

Expressive illocutionary acts and politeness in managerial responses to online hotel reviews

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Abstract. This paper explores expressive illocutionary acts in responses to hotel guests' reviews posted on Tripadvisor by comparing their occurrences and realizations in 320 managerial responses in English from English and Serbian hotels, with manifestations of linguistic politeness a focus of analysis. Drawing largely on Leech's (2014) framework, the study attempts to determine whether the acts which tend to come in the form of formulaic, routinized expressions occurring in the responses given by hotels located in different cultural settings exhibit some differences as a reflection of culture-specific politeness values. The analysis has revealed considerable similarity between the two data sets in the lexicogrammatical realization of expressives and the use of resources for politeness. However, some noteworthy points of dissimilarity have emerged which correlate closely with the differences in cultural value preferences of the two countries in Hofstede et al.'s (2010) dimensions of power distance and individualism.

Keywords: expressive speech acts, managerial responses, politeness, cultural values.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, few would not seek insight online before deciding on a holiday destination and accommodation establishment. What tends to be quite handy is browsing websites which host consumer-generated content, particularly Tripadvisor seen as a benchmark for Web 2.0 on Tourism (see Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2018). Since its launch in 2000, Tripadvisor has been increasingly gaining in popularity as a freely available vehicle for consumers to share their travel experiences with others by posting reviews, photos, or taking part in forum discussions. Not infrequently recognized as “the largest online network of travel consumers” (O'Connor, 2010, *inter alia*), Tripadvisor, as its Media Center asserts, showcases “more than 934 million reviews and opinions of nearly 8 million businesses” (<https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/us-about-us> (accessed on 25 July 2021)). When adding a review, a consumer assigns an overall bubble rating to a travel experience on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1-“terrible” to 5-“excellent”) which supplements a textual account. There is an available option for business representatives to post one response to each review. Although not compulsory, these “reactive web care interventions” (Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2018) are strongly advisable.

The latest global survey (Tripadvisor, 2018) attests to reading reviews as entrenched behaviour – 86% of Tripadvisor users will book accommodation only after reading them first. In a similar vein, numerous studies in the fields of tourism and hospitality management/marketing have found that Tripadvisor reviews, as a powerful means to spread “electronic word of mouth”, may deeply affect both the tourist activity and service providers (see Bonfanti et al., 2016; Levy et al., 2013; O'Connor 2010; Sparks & Bradley, 2017, and references therein). Altogether, reviews affect a hotel's brand image and online reputation, guests' attitudes and loyalty towards the hotel, thereby ultimately impacting the hotel's revenues (see Bonfanti et al., 2016, for more detail). That being so, managerial responses to guests' reviews, which the current study deals with, may contribute to improving hotels' reputation, creating or reinforcing brand identity, increasing positive loyalty behaviours and prospective guests' visit intentions

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(Levy et. al., 2013; O'Connor 2010; Sparks & Bradley, 2017). An arising issue of “how to respond and how to do so effectively” (Sparks & Bradley, 2017, p. 719) involves, at least partially, linguistic considerations.

Easily lending themselves to linguistic analyses, Tripadvisor reviews and responses have become a very inspirational field of language study discussed within different theoretical and methodological frameworks (genre theory (Cenni and Goethals, 2020; Napolitano, 2018; Thumvichit, 2016; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), speech act theory (Guzzo & Gallo, 2019; Hopkinson, 2017), interpersonality framework (Suau Jiménez, 2017)). Given the spread of the English language as a lingua franca in the field of travel and tourism (see Crystal, 2003), research activity has largely centred on English texts. As of late, scholars' interest has been shifting to language material in other languages (e.g., Spanish (Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2018)), frequently for the purposes of cross-linguistic or cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., English and Italian (Guzzo & Gallo, 2019; Napolitano, 2018), English, Italian and Dutch (Cenni & Goethals, 2020)). While negative reviews have caught significant attention, the reviews displaying positive polarity remain largely understudied (Cenni & Goethals, 2020). Likewise, the research on managerial responses to positive reviews (e.g., Thumvichit, 2016) significantly falls behind that on responses to the reviews expressing criticism and disapproval (e.g., Guzzo & Gallo, 2019; Ho, 2017; Hopkinson, 2017; Napolitano 2018; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014). Since negative reviews may have detrimental effects on a hotel's operation (Levy et. al., 2013), effective responses are a valuable aid in achieving service recovery and enhancing the rapport between businesses and dissatisfied customers. Like some relevant previous studies (e.g., Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2018), this one, however, will not confine its scope to any particular type of responses, but instead, include responses to both positive and negative reviews.

Genre analytic research carried out on managerial responses (Ho, 2017; Thumvichit, 2016; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014) demonstrates that “the review response genre” (Ho, 2017) is a highly conventionalized and formulaic one. In terms of rhetorical structure, it bears a strong resemblance to a traditional business letter (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014). Irrespective of the somewhat different designations given, researchers mostly agree on the distinct moves characteristic of the genre in question. Based on the analysis of 412 responses to negative reviews, Ho (2017), for instance, singles out the following set of moves: Acknowledging Problem, Expressing Feeling, Thanking Reviewer, Continuing Relationship, Denying Problem, Greeting, Recognizing Reviewer's Value and Self-Promoting, with the first three being obligatory and the remaining five optional (a threshold set at 60% occurrence). Except for criticism-addressing moves, these are also common in responses to positive reviews, yet with different rates of occurrence (see Thumvichit, 2016).

Moving from genre theory into the realm of pragmatics, the identified moves show clear associations with speech acts, specifically those falling into the category of “expressives” (Searle, 1969, 1976). Having firmly established themselves as a line of enquiry worth pursuing, speech acts belonging to this group have been researched in various contexts (see, for instance, Ogiemann, 2009, for surveys on apologies, Dayter, 2016, for seminal publications on compliments, and Jautz, 2013, for previous research on thanking). Expressives, if considered collectively, seem to be an under-researched speech act category, especially when compared to some others like directives (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017). A similar point might be made about Tripadvisor responses. Apologies, reasonably enough, stand out for the amount of scholarly concern (e.g., Hopkinson 2017; Napolitano 2018). Along with thanking and the acts of praise, they have also been analyzed in the context of mitigation strategies in hotel review/response pairs written in Spanish (Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2018). Expressives in managerial responses in English, to the best of my knowledge, have not been specifically addressed, hence a motive for the current study. It is noteworthy that politeness considerations heavily determine the realization of expressive acts (Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2010). “Developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction” (Lakoff, 1975, p. 64), politeness is mainly manifested through language use (Leech, 2014, p. ix). Abundant evidence from research in cross-cultural and intercultural communication suggests that speech act realization and the use of linguistic resources for politeness are deeply dependent on social, cultural milieu (see Holmes, 2012; Leech, 2014; Watts, 2003, and references therein), with Tripadvisor responses being no exception (Hopkinson, 2017; Napolitano, 2018). Conducting a comparative study may thus be a worthy attempt.

Conceived as a contribution to the speech-act research on “digital tourism discourse” (Cenni & Goethals, 2020), this study investigates expressive illocutionary acts in managerial responses written in English by comparing the ways in which they are realized, with manifestations of politeness a focus of analysis, in 320 Tripadvisor responses given by hotels based in two countries, Serbia and England, characterized by significantly different cultural values. An overall aim of the current research is to find out whether the speech acts which tend to come in the form of formulaic, routinized expressions when occurring in responses posted from two culturally different settings exhibit some differences in linguistic politeness as a reflection of culture-specific politeness values. In this regard, some caveats and qualifications are in order.

Highlighting cultural differences and their manifestations in speech act production would, admittedly, be the aim par excellence for a cross-cultural study. This study examines monolingual data, however, and, accordingly, the strand of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) could provide a more suitable framework. As a blend of second language acquisition research and pragmatics, ILP refers to “the study of non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language (L2)” (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993, p. 3). Considering that English is acquired and used differently in England and Serbia (L1 and L2 respectively), ILP appears well suited for the intended analysis. Yet, the issue inevitably arising is that of nativeness and/or nationality inasmuch as it is fairly common in the tourism industry to employ workforces from different parts of the world (Hopkinson, 2017; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), and Tripadvisor offers no means to determine conclusively the nationality of the respondents. It thus stands to reason that the analyzed responses were written by hotel representatives with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, albeit with the majority being the native speakers of the respective languages, at least if judged by their (sur)names. Granted that they were

responding to international customers, managerial responses may arguably represent instances of intercultural communication. Therefore, we may well talk about “global English” (Crystal, 2003) used in professional communication in different sociocultural settings. While, for this reason, we will not stick to the L1/L2 distinction, it seems unavoidable to take into account some interlanguage-specific features, particularly transfer.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

The study addresses widely explored topics, therefore I will only point up and provide a brief account of the concepts and models which are the cornerstones of the ensuing analysis.

2.1. What counts as an expressive?

In the wake of Austin’s (1962) groundbreaking lectures on speech acts, scholars (e.g., Bach & Harnish 1979; Searle, 1969) have proposed several speech act taxonomies. Notwithstanding different defining criteria, the taxonomies typically include a class of acts “concerned roughly with reactions to behaviour and with behaviour towards others and designed to exhibit attitudes and feelings” (Austin, 1962, p. 83). However, not only has this “peculiarly rampant” (Austin, 1962, p. 85) class of illocutionary acts been termed differently (behabitives (Austin, 1962), expressives (Searle, 1969), acknowledgements (Bach & Harnish, 1979)) but has also been illustrated with differing paradigms of expressive verbs which name illocutionary acts. Alongside prototypical examples, *apologize*, *congratulate*, *condole*, and *thank*, numerous other verbs/actions feature, albeit inconsistently (*commending*, *cursing*, *challenging* (Austin, 1962), *welcome*, *deplore* (Searle, 1976; Searle & Vanderveken, 1985), *bid*, *accept*, *reject* (Bach & Harnish, 1979), *greet* (Bach & Harnish, 1979; Searle & Vanderveken, 1985)), *complain*, *lament*, *protest*, *boast*, *compliment*, *praise* (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985).

As theoretical foundations set up by philosophers seem to remain a canonical approach that subsequent pragmatic studies build on (Leech, 1983, inter alia), the outlook on expressives here adheres to Searle’s (1969, 1976) positions. Searle’s taxonomy is based on twelve “dimensions” which vary across illocutionary acts, three of which are especially significant: illocutionary point (the purpose of a type of illocution), the direction of fit (whether the propositional content of illocution is intended to match the world or get the world to match the propositional content), and sincerity condition (the psychological state, attitude etc., which the speaker expresses in the performance of the illocutionary act) (Searle, 1976, pp. 2-5). Expressives are the class of acts whose illocutionary point “is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle, 1976, p. 12). What distinguishes this class from four others is that expressives are presupposed to be true and thus have no direction of fit (Searle, 1976, pp. 12-13). In other words, they “have the function of expressing, or making known, the speaker’s psychological attitude towards a state of affairs which the illocution presupposes” (Leech, 1983, p. 106).

Viewed as such, expressives could comprise “a myriad of unconnected acts” (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017, p. 156) and be extended to include overt expressions of a personal stance (Mišić Ilić & Radulović, 2015) or emotives (Maíz-Arévalo, 2017). The analysis presented here is, however, delimited to the most relevant illocutions belonging to the expressive category (Leech, 2014, Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2010) deemed to be the most genre-salient. Following Searlian tradition, speech acts are analyzed from a “macropragmatic” (see Cap, 2011) perspective, i.e. at the utterance level and granting the possibility that more than one act may be performed by a single utterance. This approach seems well suited for present purposes as most acts under study are frequently single-utterance or even-single word acts. This is especially evident in the case of *greetings* and *farewells*, or salutations for short, which mark the beginning or ending of conversation (Jucker, 2017, p. 39) and in turn function as openings and closings in emails (Musgrave, 2020; Waldvogel, 2007). They are considered to be devoid of propositional content (Searle, 1969, p. 67) and hence only marginally illocutionary acts (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985, p. 215). A type of expressives somewhat related to salutations and analysed here is that of *good wishes*, or biddings (Bach & Harnish, 1979), comprising “remarks that show sympathy with O by expressing the wish or hope that things will turn out well for her” (Leech, 2014, p. 212). The type we will also focus on is *thanking* by means of which S expresses gratitude and appreciation to H for performing some action which is good or beneficial to S (Searle, 1969, p. 65, 67). Thus far, the expressions of gratitude have been well-researched in the studies focused on English (e.g., Aijmer, 1996; Cheng, 2010; Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2010) including its varieties (e.g., Jautz, 2013). Still, it seems that much more attention has been given to apologies, another type we are interested in (see e.g., Aijmer 1996; Ogiermann, 2009, and references therein), especially in cross-linguistic research undertaken within the extensive Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns research (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) and the studies inspired by it. These two types share some important similarities. Both are post-event acts (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) but of different orientations: while thanking is O-oriented, presupposing the previous action by the O, apology is S-oriented, presupposing a previous action by the S (Leech, 2014, p. 121). The act of apologizing may well be treated as “a speech act set” since it, besides the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), may also include other potential strategies: an explanation, an acknowledgement of the S’s responsibility, an offer of repair and a promise of forbearance (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 207). Here, however, we will focus only on the “head act”, i.e. the main illocution. These four types of expressives include, to a lesser or greater extent, formulaic elements, and thus differ from compliments whose formulaicity is disputed (Jucker, 2017). Compliments generally refer to “personal compliments” (Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2010) which explicitly or implicitly attribute credit to H for

some “good” (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the S and the H (Holmes, 1998, p. 446). While the speech acts fitting this definition do not occur in my data, there are examples of S-oriented acts related to S’s expression of positive evaluation of their own “good” which is positively valued by the S and the potential audience, i.e. self-praise, or *self-compliments* (Dayetr, 2016).

2.2. Politeness framework

This study embraces pragmatic approaches to linguistic politeness (Lakoff’s (1975) rule-based view, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory propagating the concept of face, Leech’s (1983, 2014) conversational-maxim approach). Evaluation is considered fundamental to the analysis of politeness (Holmes, 2012). Following Leech (2014), the degree of politeness of an utterance may be assessed by taking into account pragmalinguistic (or context-free) or sociopragmatic (or context-sensitive) politeness, i.e. absolute and relative politeness (Leech, 1983). The two constitute distinct facets, or aspects, of the politeness phenomenon: “one oriented to linguistic realizations of politeness, and the other oriented to the social or cultural determinants of politeness” (Leech, 2014, p. 13). Following this line of reasoning, the study looks into the politeness of expressives from these two complementing perspectives.

As regards the former, I adopt Leech’s (2014) tack. Leech (2014) considers linguistic politeness from a speech act perspective and takes up a close-up view of language as a starting point, thereby providing an analytical framework valid for addressing the interface between pragmatics and linguistic form in the investigated genre. The concept of face is also a valuable feature in the proposed model, however, viewed somewhat differently than in Brown and Levinson’s theory, and defined as “the positive self-image or self-esteem that a person enjoys as a reflection of that person’s estimation by others” (Leech, 2014, p. 25). Holding the view that to be polite means “to speak or behave in such a way as to (appear to) give benefit or value not to yourself but to the other person(s), especially the person(s) you are conversing with” (Leech, 2014, p. 3), Leech suggests five matching pairs of maxims overarched by the General Strategy of Politeness. Pos-politeness maxims are oriented towards assigning a high value to the other person’s (O’s) wants/ qualities/ opinions/ feelings and a low value to one’s own (S’s), while neg-politeness maxims, conversely, are oriented towards assigning a low value to S’s wants/ qualities/ opinions/ feelings and a high value to O’s (Leech, 2014, p. 90). The only exception of pos-politeness which involves giving a high value to S is in his/her obligation to O. Both pos- and neg-politeness are of scalar nature so that the degrees of politeness can be increased in both cases, yet with divergent mechanisms (magnifying/ strengthening the expression of positive value and diminishing/ softening the expression of negative value respectively (Leech, 2014, p. 12)), i.e. using different strategies for modifying the strength or force of speech acts (Holmes, 1984). Politeness is a social phenomenon as well, which imposes the need to get down to the socially-oriented facet of politeness. In so doing, the basic insights from somewhat “contrasting” (Holmes, 2012) postmodern approaches (Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003) are also taken into consideration primarily because they stress the impact of social systems.

2.3. Cultural values

The conceptualization and norms of politeness differ across cultures, so Leech’s Maxims may apply differently in different cultures (Holmes, 2012, p. 210). In addressing the potential impact of cultural factors, I rely on Hofstede’s model (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede et al., 2010) of “national cultures” which has rendered a useful benchmark for analyzing politeness (see Ogiermann, 2009). Defining culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6), Hofstede evaluates the impacts of culture on the values in the workplace through a two-round questionnaire survey initially conducted within a multinational company (IBM) and involving employees from 67 countries. This has resulted in a four-(later five-)dimensional model of cultural differences, according to which each country is characterized by a score on the following dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and long-term orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010).

3. Data and methods

The corpus consisting of 320 managerial responses posted on Tripadvisor, equally distributed between those from Serbian and English hotels, was compiled in January 2021. My intention was to ensure individual variability (see Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 197), which imposed a manual retrieval of the data. Further, the availability of responses from Serbian hotels determined the size and contents of the corpus. The responses from all hotels in three urban tourism destinations in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Niš) listed on Tripadvisor were searched and one response per hotel representative, i.e. the first one to either positive (“very good” or “excellent”) or negative review (“terrible” or “poor”), was included in the corpus. This yielded 160 responses constituting the SRB sub-corpus, as shown in Table 1 which summarizes the structure of the corpus. In creating a sub-corpus of managerial responses from English hotels (ENG), a somewhat different procedure was applied. Only the responses from London-based hotels were considered, one per hotel. To achieve the sub-corpora equivalence, the responses written by English managers match those from Serbian hotels in terms of the distribution between the types of responses and the hotel category. A difference in the time span covered (see Table 1) was deemed irrelevant to the current study.

| Sub-corpus | No. of hotels | | | | No. of responses | | Running words | Time span |
|------------|---------------|----------|-----|----|------------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | positive | negative | | |
| SRB | 5-star | Belgrade | 3 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 16,669 | 1/5/2014 – 31/12/2021 |
| | | Novi Sad | 2 | | 1 | 3 | | |
| | 4-star | Belgrade | 35 | 41 | 43 | 57 | | |
| | | Novi Sad | 4 | | 6 | 4 | | |
| | | Niš | 2 | | 2 | 1 | | |
| | 3-star | Belgrade | 9 | 10 | 12 | 11 | | |
| | | Novi Sad | 1 | | 0 | 2 | | |
| | Total | | | 56 | 72 | 88 | | |
| ENG | 5-star | London | 22 | 9 | 13 | 15,675 | 1/6/2016 – 31/12/2021 | |
| | 4-star | | 113 | 51 | 62 | | | |
| | 3-star | | 25 | 12 | 13 | | | |
| | Total | | 160 | 72 | 88 | | | |

Table 1. Data details

The study relies on a combination of approaches and methods. *AntConc* software (v 3.5.2 Anthony, 2018) was used first to obtain the information on the frequency (concordance searches) of relevant clues (IFIDs identified by Searle (1969, p. 30), nouns and adjectives (e.g., *thanks*, *sorry*) which serve a similar role as performative verbs do), if applicable (a top-down approach), and then the responses were manually searched to filter the retrieved results (e.g., in case of *sorry*) and identify less obvious realizations of the investigated acts (a bottom-up approach). The procedure was repeated for each type of expressives identified in the corpus. The findings, summarized in tables for ease of reference, were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The distribution of expressives

Expectedly enough, expressive illocutions permeate my data, occurring more than three times in a response and being slightly more frequent in Serbian data (3.78 vs. 3.60) (throughout the study, the numbers in brackets follow the order of the data presentation in tables (SRB, ENG)). Judging from the identified expressives and the belonging numbers of occurrences displayed in Table 2, the investigated sub-corpora share a considerable similarity. What follows is the analysis of the manifestations of politeness.

| | SRB | ENG |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| Greetings and farewells | 301 | 270 |
| Good wishes | 3 | 11 |
| Thanking | 197 | 191 |
| Apologies | 56 | 52 |
| Self-compliments | 48 | 52 |
| Total | 605 | 576 |

Table 2. Expressives in managerial responses

4.2. Pragmalinguistic aspects

4.2.1. Greetings and farewells

The greetings in our data shown in Table 3 involve various terms and phrases, roughly categorized into five strategies varying widely according to the level of formality and the type of politeness effects. They oscillate between the conventional formulae typical of formal letters (*Dear Mr./Ms. surname*) and very friendly familiar options (*Hello there*) in both sub-corpora. However, the two show some important variations in the use of greeting words (GW) and forms of address.

| Strategy | Realization | SRB | ENG |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| GW + title + sur/(nick)name | <i>Dear Sir/Madam</i> | 3 | 0 |
| | <i>Dear Mr./Ms. (sur)name</i> | 27 | 2 |
| GW + (nick) name | <i>Dear (nick)name</i> | 61 | 92 |
| | <i>Hi / Hello (nick)name</i> | 2 | 16 |
| GW+ (valued) guest | <i>Dear valued guest/customer</i> | 16 | 3 |
| | <i>Dear guest/reviewer</i> | 37 | 24 |
| GW | <i>Good morning/afternoon</i> | 0 | 2 |
| | <i>Dear / Respected</i> | 9 | 0 |
| | <i>Hello (there)</i> | 1 | 1 |
| (Nick)name | | 0 | 1 |
| Total | | 156 | 141 |

Table 3. Greetings in managerial responses

The greetings uncharacteristic of formal settings (*(nick)name*, *Hello there*, *Hi/Hello(+ (nick)name)*) are more frequently used by London managers and only sparingly employed by Serbian ones (1.9% vs. 12.8%). Unsurprisingly, the use of initial endearment (*Dear*) is by far the most preferred option. However, instead of a polite formulaic opening *Dear H*, a preferred e-mail greeting in professional correspondence, a GW *Dear* occurs without a reviewer's (nick)name in eight responses from Serbian hotels (5.1%). This may be seen as a kind of negative pragmatic transfer and attributed to the practice of using this form as an alternative to the Serbian typical opener *Poštovani* (whose English equivalent (*Respected*) also occurs once) commonly considered an appropriate salutation even when not followed by an addressee's (sur)name. The findings indicate that Serbian managers have a stronger preference for greetings that tender respect or attach importance to a reviewer. Besides one opening stressing appreciation (*Dear and appreciated*), this is principally evidenced by address forms. Greetings involving forms of formal address (*Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Sir*, *Madam*), which are clustering at the higher end of a pragmalinguistic politeness scale, are quite characteristic of the SRB responses (19.2%, 1.4%). Again, a transfer may be observed. Following conventions applicable in Serbian, *Mr./Ms.* are occasionally used with a first name (*Dear Mr. Goran*), or alone, thus yielding inappropriate constructions. The tendency towards showing respect possibly accounts for a greater number of *Dear valued guest*, an explicit embodiment of Leech's (2014) view of politeness, in the SRB (10.3% vs. 2.1%). Similarly, the lower use of *Dear (nick)name* (39.1% vs. 65.2%) might indicate that Serbian managers regard addressing by nickname as lacking an appropriate level of respect.

Since a greeting is used by S as a courteous recognition of H, its omission sets at the bottom of a politeness scale. My findings on greetings and farewells reveal that London managers dispense with these "politeness markers" (Waldvogel, 2007, p. 458) more easily than Serbian ones. Farewells, the phrases occurring above the signature, or in case of its absence, at the end of a response, partially overlap with other expressive illocutions, specifically thanking, good wishes and the expressions of the S's affective stance. All instances of the expressions of gratitude, including those "marking segments in interaction" (Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2010, p. 173), are considered the speech act of thanking, hence not included here but discussed below. The forms semantically related to wishes which are well-established as pure greetings are viewed as instances of farewells only when occurring in the closing move. When found elsewhere, including pre-closings, they are taken as instances of good wishes. A range of 27 identified expressions splits into two strategies (farewell formulae and "phatic comments" (Waldvogel, 2007)), allowing for further groupings based on keywords. Here, expanded farewells combining two strategies (*Kind regards and best wishes*) have been counted as two farewells. Following Musgrave (2020), the *Best* category comprises the instances of *Best* and of *All the best*, while expressions *Best regards* and *Best wishes* have been taken as the instances of respective nouns and counted accordingly.

| Strategy | Realization | SRB | ENG |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----|-----|
| Farewell formula | <i>Yours / Sincerely</i> | 27 | 9 |
| | <i>Regards</i> | 108 | 99 |
| | <i>Respectfully</i> | 1 | 0 |
| | <i>Warmly</i> | 1 | 0 |
| | <i>Cheers</i> | 0 | 1 |
| Phatic comment | <i>Wishes</i> | 3 | 10 |
| | <i>Best</i> | 1 | 5 |
| | <i>Have</i> | 2 | 0 |
| | <i>Take</i> | 1 | 1 |
| | <i>Other</i> | 1 | 4 |
| Total | | 145 | 129 |

Table 4. Farewells in managerial responses

The findings presented in Table 4 closely correspond to those on greetings regarding English managers' disposition towards informality. Farewells characteristic of formal business correspondence (containing *Yours* and/or *Sincerely*) are more commonly used by Serbian managers (18.6% vs. 6.7%), while the formulae seen as less suitable for work-related correspondence (*Cheers*, *Warmly*) and phatic comments (*See you soon*) (Musgrave, 2020) feature more prominently in the ENG responses (6.2% vs. 16.3%). In between are the farewells of the *Regards* type, the most preferred option almost equally represented in two data sets (74.5%, 76.7%). Among the available alternatives (*Warm(est)/Best regards*), (*With Kind regards*) stands out for its frequencies, although less so in the SRB (44.4% vs. 76.7%), while the single-word formula is highly dispreferred (one instance in the ENG).

4.2.2. Good wishes

Expressing fellow feelings with others, good wishes relate to an emotive element of politeness and to the Sympathy Maxim (Leech, 2014, p. 208). As shown in Table 5, well-wishing tends to be most frequently expressed by illocutionary verbs (*wish*, *hope*) in my data. Apart from stereotyped expressions related to some specific pretext (*Happy Anniversary*), or expressions of concern and optimism for a reviewer's well-being, especially in view of the current pandemic threats (typically conveyed by an imperative (*Stay/Keep safe*)) found in both data sets, the ENG responses offer examples with *hope* (*I hope you are well*).

| Realization | SRB | ENG |
|----------------|-----|-----|
| IFID | 2 | 9 |
| <i>Happy X</i> | | 1 |
| Imperative | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 3 | 11 |

Table 5. Good wishes in managerial responses

It is worth mentioning that the hopes oriented towards the reviewer's subsequent actions that the hotel may ultimately benefit from do not fall under this group as they are associated with self-prospects rather than "another's prospects" (Bach & Harnish, 1979, pp. 52-53).

4.2.3. Thanking

Managerial responses abound with expressions of gratitude. Yet, not all of them count as the speech act of thanking as they do not meet the propositional content condition. This specifically applies to the expressions involving a past action carried out by H (Searle, 1969, p. 67), such as those implying H's future actions (*I would very much appreciate if you could*), and the ones constituting generalized declarations of appreciation of other's acts (*We highly appreciate our guest comments*). As for the illocutions with a core function of expressing the feeling of gratitude, the findings presented in Table 6 reveal close similarities between the two sub-corpora in the numbers and the prevailing strategies. Thanking is a typical initial move after greeting, which may well be repeated in the body of a response or used as a final/closing move (Ho, 2017; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), which explains why these acts outnumber the responses analyzed here. Further, thanking may occur either as a head act or a mitigating supportive move in apologizing.

| Strategy | Realization | SRB | ENG |
|------------------------|---|-----|-----|
| Hedged performative | | 15 | 4 |
| Performative utterance | IFID +intensifier+for | 28 | 30 |
| | IFID+ for | 117 | 129 |
| | IFID+ intensifier | 2 | 5 |
| | IFID | 3 | 3 |
| Semi-performative | intensifier+grateful+for | 3 | 2 |
| | thankful / grateful +for | 3 | 0 |
| Appreciation | intensifier +appreciate(d) / appreciative | 10 | 5 |
| | appreciate | 16 | 13 |
| Total | | 197 | 191 |

Table 6. Thanking in managerial responses

A substantial proportion of thanking (83.7%, 89.5%) is done via an explicit IFID (*thank you, thanks*) which agrees with previous studies (Aijmer, 1996; Cheng, 2010). Simple thanking, by using the IFID only (Cheng, 2010), and the acts realized as two-word ones (*Many thanks*) are exceptionally rare and confined to a (pre-)closing move (2.5%, 3.7%). Compared to *thanks*, *thank you* is much more conventional and although being well-accepted in various contexts (Cheng, 2010, p. 266) tends to be associated with more formal ones (Jautz, 2013, p. 13). *Thank you* far outstrips *thanks* in our data, yet the relation between the two forms in the SRB is 20:1, whereas it is 10:1 in the ENG sub-corpus. The utterances with *thanks* typically involve elaboration. Wordiness tends to demonstrate close associations with politeness (Leech, 2014), so managers resort to various elaborate strategies to increase politeness effects. A widespread practice involves naming the reason for S's gratitude by means of a for-clause (84.3%, 86.4%), typically the act of reviewing or the latest stay at the hotel. Frequently, evaluative adjectives occur which can be considered lexical modifiers adding to politeness effects (*Thank you for your kind feedback*). Quite common is to point out that the reviewer put in some effort to carry out the action (*for taking the time to write*), implying that not everybody would be ready to do that.

While there are no notable distinctions in these respects, some appear with hedged performatives. They are not a common feature in the data, yet are almost four times more frequent in the SRB (7.7% vs. 2.1%). Largely, these are "embedding constructions" (Jautz, 2013, p. 10) with verbs conveying S's emotional involvement (*want, wish, would like*). By implicating that it is S's willingness that motivates the act, embedded thanks seem to be charged with feelings implying that the S is really delighted with the beneficial act and hence feels the urge to express gratitude. One instance in the SRB data involves embedding into a request (*First of all let us thank you*) where the S appears to be asking for permission, although no objection to hinder the enactment can be objectively expected and the illocutionary act is performed. Hedged performatives may combine with intensification, a typical type of "internal modification" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) aimed at increasing the politeness of pos-politeness illocutions. Intensifier refers to what Brown and Levinson term hedging viewed as "intensifying modifiers fulfil the sub-strategy of exaggerating (interest, approval, sympathy with H)" (1987, p. 104). In two instances, one from each data set, adverbs are used to increase the sincerity of the act (*We would like to deeply thank you for, I would also like to sincerely thank you*). When *thank you* occurs in its nominal version, again one instance per data set, attributive adjectives signal the increased level of gratitude (*a tremendous/big thank you*). By far most commonly, adverbial expressions of degree are used for "emphasizing or boosting the illocutionary force of a speech act" (Holmes, 1984). Besides *many* premodifying *thanks* and *so/very much* occurring as complements of *thank you* in both sub-corpora, the ENG also offers examples of *ever so* and *kindly*, each used once with *thank you*, as well as the only instance of double intensification (*Thank you very much indeed*).

Interestingly, the SRB sub-corpus shows greater variation in expressing gratitude with other semantically related lexical devices, specifically considering the adjectives (*thankful* and *appreciative*, each occurring once) not found in the ENG and boosting the force of such utterances. *Truly* and *very* intensify *grateful* in the SRB, whereas only *most* is used in the ENG responses. In this sub-corpus, *appreciate* occurs with *really* and (*very*) *much*, also found in impersonal constructions. In addition to these, in the SRB, we find *truly, sincerely* and emphatic verb *do* emphasizing the sincerity of thanks. Another politeness-related feature characteristic of the SRB responses is the occurrence of the capitalized *You* appearing in almost the tenth (9.38%) of instances of *thank you*. Unlike English, Serbian holds the *T/V* distinction between familiar and honorific formal/polite second-person pronouns (*ti/vi*) used when addressing a person in a position of respect, and *vi* may be capitalized in writing. Hence, *thank You* is aimed at increasing the politeness effect, albeit conforming to the pragmatic norms of Serbian.

4.2.4. Apologies

Similarly to thanking, apologies can be realized either explicitly by using performative verbs or implicitly via semantically related assertive utterances. As regards the latter, discerning apologies from the expressions of S's affective stance appears to be complicated. In particular, this is the case with (*I'm*) *sorry* (following Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, considered a performative verb rather than a half-performative (Austin, 1962)) which "operates in an ambivalent way": sometimes is equivalent to *I apologize*, sometimes describes S' feelings, sometimes does both at once (Austin, 1962, p. 87). Regarding this pragmatic duality, I take not only the S's regret for the offence but also their acceptance of direct or indirect responsibility as the essential felicity conditions for an apology (Bach & Harnich, 1979; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Accordingly, responsibility acceptance, indicated by the complementation of the expression of regret or by the cues from the wider context (Hopkinson, 2017), is taken as a litmus test in resolving the ambiguities with other lexical means potentially used to perform an apology.

The findings summarized in Table 7 accord well with those of previous analyses of this genre (Guzzo & Gallo 2019; Hopkinson, 2017). The performative *apologize* (spelling alternations (*apologize/-se*) considered to be of no relevance to this study), along with its nominal version (*apology/apologies*), turns out to be the prevalent IFID in both data sets (76.8%, 88.5%). Worth noting is that the two show divergent use of the first-person pronouns and adjectives in that the plural forms are a more significant feature of the SRB (67.8% vs. 46.2%). The overall predominance of *apologize* over *sorry*, which occurs as an apology IFID relatively rarely (19.6%, 17.3%), might be expected as the former is "a formal on-record apology" (Leech, 2014, p. 127) and, in turn, more likely to occur in written texts (Guzzo & Gallo, 2019, pp. 147-148). Unlike Hopkinson's (2017) study, mine does not reveal a much stronger preference for *sorry* in the responses written by non-native speakers. It, however, suggests that the difference lies in deploying the structures with nominal forms as they are almost two times more frequent in the ENG sub-corpus (21.4% vs. 44.2%). This might be indicative of the stronger tendency among English managers towards avoiding "formulaic expression of regret (a performative verb)" (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 206). Some sort of intensification, used in more than a third of apologies (39.3%, 38.5%), presumably serves a similar purpose.

| Strategy | Realization | SRB | ENG |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Hedged apology | | 17 | 28 |
| Performative utterance | intensifier+IFID | 16 | 8 |
| | IFID | 16 | 14 |
| Other expressions | (intensifier) <i>apologies</i> | 5 | 2 |
| | <i>regret/regretful</i> | 2 | 0 |
| Total | | 56 | 52 |

Table 7. Apologies in managerial responses

One way of reinforcing politeness is making regret appear more profound and genuine through modifiers which add attitudinal or emotive meaning. Besides *sincerely* and *truly*, the ENG offers examples of *apologise unreservedly* and *most profusely*, one instance each. Increasing the apologetic force of regret expressions by degree adverbs (*very/really*) seems to be more a characteristic of the SRB data as is the use of emphatic *do* to express S's emotional involvement (*do apologize*). However, the intensification may not necessarily lead to increasing politeness, particularly in a case of co-occurrence with a linguistic device which signals non-factivity and thus serves as a "partial waiver of the propositional content condition" (Leech, 2014, p. 123). Such qualified apologies (Leech, 2014, p. 123) are not particularly prominent in the data, still are two times more frequent in the ENG (7.1% vs. 15.4%). The clearest instances are when the proposition related to the offence is presented as conditional (*I do apologize if you met some inconvenience*) (5.3%, 1.9%). The conditional clause indicates S's reservations regarding the reality (and hence validity) of the offence to be admitted, and attenuates the apologetic force of the illocution. In my corpus, a linguistic item most frequently used as a "content-oriented downtoner" (Holmes, 1984) is epistemic *may* typically accompanied by nonfactive *any* (*We apologise unreservedly for any embarrassment that may have been caused*). Serving as offence/responsibility disclaimers, these linguistic items function as hedges. They are used when the S has the need for protection (Lakoff, 1975, p. 54), which may be the case here. If apologies are taken as the acts that "directly damage S's positive face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 68), hedges can then be seen as a self-protective strategy used to redress face. Although hedging is said to increase politeness effects, this seems not to be so with hedged apologies, i.e. *apologize* or *apologies* embedded into "apologetic formulae" (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 95). While over half of apologies in the ENG are hedged, this strategy accounts for less than a third of apologies in the SRB (30.3% vs. 53.9%). Wider use of the nominal *apologies* in the ENG, mainly found in these structures, underlies this disparity. Possibly, it is also the reason behind a stronger preference for conveying apologies in the disguise of requests (*Can I/Let/Allow me, Please accept*) over using the expressions of willingness and desires (*I would like to apologize*) in this data set (57.2% vs. 25% of hedged apologies respectively), while there are no significant distinctions in embedding apologies in the SRB (41.2 vs. 47.1%).

Just like thanking, apologies are aimed at preserving a balance of value between S and O. Apologies “arise from the offense committed by the S” (Leech, 2014, p. 8), which in this genre is the S’s failure to provide the adequate, or expected, level of service. They have an intended remedial effect and are meant to be face-enhancing to H, which relates them to pos-politeness (Leech, 2014; Ogiermann, 2009). Although apologies are part of remedial interchanges that restore S’s positive face, the effects of the recognition of an offence on S’s face cannot be eliminated. In the case of an existing contractual relationship between accommodation providers and guests, assuming responsibility on the part of the S as a hotel representative may not be only a face-threatening act for the S but may ultimately have legal or financial consequences. Reasonably, the expressions of regret tend to be more frequently used to express S’s affective stance than to issue an apology.

4.2.5. Self-compliments

Self-compliments are typically realized indirectly using lexemes, most frequently adjectives, with appreciative meaning. The illocutions which involve giving favourable value to S’s properties occur at similar rates in the SRB and the ENG, 48 and 52 instances respectively. Considering the genre in question, these should be seen as positive disclosure rather than bragging (see Dayter, 2016, p. 66), although marked vocabulary is not uncommon (strong adjectives, comparative and superlative forms, frequency adverbs). Self-compliments include the attributions of the factors which create guests’ satisfaction (effective service delivery, the direction of the hotel’s policies, qualities of its employees), with particular stress on customer orientation (*We always strive to deliver the best experience for our guests*) and the statements of pleasure deriving from the characteristics of the hotel’s features and facilities or prior guests’ evaluations.

Contrary to other expressive acts, self-compliments, or boasts, are commonly associated with neg-politeness as they indicate that the S does not care about H’s feelings (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 67) and involve a breach of Modesty Maxim (Leech, 1983, p. 132). Lying in the open space, managerial responses are available to everyone, and thus share persuasive aims with other promotional genres of tourism discourse. Therefore, maximizing the expression of dispraise of the S could hardly be beneficial. Rather, attending to the S’s face in the form of self-compliments can have favourable effects on customers’ retention and attraction. That means that self-compliments in responses do not threaten the O’s positive face, by implying that the S respects H’s wants and needs.

4.3. Sociopragmatic aspects

Due to their convivial function (the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity and illocutionary goals coincide), the majority of expressive illocutions are intrinsically courteous or polite (Leech, 1983, pp. 103-106), the acts of pos-politeness (Leech, 2014). Politeness is expected to be at a premium in service-providing industries. In the hospitality industry, it is largely associated with hotel service providers’ duty towards their customers. Not taking opportunities for performing polite illocutions may result in breaking the channel of communication with them and ultimately lead to the loss of profit. Regarding the genre in question, the failure to respond, preferably in a timely manner, can be taken as an act of impoliteness. Likewise, conveying the acts of pos-politeness contributes to the development or restoration of harmonious relations between hotel employees and guests. It is debatable, however, whether taking a discursive approach would lead to judging expressive illocutions as indicators of managers’ polite behaviour. Being largely expectable, they constitute what Watts sees as “institutionalised discursive formats” (2003, p. 19). As such, they instantiate so-called politic behaviour, i.e. “linguistic behaviour which is perceived to be appropriate to the social constraints of the ongoing interaction” (Watts, 2003, p. 19). Identified expressives may then be regarded as merely appropriate to the investigated online interactions and as such not polite per se. My analysis has shown that the linguistic practices of English and Serbian hotel managers closely coincide. As expressive speech acts fall, for the most part, within conversational routines (Aijmer, 1996, pp. 6-27), semi-formulaic expressions of procedural meaning (Watts, 2003, pp. 186-199), or pragmaticalized expressions (Leech, 2014), it is unsurprising that managers from the two countries rely on more or less the same, rather limited, range of lexico-grammatical resources. It appears that no significant patterns of variation can be established concerning the indicators of politeness the managers make use of (internal modifications or combining different strategies for particular recurrent acts, notably thanking and apologies). Although a great deal of politeness related to expressives is highly routinized, the findings have revealed some subtle differences which can be correlated with social and cultural factors.

Managers construct their social and professional identity and relationship with guests (see Waldvogel, 2007) through the pragmalinguistic choices they make. This makes expressive acts a constitutive part of “relational work”, defined by Locher and Watts as “the ‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others” (2005, p. 10). The interpersonal aspects of politeness theories align with this view. From a sociopragmatic angle, politeness is considered in terms of three well-known factors pointed out by Brown and Levinson (1987) which closely correspond to the essential dimensions of Leech’s (1983, 2014) trivalent model of politeness. The first two concern the relationship between S and H: vertical distance or power and horizontal distance or solidarity. The third one, the cost-benefit scale or the weightiness of transaction, also subsumes the rights-and-obligation factor (Leech, 2014, p. 107). Since the insights into whether the managers from two countries have the same sense of duty to respond to reviews fall beyond the scope of this study, the illocutions manifesting the Maxim of Obligation might be indicative. Very close numbers show marked similarity between the managers from the two countries in the strength of obligation they have towards their guests to perform a particular action (convey thanks and/or apologize). The same does not hold for the Sympathy Maxim. The numbers of phatic comments occurring as farewells and/or well wishing

suggest that English managers give greater weight to this maxim than Serbian ones do, albeit inconclusively considering a number of these illocutions and the potentially different times of writing responses. Other signs that possibly lend further support to this observation are found in greetings.

The identified dissimilarities in greetings have an important bearing as they set the tone for the communicative event that follows and are “a way of constructing the recipient as worthy of respect” (Waldvogel, 2007, p. 456). The choice of greeting and a form of address are selected based on S’s assessment of their relationship with H in terms of social distance dimensions. They thus are direct reflections of managers’ perceptions of interpersonal relations. Resorting to honorific terms of address and the titles prefixing H’s name implies the asymmetry between S and H in terms of horizontal social distance (the distant, formal relationship) and vertical social distance (H has higher power and status relative to S). In the SRB sub-corpus, these signals of bivalent politeness closely relate to the pronominal address *You* also serving a ‘social indexing’ function (Leech, 2014, pp. 10-11). The greetings used in interactions in which H is high on both scales of distance are more frequent here, while the greetings indicating closeness in terms of social distance scales more frequently occur in the ENG sub-corpus (Table 3). This correlates with other signs of informality found in farewells and thanking which may also be associated with friendliness or familiarity. Taken together, these choices point to a stronger tendency among English managers towards treating reviewers as known individuals, rather than as respected strangers, and developing a relationship of rapport with them. Turning back to Lakoff’s (1975) positions, we may claim that, in Serbian hotels, the greater significance is given to the rule of Formality, whereas that of Camaraderie tends to be applied more often in London hotels. As different cultures consider these rules differently (Lakoff, 1975, p. 68), we may conclude that cultural differences still tend to show up in the investigated instances of intercultural communication.

Putting Hofstede’s model into the picture can increase our understanding of why certain choices are viewed as more appropriate than others in the two hotel establishment settings. The observed differences may be seen as quite plausible manifestations of the differences in cultural value preferences of the two countries, specifically in the dimensions of power distance and individualism. Power distance dimension (large vs. small) depicts “the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 61). On this dimension, Great Britain scores low (index of 35), whereas Serbia scores high (index of 86) (the lowest PD Index being 11 and the highest 104) (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 58-59). This could explain why the responses coming from Serbia place greater value on unequal hierarchical relations between hotel employees and guests on the grounds of the supposed superiority of the latter. It can thus be claimed that hotel employees see paying customers in a similar way as they see their superordinates. Linguistically, this is manifested through the forms assigning power to customers, i.e. those exuding respect and deference. There is a strong correlation between high power distance and low individualism. Based on Individualism index values (ranging from 6 to 91) (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 95-97), Great Britain (index of 89) is an exemplar of the individualist society in which the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group and a high value is placed on personal autonomy. In contrast, Serbia with a low individualism score (25) belongs to collectivist societies in which “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92). This sufficiently accounts for a greater tendency among Serbian managers to construe expressives as the expressions of the attitudes and emotions shared by the group, as indicated by the first person plural forms, rather than those of the undersigned individuals. However, when it comes to the acts highly oriented towards S’s positive face needs, i.e. self-compliments, dissimilarities tend to diminish. The absolute prevalence of *we* over *I* in both data sets demonstrates that, for the purpose of self-promotion, it is the face of the institutional self that is attended to.

5. Concluding remarks

Focused on linguistic politeness, this study has investigated expressive illocutionary acts in 320 managerial responses from English and Serbian hotels paying attention to both the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects. As might have been expected, the study has shown that the acts of pos-politeness are the pervasive feature of managerial responses, although slightly less so in those from English hotels. Unsurprisingly, it has revealed numerous points of similarity between the two sub-corpora. The analysis of five groups of identified expressives (greetings and farewells; good wishes; thanking; apologies; self-compliments) shows that the range of lexico-grammatical resources employed for the purposes of speech acts realization and politeness closely coincide. However, some important differences have emerged including the rate of occurrence of the specific expressive illocutions (notably greetings, farewells and good wishes), the weight given to maxims of politeness (specifically the Sympathy Maxim), and the preference of some lexical choices (particularly those seen through the formality/informality prism). Although being a matter of degree rather than of absoluteness, they are indicative of differing perceptions of interpersonal relations. Put briefly, the signals of closeness between managers and guests in terms of social distance scales are far more characteristic of the reviews from London hotels, while Serbian managers tend to give preference to the forms characteristic of formal relationships. The observed differences have been shown to correlate closely with the differences in cultural value preferences of the two countries in Hofstede et al.’s (2010) dimensions of power distance and of individualism. These findings suggest that there are some elements of national culture in the investigated instances of professional communication.

This study adds to the burgeoning body of speech act research in digital genres and has hopefully provided some fresh insights into the enactment of politeness in managerial responses. However, given the corpus size, which is the

major limitation of this study, a more extensive study would be required to substantiate the findings presented here. Further, the analysis might benefit from extending its scope to include macropragmatic perspective and thus seeing expressives as macro-acts, as done by Hernández Toribio and Mariottini (2018). This seems a promising area for some future research and so does the investigation of expressives and politeness from a cross-linguistic perspective. Considering that contrastive studies on managerial responses from the English-Serbian perspective are practically non-existent, this would be a fruitful area for further work.

From a practical standpoint, the study may carry some implications for the teaching of English for tourism and hospitality purposes. Since the incorporation of empirical research results based on natural language use data into pedagogy has been widely advocated (see Cheng 2010), the insights drawn from this and similar studies could prove informative for teachers. The findings presented above may easily find their application in the design of classroom activities and/or the creation of teaching materials, especially those pertinent to business letter writing. Besides this, by revealing the instances of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer, this research possibly raises the issue of L2 pragmatic competence. On the one hand, the study indicates that teachers might need to (re)consider the amount and quality of pragmatic input, especially given the relative merit of the available textbooks in this regard (see Radovanović & Mićović, 2018, and references therein), and, on the other, points to the need for some future acquisitional and developmental ILP studies focused on Serbian learners' population, specifically prospective hotel managers. What could benefit from a more detailed consideration are potential differences in the modifications of illocutionary acts, particularly hedging, a topic only touched upon in this study.

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