para esas fechas es la temporada::: de es dentro
161 de Venezuela.
That the date I gave you^u is high and low
Season, M'am is for:::↑ the date that I gave
You^u is for season::: dates in
Venezuela.
- 162 (.1)

163 C: *Ustedes sí son vivos, no? (ja ja)*
You^P really are crafty, aren't you? (ha ha)

In (3) the agent reiterates that the only slots available to make use of the additional week are in Venezuela. The client reacts by providing a rationale for her request by appealing to the agent's understanding of her needs. She does this by addressing the agent in the informal second person singular (*me das* 'you^T give me' L. 150) and bringing to the fore the illogicality of the agent's suggestion. The agent thus reiterates the lack of availability in the desired destinations and implicitly explains one of the restrictions associated with bonus weeks (L.152-6). This triggers the client to utter a request for clarification in which she switches to the formal second person singular (*cómo dice* 'pardon^U?' L.157) and displays misalignment. The agent, therefore, spells out the rationale for his original suggestion (L.158-161). After a noticeable silence (0.1 pause at L.162) indicating dispreference, the client further displays misalignment by explicitly accusing the agent in his capacity as institutional representative of being crafty, thus attacking his face and showing disaffiliation. The client constructs her accusation in the second person plural *ustedes* when syntactically the pronoun could have been omitted.^{iv} The marked presence of *ustedes* helps the client to position the agent as a member of the collective that she holds accountable for her trouble. She follows this with the affirmative particle *sí* functioning as an intensifier before the negative adjective *vivos* ('crafty'), a confirming tag and culminates with disaffiliative laughter (Glenn, 2003) after which the conversation is brought to a close.

5.3 Reaching closure

If we return to (1) we can see that the complainant has been put in a position where she has to admit that she had not checked the unit prior to booking it and, by default, take back her accusation that the company should be made accountable for the unit allocation. Given the loss of face that this represents and the fact that she does not seem to be getting anywhere with her complaint, she justifies her allegedly 'negligent' behaviour on a new ground: 'trust' (L.86-87), thus bringing to the fore the relational history between the participants (i.e. between the institution and the client) and what she understands their different responsibilities should be (cf. 82-5). With this, she appeals to the lack of morality of the company procedures and implicitly accuses it of disloyalty. This enables her to maintain her accusation from a moral high ground and thus potentially repair any damage caused to her face. Having exhausted the potential institutional grounds on which her complaint was

initially based (L.47-51), the complainant engages in story-telling with a view to getting the agent to affiliate with the complaint, restore connectedness and hopefully achieve a remedy . The complainant positions herself as a story-teller and the agent as the story-recipient. The latter, however, limits herself to the production of lax acknowledgement tokens (L. 88, 92, 97,109) despite the caller's socio-emotional account of the circumstances. The story contains a progressive cracking up of the dramatic detailing with the effect tumbling out as result of the agent's heareable resistance to affiliate.

The account is flavoured with elements oriented to seeking affiliation through sympathy (*dos personas grandes* 'two mature people' L.90); heightened affectivity via negative assessments (e.g. *horrible* L.93); extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986) to invoke the maximal properties of the action described (L. 98-9 *que no me pueda mover* 'where I can't move'); prosodically and semantically marked displays of outrage (L. 100 *realmente es una porquería* 'frankly it's rubbish'); reports of trouble doing ordinary things such as having a shower (L. 99-100); constantly being forced to do uncomfortable things while on holiday via extreme formulations (Pomerantz 1986) as evidenced by the use of the present indicative (L. 101 *subo y bajo las escaleras* 'I go up and down steps') which helps to underline the monotonous nature of the action and the fact that is likely to continue, should she remain in that room for the rest of her holiday; direct accusations via the deployment of sarcasm (L.102-103 *uno peor, más cerrado, más interno* 'a worse one, one that is even pokier') and, direct reported speech (Holt, 1996) through which she accuses the company of having swindled her. She first introduces her accusation of deceitful business practices as a rational deductive behaviour via the contrastive particle *pero* ('but') and conditional *si* ('if') (L.106) followed by direct reported speech. In deploying direct reported speech, the caller narrates what was said and how it was said thus legitimising her accusation of 'untrustworthiness', allowing the agent to judge it for herself (Holt 1996). The client thus presents information about the company's social value which cannot be integrated to the positive values being claimed by the agent as institutional representative (Goffman 1967), hence threatening her institutional face.

The agent offers an acknowledgement token in latch (L. 109) and in view of such a lax response the complainant articulates the business morality that the company should have abided by (L.110-112- cf. Drew, 1998) followed by a detailed negative description of the unit (L.113-119) in line with the one proffered earlier. She thus manages to maintain her original accusation, albeit based on a different grounder and further repair any damage that might

have been caused to her face by not fulfilling her responsibilities in the relationship. At line 120, the agent indicates her readiness to move to the next activity (i.e. the uttering of *bien* with final intonation contour). This, however, is not taken up by the complainant who presents an additional grounder (L. 121) The agent reiterates her wish to move to the next activity (L. 122) though the caller continues to express her outrage (L. 123-125) until the agent manages to regain the floor and projects a new activity for which she enquires the location of the complainant (L.126-127) with a view to proposing an arrangement: to call her back once the Customer Care department has established what can be done.

Similar behaviour can be observed in (4) below where the client complains about the lack of a suitable accommodation unit in the time slot she required, as result of which she had to travel at a different time instead. Unable to rebut the agent's arguments as these were based on the agreement signed between the company and the client, the latter accuses the company and by default the agent in his capacity as institutional representative of having swindled her.

Excerpt 4 [12:5 tienen más vueltas que la calesita 'you go round and round in circles']

- 90 C: Eh: Vacaciones Inolvidables tuvo la avivada, (.) yo
 91 tengo para cuatro personas?
*Um: Holidays to Remember had the craftiness, (.) Do I
 Have a unit for four people?*
- 92 A: Sí sí.
Yes yes.
- 93 C: Bueno. me dieron para dos perso[nas,]
Well. They gave me one for two peo[ple,]
- 94 A: [Ah::]
- 95 C: y las otras dos(.) se las <morfó Vacaciones
 96 Inolvidables>
*and the other two(.)were ,<gobbled up by Holidays
 to Remember>.*
- 97 (.1)
- 98 A: A ver déjeme ver El Pinar para dos personas le dieron.
 99 Sí, pero cuántas viajaban dos o cuatro?
*Let^U me see they gave you El Pinar for two people.
 Right, but how many people were travelling two or four?*
- 100 C: Viajábamos dos pero yo tengo la comodidad para cuatro?
Two but I have a unit with a capacity for four?
- 101 A: Claro claro. a veces lo que sucede es que: eh:(.) a
 103 ver déjeme ver.
*Sure sure. Sometimes what happens is that: um: (.) let's
 see let^U me see.*
- 104 C: =Había libres eh,
=there were units available um,
- 105 A: Había libres,
There were units available,

- 106 C: Sí.
Yer.
- 107 A: déjeme ver.
Let^u me see.
- 108 C: Ahí en El Pinar me dijeron que muchas veces hacen eso,
In El Pinar they told me that this is often done,
- 109 A: Mmm
- 110 (.6)
- 111 A: Sí lo que pasa es que usted en ese momento no viajó
112 con una semana de propiedad suya(.) viajó con una
113 semana abono.
*Yes what happens is that at that time you^u didn't use
Your own week(.) you used a bonus week.*
- (9 lines in which the trading power of bonus weeks is discussed are omitted)
- 123 A: Claro lo que pasa es que las semanas abono están
124 sujetas a disponibilidad, usted viajó con una semana
125 bono quiere decir que la semana abono que le dieron
126 (.) no tiene por qué ser exactamente a la unidad que
127 usted deposita= porque no es un intercambio contra un
128 depósito. me comprende:?
*Sure what happens is that bonus weeks depend on
Availability, you^u used a bonus week which means that the
bonus week you were given (.) doesn't have to be exactly
the same as the one you deposit= because it's not an
exchange based on a deposit. Do you^u understand: me?*
- 129 C: Sí Sí. Tienen más vue::ltas que la calesita,
*Yes Yes. You have more roun:ds than a merry-go-round,
Yes yes. You go round and round in circles,*
- 130 A: Ha:Y bueno. es un sistema que tiene digamos que tiene
131 algunas particularidades.
*Ah: and well. The system let's say it has
Some peculiarities.*

As observed at L.90-1 in (4), the client accuses the company of playing tricks (*tuvo la avivada* 'had the craftiness'), and having an appetite for it (*se las morfó* 'gobbled them up' L.95). The accusation is initiated at L. 90 with a strong, albeit unsubstantiated, assessment *tuvo la avivada*. It is followed by a yes/no question with a strong epistemic stance so as to get the agent to confirm the requested information and establish common ground from which to rebut her argument. The answer to the question is obvious to both participants as it entails the confirmation of the unit capacity the client has with the company. In so doing, she invites the agent to confirm the she is, in theory, entitled to a unit for four people. The agent's confirmation allows the client to state what is also already known to both, namely that she has given a unit for two rather than four people, thus providing evidence for her accusation at L.90 and further expanding it by qualifying the behaviour of the company as greedy (*se las*

morfó ‘gobbled them up’ L.95). In the light of the client’s accusation the agent tries to establish the number of people who travelled on the occasion by uttering yet another question with a strong epistemic stance as both participants know the answer to it already (L.99). In so doing, he prepares the ground for rebutting the client’s argument (i.e. institutional restrictions on bonus weeks). While the agent checks the relevant records, the client volunteers information in support of her complaint: other, and by implication better, units were available at the resort (L. 104) and substantiates it by using reported speech (L.108). In using reported speech she attempts to legitimise her claim. She conveys that she is not alone in thinking like this, others, including businesses with which the company is in partnership with, hold the same view. After a significant silence (L.110) the agent proceeds to explain the institutional restrictions regarding bonus weeks *vis à vis* weeks of ownership and culminates his explanation with a confirmation seeking question (L.128). The complainant displays her understanding of the rules (*yes yes yes*) before she offers a metapragmatic assessment of the interaction with the figurative expression *tienen más vueltas que la calesita* (literally ‘you^P have more rounds than a merry-go-round’ idiomatically ‘you go round and round in circles’). In doing so, she maintains her accusation of misleading business practices and the moral high ground before drawing the sequence to a close (cf. Drew and Holt 1988, 1998). The agent recycles the complainant’s turn in a modulated way (*digamos* ‘let’s say’ *algunas* ‘some’) and indicates his readiness to move to the closing by treating the complainant’s assessment and its response as a possible last topic, after which the participants bring the conversation to a close.

6. Concluding remarks

The foregoing examination has provided new insights into an unexplored complaint context, that of the overtime development and elaboration of a telephone mediated complaint in a contemporary Latin American for-profit commercial setting. The analysis of the opening in the main call and supplementary conversational excerpts has shown that the complainants introduced the complaint cautiously. Instead of articulating them as a first item of business they approached the interactions as if they were ‘business as usual’ (cf. Tracy and Agne, 2002) calls. This was done by providing a trouble-implicative preliminary (Schegloff, 2007) in the slot in which the reason for the call is typically proffered (Márquez Reiter, 2011) as a way of providing relevant background to the actual complaint. The article contends that this may be a complainants’ way of increasing the chances of earlier client record retrieval by the

agents and that this, in turn, would enable clients to formulate the actual complaint to more attentive agents.

The analysis of the extended call and accompanying conversational excerpts have shown that throughout the interaction, particularly during the development and revision of the complaint, participants mobilised forms of address and changes in footing as vehicles for seeking affiliation and displaying misalignment and/or disaffiliation, and that in so doing they indexed face concerns. As the interaction progresses and the participants' misalignment with regard to the interactional project becomes more evident, both complainants and complaint recipients resorted to the production of (yes/no) questions with a strong epistemic stance in order to guide the other to confirm the requested information and thus establish common ground from which to rebut each other's arguments. The mobilisation of yes/no questions with a strong epistemic stance is in line with the results reported by Monzoni (2008) in her study of Italian institutional complaints. However, unlike Monzoni's study, these questions were not introduced in the reason for call slot. They emerged in the middle of the interaction as a result of the participants' hearable resistance to align with each other's project.

The participants' futile efforts to reach common ground led to the production of a complaint over long sequences and embedded within story-telling. Through these narratives the complainant expressed her annoyance and dissatisfaction with the service received in the context of the relational history between the client and the company and, in the light of what the participants considered to be their rights and responsibilities in the relationship. In keeping with the research conducted into complaints in other institutional settings (e.g. Heinemann 2009; Monzoni 2009, Orthaber and Márquez Reiter 2011, the agent was not inclined to accept the complaint and showed a rather disaffiliative stance.

The agent's resistance to accept the client's position led to accusations in which the lack of morality of the institution and that of the agents in their capacity as institutional representatives was invoked. Complainants did so by recurring to (direct) reported speech to legitimise their accusations, appealed to the agents' common sense and to their sense of justice. This was observable in the proffering of metapragmatic comments realised by figurative expressions in an effort to further substantiate their complaints and seek some sort of remedial action.

The unfair commercial treatment observed in these calls and witnessed across the corpus of calls is something that the clients seem accustomed to. It also something which the

company appears to be getting away with given the exercising of consumer rights in the developing countries where the participants come from and the huge slice of the time-share market that the company enjoys. The delay observed before getting down to the main business in hand and the overtime development and elaboration of the complaint may thus respond to the interpersonally sensitive nature of activity, the way in which the company conducts its business and to standing business practices in this part of the world.

The results of this study thus beg the question of whether the complainants and complaint recipients of these calls would engage in extended interactions such as the one examined if they felt that they were offered a healthy return and knew that the company could be held accountable to an independent party.

Can globalisation and its new forms of service provision (e.g. telephone mediated service encounters) offer a platform to help developing countries such as those where the participants of this study come from regulate consumer protection and ensure fair trading standards? Only time will tell.

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Transcription conventions

(adapted from Schegloff, 2007)

[]	overlapping speech
(1.5)	numbers in brackets indicate pause length in seconds
(.)	micropause
:	lengthening of the sound of preceding letter
-	word cut-off
.	falling or final intonation
?	rising or question intonation
=	latching utterances
<u>Underlining</u>	contrastive stress or emphasis
CAPS	indicates volume of speech
°°	markedly softer speech
↑↓	sharp falling/rising intonation
> <	talk is compressed or rushed
< >	talk is markedly slowed or drawn out
()	blank space in brackets indicates uncertainty about the speech

Grammatical glosses

T/V	use of familiar second person singular <i>tú</i> or <i>vos</i>
U	use of the formal second person singular <i>usted</i>
P	use of the plural form of address <i>ustedes</i>
DIM	diminutive

ⁱ It should be noted that the definition of what constitutes an (in) direct complaint varies. Thus, in speech act theory indirect complaints are typically implicit whereas direct complaints are explicitly formulated (Trosborg, 1995). Yet, some sociolinguists (Boxer 1993 and Acuña Ferreira 2004) have identified acts such as grumbling, griping, nagging and gossiping as indirect complaints performing an affiliative function in the context of everyday conversations between friends and/or acquaintances.

ⁱⁱ Primarily working from a speech act perspective, Márquez Reiter (2005) reports the disaffiliative behaviour of Uruguayan caregivers in managing fully-fledged socio-emotional complaints from care recipients over the phone to de-legitimise their claims and deny them

any remedial action. She explains this behaviour on the institutional roles adopted by the call-takers and the state of consumer rights in the country.

ⁱⁱⁱ Spanish is a pro-drop language, a language in which subject pronouns may be omitted when they are pragmatically inferable. This is the case of River Plate Spanish, the variety of Spanish spoken by the Porteño complainant and the Montevidean agent in call (1). Although the variety of Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires and Montevideo share a great number of similarities they differ, among others, in the use of the singular direct personal pronouns. Montevidean speakers have at their disposal two informal second person singular forms *tú* and *vos* while Porteños only use *vos*. However, in Montevideo *tú* is generally used with *vos* verb morphology.

^{iv} Lipski (1994) reports that over redundant subject pronouns are not rare in Venezuelan Spanish.