Reorienting the assessment of the conventional expressions of complaining and apologising: From single-response to interactive DCTs

Esther Usó-Juan[1], Alicia Martínez-Flor[2]

Abstract

The importance of assessing pragmatics in the classroom has been recognized as a difficult and complex task since there are a lot of contextual factors that influence an appropriate use of the language. Therefore, it is essential to carefully design the methods that elicit learners' production of a particular pragmatic feature given the fact that the use of a particular elicitation instrument may influence research outcomes. Considering these aspects, the aim of the present paper is the elaboration of a discursive type of instrument, that of an interactive discourse completion task, to assess learners' use of the strategies employed when complaining and apologizing in a second/foreign language context. Additionally, the potential of using verbal reports to obtain learners' insightful information as regards their execution of speech act production is also highlighted by the creation of a retrospective verbal report that may be used in combination with the elicitation method being elaborated. The choice of the speech acts of complaining and apologizing has been done on the fact that the performance of them in a second/foreign language may be a difficult task for learners due to their lack of familiarity with the norms and conventions of the target language which, in consequence, may result in an impolite and rude behaviour. Therefore, learners may require a certain level of pragmatic competence to perform these speech acts in an appropriate way in order to avoid possible communication breakdowns. To do so, learners need to know that the appropriate choice of the conventional expressions of complaining and apologising may depend on sociopragmatic issues such as the social status (low or high) and the social distance (close or distant) between the interlocutors, as well as the intensity of offense (less or more) involved in the communicative act. Considering these aspects, the aim of the present paper is the elaboration of a discursive type of instrument that of an interactive discourse completion task, to assess learners' use of the strategies employed when complaining and apologising in a second/foreign language context. Additionally, the potential of using verbal reports to obtain learners' insightful information as regards their execution of speech act production is also highlighted by the creation of a retrospective verbal report that may be used in combination with the elicitation method being elaborated.

Keywords: *Assessment, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Conventional Expressions, Complaints, Apologies, Test Instruments, Interactive Discourse Completion Tasks, Verbal Reports*

1 Universitat Jaume I, Castellón. Spain, E-mail: euso@ang.uji.es
2 Universitat Jaume I, Castellón. Spain, E-mail: aflor@ang.uji.es

1. Introduction

The field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has been the focus of interest of a lot of scholars in the last decades, and particular attention has recently been paid to the area of testing (Roever, 2005; 2011; Alcón and Martínez-Flor, 2008; Nurani, 2009; Eslami & Mirzaei, 2012; Malekzadeh, 2012). Within this area, it has been argued that since pragmatic language use is a very complex phenomenon with a lot of contextual factors influencing its actual performance, it is of paramount importance to carefully design the methods that elicit learners' production of a particular pragmatic feature. In fact, how to collect appropriate data is a crucial issue in pragmatic research since the use of a particular elicitation instrument may potentially influence research outcomes. That is the reason why continuous improvements concerning research methodologies in the pragmatics realm have been developed (Billmyer and Varhese, 2000; Barron, 2003; Kasper & Roever, 2005; Nickels, 2006; Grabowski, 2007; Schauer, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2010; Liu, 2010; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan, 2011), although there is still the need to further investigate this area by widening the types of data collection instruments created, as well as including different situations such as those that take place in the workplace (Yates, 2010).

In order to address these issues in the present paper, particular attention will be paid to the formulas or conventional expressions that are used to perform the speech acts of complaining and apologising. The rationale behind the selection of these two communicative acts is provided when explaining them. Moreover, it is important to point out that according to Bardovi-Harlig (2006: 3), the term formula makes reference to three different uses: i) developmental formulas (i.e. routines that are learnt as a whole, that is to say as a unique word or expression without analysing the different parts or constituents that form them); ii) target formulas (i.e. routines or conventional expressions that are fixed and typically associated to particular communicative situations) and iii) semantic formulas (i.e. conventional expressions which are considered as the components of a particular speech act). For the purpose of the present paper, we are going to focus on the last use of *formulas*, that is those pragmatic strategies associated to the complaint and apology speech act sets.

Considering therefore the above-mentioned aspects, namely the need to widen the types of data collection instruments created in ILP and the need to include situations that consider interactional exchanges in workplace settings, the aim of the present paper is the elaboration of a discursive type of instrument, that of a written interactive discourse completion test (IDCT) to assess learners' use of the conventional expressions employed when complaining and apologising in English as a foreign language in a Tourism workplace. To this end, we will first review the written data collection techniques employed in ILP by reorienting their assessment adopting a discursive approach. Then, we will describe the communicative acts of complaining and apologising and present the major conventional expressions used when performing them. After that, the design and elaboration of the written IDCT created to assess learners' written production of these expressions, as well as the design of a verbal report questionnaire will be explained. Finally, concluding remarks will be given and practical recommendations highlighted.

2. Collecting written production data in ILP

Kasper and Roever (2005) have examined the main methodological approaches that have been employed to analyse how target language pragmatics is learnt. The authors divide the data collection instruments used in ILP into three groups, that is, those examining spoken interaction; those concerning different types of questionnaires; and finally, those involving

self-report data. The method employed in the first group has been the recording of *authentic discourse* which allows the researcher to observe how participants produce and understand pragmatic information and how they interact in contextual settings. However, since the researcher has no control over the interaction or over how different variables influence participants' behaviour in conversation, other instruments have been proposed within this group such as *elicited conversation* and *role-plays*. In those cases, interactional data are obtained under controlled conditions, since the researcher can determine the setting of the interaction and control the variables intervening in it. Moving to the second group, different questionnaires have been used to examine learners' pragmatic competence namely, *discourse completion tasks or tests* (DCTs), *multiple choice questionnaire* and *scale-response assessment formats*. Thus, DCTs have been used to collect pragmatic production of speech act strategies, *multiple choice questionnaires* serve to measure recognition and interpretation of utterances and *scaled-response formats* have been utilised to evaluate learners' perceptions of pragmatic errors or appropriateness of speech act realisation strategies. Finally, in relation to the third group, that of self-report data, the use of *interviews*, *diaries* and *think-aloud protocols* have been proposed in order to obtain information on learners' cognitive processes regarding their pragmatic performance.

Among these data collection methods, the most widely used to collect learners' written production data have been the DCT (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010). Therefore, for the purposes of the present study we focus on this particular production instrument which is described in detail in the next subsection by presenting the different types it may adopt.

2.1. Assessing pragmatic knowledge through DCTs

The DCT serves as one of the major written data collection instruments in ILP and cross-cultural pragmatics research. This instrument elicits simulated speech act data under control conditions so as to measure pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge in a non-interactive format. As Roever (2005) explains, the DCT is essentially a written type of questionnaire containing a short situational prompt describing the situation (called scenario) and space for the learner to write down what he/she would say (see Example 1).

Example 1
You are about to leave the house for an important appointment when your housemate Jack asks you if you could help him paint his room.
You say: _____
(Roever, 2005: 18)

Optionally, the prompt can be followed by an initiating utterance, and the response gap can be followed by a rejoinder (see Example 2).

Example 2
You are about to leave the house for an important appointment when your housemate Jack comes up to you ad says:
"Hey, would you have a little time? I'm painting my room and I could use some help".
You say: _____
Jack: "That's okay. I'll ask Jane if she can help me."
(Roever, 2005: 19)

The DCT enjoys popularity due to its practicality, that is, it allows the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time (Houck and Gass, 1996) and

unlike oral elicitation techniques, it does not need the error-prone transcription, thus making it easy to compare quantitatively the responses of native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) across cultures (Kasper and Dahl, 1991). Moreover, it creates model responses which are consistent with naturally occurring data, at least in the main patterns and formulas (Golato, 2003). Most importantly, social variables (i.e. age, gender, status or power of interlocutors, social distance, imposition of the situation, etc) can be controlled in the design of the instrument. This fact may shed light on the possible influence of contextual variables on learners' choice of particular forms when writing their responses.

However, the use of DCT as research instrument has been criticised for being too artificial, as it presents short written segments rather than real-life extracts (Rose, 1994) and, as a pen and paper instrument, it has also been claimed to resemble a test-like method (Sasaki, 1998). This is because, despite the responses being thought of as being oral, learners are asked to respond in a written mode what they think they would say in a particular situation, which may not exactly correspond to what they would actually say in the same setting under real circumstances (Golato, 2003). In addition, it lacks negotiation which commonly occurs in authentic discourse due to the absence of interaction between interlocutors (Nurani, 2009). This is particularly problematic given the fact that many speech acts generally occur over several turns and their shape depends on interlocutor's responses (McNamara and Roever, 2006).

In an attempt to remedy the disadvantages of the DCT and to improve its validity in assessing pragmatic meanings, some researchers have refined the design of the traditional DCT. The focus has been on two main aspects, namely the ability of the respondent to i) better understand the context of the situation and ii) take turns. As Bardovi-Harlig (2013) explains, context plays a key role in pragmatics. Whereas NSs may need only a short scenario which explains the setting, NNSs may need more detailed scenarios to imagine the particular setting and interact more naturally. Billmyer and Varghese (2000), for instance, developed a content-enriched DCT that enhanced situational prompts with contextual information. In this study, the authors created two versions of a DCT. The first version included a classic DCT with one or two sentence prompts whereas the second version was more elaborated than the first one, providing more contextual information regarding the situation. As a result of this enhancement, the responses resulted in a greater use in supportive moves in a variety of request situations for NNSs. That is, longer scenarios showed a significant effect on the richness of the data elicited. Context has also been enhanced visually through the use of drawings in the cartoon oral production task (COPT) designed by Rose (2000) or photographs in the studies conducted by Nickels (2006), Schauer (2009) or Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2011). One advantage of visual enhancements is that they may deliver certain details quickly and more naturally (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). Yet, despite effort to enhance context information under controlled conditions, the above formats fail to capture the speech act sequences across multiple turns.

In fact, the lack of turn taking in the DCT has also been addressed by many researchers. For instance, Cohen and Shively (2003) developed the multiple-rejoinder DCT which requires participants to read the description of the situation and all the rejoinders (i.e. the interlocutors' responses in each scenario) and thus respond to several turns over an entire exchange. This way, the multiple rejoinders given by a hypothetical interlocutor provide the direction of the ensuing discourse and help reflecting more closely the conversational turn-taking of natural speech. An additional modification of the traditional DCT to collect turns is what is called the IDCT, which has also been referred to as *free DCT* (Barron, 2003), *reciprocal written task* (Grabowski, 2007) or *written role-play* (Martínez-Flor, in press). These formats also provide a scenario but respondents have to produce a free dialogue,

involving interactive negotiation on the part of the two participants instead of one for each situation. Unlike the traditional DCT where participants elicit data in one turn, the IDCT allows the respondents shape data according to the interlocutors' responses over the course of several turns, resembling thus, a more natural turn-taking behaviour. For example, Martínez-Flor (in press) examined the effects of two production instruments (i.e. written IDCT and oral role-plays) on learners' use of refusals in a foreign language context. Results from her study demonstrated that i) learners' response length when refusing, ii) the amount of refusal formulae employed and iii) the type of refusal strategy chosen was somewhat similar across the two research methods. Considering these findings, the author stated that the particular two instruments employed in her study were found to elicit comparable learners' behaviour when refusing to a variety of requestive situations. More specifically, the design of a written DCT that adopted an interactive structure similar to the role-play, appeared to have exerted a positive effect on learners' responses. In this sense, it seems that although written production questionnaires have received a lot of criticism, when created in an accurate way, can still be effective data collection instruments to examine how learners activate their pragmatic knowledge.

2.2. Combining DCTs with verbal protocols

In the field of ILP, DCTs have been employed in combination with verbal protocols to increase the level of trustworthiness of the results (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010). This fact has to do with triangulation of data. In fact, triangulation is a term defined by Cohen et al. (2007), which refers to the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of aspects of human behaviour. As these authors indicate, the more the methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence in the results can be. Therefore, triangular techniques may help to improve the internal validity of the instrument, that is, the degree to which an instrument measures what it intents to measure, and thus ensures adequate interpretation of the results.

Specifically, verbal reports consist of a technique which can be used to get information about learners' cognitive processes when performing a given task. In particular, this technique might be used either concurrently (i.e. while doing the task) or retrospectively (i.e. immediately after the completion of the task). Robinson (1992) conducted a pioneering study that applied verbal report methods to examine interlanguage pragmatic production. The author combined concurrent and retrospective verbal reporting with a written DCT in order to investigate NNSs' refusal performance. Findings indicated that while concurrent reporting reveals specific information about the planning of the speech act, retrospective reporting aids at generating and investigating hypotheses. Besides this study, further investigations have focused on the use of both concurrent and retrospective verbal reports with written DCTs (Woodfield, 2008, 2010, 2012; Farnia and Wu, 2012). Overall, these studies have demonstrated that by using this instrument, researchers might obtain learners' insightful information (i.e. the planning and execution of speech act production, pragmatic knowledge, as well as the attended aspects when uttering speech acts) that is not accessible through an analysis of DCT response data alone. In this sense, it seems that data triangulation of this type can play a vital role in interpreting the data in a transparent way.

3. Pragmatic features examined: Complaints and Apologies

The pragmatic features examined in this paper are those of complaints and apologies. These speech acts are chosen because they have extensively been investigated in the field of ILP.

Moreover, reacting appropriately to complaints seems to be crucial as it is an important factor in keeping successful communication and maintaining social relationships (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004), specifically in many work situations where "it can be particularly important to understand who can tell whom what to do, under what circumstances and how they do it" (Yates, 2010: 113). Therefore, the testing and teaching of complaint-apology sequences may be included in many English language programs preparing learners for the workplace. For the purpose of the present paper, we are going to focus on the field of Tourism, since these particular speech acts are likely to arise very often in interactional exchanges in this field and, therefore, learners need to handle them properly to avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns in their future jobs.

3.1. Complaints

Complaints belong to the class of expressive acts (Searle, 1969), whose illocutionary point is to express a kind of disapproval or negative feeling towards a particular past event. In the terminology of Leech (1983), the act of complaining is a conflictive speech act that should be avoided because it shows the negative feelings of the speaker and creates a conflict between him/her and the hearer. Therefore, as Olshtain and Weinbach (1987: 19) point out, complaints are a highly complex speech act in which "the speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which affect the speaker unfavourably. This complaint is addressed to the hearer, whom the speaker holds responsible for the offensive action".

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987: 195-196) also discuss the preconditions that are necessary for the speech act of complaining to take place. These factors present the speech events that indicate what makes the participants talk, what they are talking about, and what the purpose of the complaining is. The following four preconditions need to be fulfilled:

i.   The speaker expected a favourable event to occur (an appointment, the return of a debt, the fulfilment of a promise, etc.) or an unfavourable event to be prevented from occurring (a cancellation, damage, insult, etc.). The action results, therefore, in the violation of S's expectations by either having enabled or failed to prevent the offensive event.

ii.   The speaker views action as having unfavourable consequences for the speaker. The action is therefore the offensive act.

iii. The speaker views the hearer as responsible for the action.

iv.   The speaker chooses to express his/her frustration and disappointment verbally.

In this sense, it is important to make a distinction between a direct and an indirect complaint. Whereas an indirect complaint is given to a hearer who is not responsible for the perceived offense (Boxer, 1993, 1996, 2010), a direct complaint is "a direct confrontation performed by a speaker who expresses displeasure or annoyance towards a hearer for a socially unacceptable behaviour, and holds the hearer responsible for this behaviour" (Kozlova, 2004: 85). Clearly, these two types of complaints are quite dissimilar from each other and they are employed in different contexts. In this particular study, however, attention will be paid to direct complaints since they might serve as an initiating speech act of apology sequences. Therefore, when the complaint is performed directly, this speech act is inherently face-threatening to the hearer (Moon, 2001), so in terms of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the act of complaining is a face-threatening act (FTA).

Due to the face-threatening nature it entails, the speaker needs to control the level of directness at which he/she is going to perform the complaint (Chen et al., 2011). Then, the speaker can use different strategies in order to avoid offending the hearer and to remain

polite. Indeed, to complain appropriately and in a socially acceptable manner, special attention needs to be paid to what is said on the basis on three parameters: i) social status, and ii) social distance (Brown and Levinson, 1987), as well as iii) the level of offense involved in the complaint being performed (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1985). However, if considering all these factors when performing an appropriate complaint appears to be challenging for NSs (Murphy and Neu, 1996), their appropriate performance is even more challenging for NNSs and learners who may lack the necessary linguistic proficiency, sociocultural knowledge and pragmatic ability to produce this speech act appropriately. In fact, their lack of familiarity with the norms and pragmatic conventions of the second/foreign language may make them produce unintentionally inappropriate complaints. In this sense, in order to avoid learners being perceived as rude, impolite or even offensive, there is a need to make them aware of the different conventional expressions that may be used depending on the social variables and the degree of politeness involved in a particular situation.

Previous research has proposed different realisations for this speech act (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987, 1993; Trosborg, 1995; Murphy and Neu, 1996; Boxer, 1993, 1996, 2010). For the purposes of this paper, however, we consider the typology presented in Table 1 which has been based on Olshtain and Weinbach's (1987) and Trosborg's (1995) proposals and modified on the basis of analysing learners' written production data in a pilot study conducted with six English NSs and six NNSs with advanced English level. Five main options are available for the realisation of the speech act of complaining: i) *no explicit reproach, ii) expression of disapproval, iii) explicit complaint, iv) expression of accusation and warning, and v) expression of threat*. These five options are presented on a scale that depends on the severity of the complaint ranging from the least (strategy 1) to the most severe (strategy 5).

Table 1. Complaint strategies (adapted from Olshtain and Weinbach, 1987; Trosborg, 1995)

Strategies	Examples
1. No explicit reproach	*Never mind, nothing serious happened*
2. Expression of disapproval	*What terrible bureaucracy!*
3. Explicit complaint	*You're always late*
4. Expression of accusation and warning	*I'll speak to your supervisor*
5. Expression of threat	*I'm not moving one inch unless you change my appointment*

No explicit reproach, which is the least severe and the most indirect expression, is used when the speaker avoids actually mentioning the offensive event. Therefore, the speaker chooses to minimise the FTA of the hearer by avoiding the explicit mention of the offensive event (e.g. "such things happen all the time"). When using the *expression of disapproval*, which is somewhat severe, the speaker chooses to express annoyance, dislike or disapproval of the offensive event but avoids direct reference to the hearer. Therefore, the reference to the offensive act is done in a general and vague manner and there is still avoidance of open FTA (e.g. "such lack of consideration").

The *explicit complaint*, which is fairly severe, is used when the speaker threatens the hearer's face by making a direct complaint but he/she does not say there will be any other consequences. Therefore, when choosing this strategy the speaker performs an open FTA towards the hearer but no sanctions are instigated (e.g. "I've been waiting here for nearly an hour"). By using the *expression of accusation and warning*, which is severe, the speaker explicitly accuses the hearer of the offense directly and hints that there may be consequences

for the offender. Therefore, when choosing this strategy the speaker performs an open FTA and even implies potential sanctions for the hearer (e.g. "Next time I will let you wait for hours").

Finally, the *expression of threat*, which is the most severe and the most direct expression, occurs when the speaker immediately threatens the hearer by attaching him/her. Therefore, when the speaker chooses this strategy, he/she openly attacks the hearer's face and the strategy takes the form of an ultimatum with immediate consequences (e.g. "pay the money right now").

3.2. Apologies

Apologies also belong to the class of expressive acts (Searle, 1969). However, in contrast to complaints, apologies are considered as a type of convivial speech act whose goal is to maintain social contract and restore harmony between the speaker and the hearer (Leech, 1983). Therefore, according to Bergman and Kasper (1993: 82), they can be defined as "compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S (the speaker) was causally involved and which is costly to H (the hearer)". As such, apologies typically occur post-event since they are employed to solve a problem between the two interlocutors, which is usually created by the speaker since he/she has committed an offensive action that has damaged the hearer.

In this sense, the speech act of apologising can be placed within the domain of politeness in which an apology is mainly viewed as a communicative event where the apologiser needs to take into account the other interlocutor's face as an attempt to repair or restore damage to face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, it is important to point out that an apology involves different aspects of face depending on the perspective from which it is considered. For the hearer, an apology is a face-saving act because it provides support for the hearer's negative face as "it is made clear that he/she has been harmed by the speaker's actions" (Sabaté-Dalmau and Curell-Gotor, 2007: 291). Contrarily, for the speaker, "an apology is a face-threatening act (FTA) as it damages the speaker's positive face" (Warga and Schölmberger, 2007: 223). In fact, it implies the acceptance that something wrong has been done, whether on purpose or not. In this case, the apology can adopt a defensive orientation towards saving one's own face by justifying or explaining the reason for his/her failure (Trosborg, 1995).

In a complaint-apology situation, for example, the speaker may find him/herself in a position of "inner conflict" (Edmonson and House, 1981: 145). That is, in receiving a complaint, the apologiser must placate the complainer to restore social harmony, but on the other hand, he/she must also restore his/her own social status (Trosborg, 1995). Therefore, a conflict between these two aims is likely to arise and consequently, as Trosborg (1995: 374-375) indicates, "a complaint is not always followed by an apology. In turn, the recipient of an apology may or may not have been complaining. If a speaker feels he/she has given offence and/or anticipates negative reactions, he/she may try to "soften his/her interlocutor's feelings" by "getting in first" (Edmonson and House, 1981: 153). Thus, although the acts complaint/apology resemble an adjacency pair, one may occur without the other. For the purposes of this study, however, we will consider the communicative event of complaint-apology as an adjacency pair.

Consequently, the speaker needs to consider a series of factors that may have an influence on his/her assumption of responsibility, and therefore choose to apologise or emphasise his/her innocence by not feeling the need to apologise. Such factors include: i) his/her perception of the severity of the offense involved in the communicative act, as well as

ii) the degree of social distance and iii) social power between the two interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1987). On the basis of these three parameters, and similar to complaints, different conventional expressions need to be known by the speaker in order to appropriately perform apologies (if he/she chooses to do so) so that harmony can be restored and, consequently, avoid communication breakdowns between the two interlocutors. In fact, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) point out, a more serious offense would require a more elaborated apologetic strategy, whereas a less severe offense might only need a less intensified apology. Moreover, the authors indicate that more elaborated apologies are usually employed when the offended person has a higher status.

Previous research has proposed different realisations for this speech act (Fraser, 1981; Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987, 1995; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). For the purposes of this paper, however, we consider the typology presented in Table 2 which has been based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) and Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) proposals and modified on the basis of analysing learners' written production data in a pilot study conducted with six English NSs and six NNSs with advanced English level. The five major response expressions likely to follow a complaint are: i) *an explicit expression of apology,* ii) *an explanation,* iii) *an acknowledgement of responsibility,* iv) *an offer of repair,* and v) *a promise of forbearance.* These five options are presented on a scale that ranges from the most (expression 1) to the least direct way of apologising (expression 5). They can be used either by themselves or by combining them. Additionally, it needs to be pointed out that the first two strategies can be used across all apology situations, whereas the latter three strategies are situation-specific and they vary depending on the damage caused (Kondo, 2010).

Table 2. Apology strategies (adapted from Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

Strategies	Examples
1. Expression of apology	
a. regret	*Sorry*
b. offer of apology	*I apologise*
c. request for forgiveness	*Pardon me*
2. Explanation or account	*The traffic was terrible*
3. Acknowledgement of responsibility	
a. Accepting the blame	*It's my fault*
b. Expressing self-deficiency	*I didn't see you*
c. Showing embarrassment	*I feel awful about it*
d. Justifying the hearer	*You are right*
e. Expressing lack of intent	*I didn't mean to*
f. Refusing to acknowledge	*It wasn't my fault*
4. Offer of repair	*I'll pay for the broken vase*
5. Promise of forbearance	*It won't happen again*

The conventional *expression of apology*, which is the most direct way of apologising, involves the use of performative verbs that express regret for having violated a particular social norm. This expression involves three sub-strategies, which are i) an expression of regret (e.g. "I'm sorry"), ii) an offer of apology (e.g. "I apologise); and iii) a request of forgiveness (e.g. "Excuse me"). These semantic formulae are not language specific so that each language may have different ways of expressing directness by either using a performative very or a combination of them (Olshtain and Cohen, 1983; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). When giving an *explanation* of the situation, which is seen as an indirect form of

apology, the speaker self-justifies him/herself by explaining that the cause of the offense was beyond his/her control ("The bus was late").

Acknowledgement of responsibility involves that the speaker assumes his/her fault and provides an apology for the damage caused. The various sub-strategies that are included within this main expression are displayed by forming a continuum which ranges from explicitly assuming the responsibility of the complaint for the offense, whereby the speaker recognises fault in causing the offense, to refusing to acknowledge the guilt. This strategy involves six sub-strategies, namely i) *accepting the blame* (e.g. "My mistake"); ii) *expressing self-deficiency* (e.g. "I was confused"); iii) showing embarrassment (e.g. "I feel awful about it"); iv) *justifying the hearer* (e.g. "You're right to be angry"); v) *expressing lack of intent* (e.g. "I didn't mean to upset you"); and vi) refusing to *acknowledge (e.g. "I wasn't my fault").*

An *offer of repair* is used when the speaker tries to offer a repair because either a physical offense or damage is done (e.g. "I'll help you to get up"). Finally, *a promise of forbearance* is employed when the apologiser promises that the offense will not be repeated (e.g. "This won't happen again").

4. Design and elaboration of the IDCT

A discursive written type of instrument, that of an IDCT, was elaborated in order to assess learners' use of the strategies employed when complaining and apologising in many work situations within the Tourism industry. Taking into account previous research on the field of ILP, the IDCT was developed in 3 main stages: i) topic generation; ii) scenario generation, and iii) worksheet generation. Each stage is explained below along with tables that summarise all scenarios.

4.1. Topic generation

The first stage in generating the test was to obtain topics of the scenarios through *exemplar generation* (Liu, 2010). Thus, an online questionnaire was designed in which five English NSs and five NNSs working in different sectors of the tourism industry were asked to describe the three most recently occurring events which contained complaint-apology sequences among co-workers at the same company[3]. The 10 workers returned the questionnaire and all wrote three situations. It was found that the thirty situations generated by the respondents contained some overlapping topics; consequently, priority was given to them in the final selection of eight topics included in the IDCT. The topics, based on real-life occurrences or observations, were discussions between two interlocutors regarding: cigarette breaks (task 1), a recommendation letter (task 2), a business meeting (task 3), a lost hotel reservation (task 4), misspelled business documents (task 5), casual conversations at front office (task 6), habitual late arrival for work (task 7) and false educational credentials (task 8).

4.2. Scenario generation

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[3] The use of both NSs and NNSs has been done on the fact that NSs produce the real language used by natives in the scenarios, whereas NNSs's responses allow us to predict the type of responses our students are going to produce in the same scenarios and whether they have understood the situations.

In the second stage, the eight topics were transformed into eight tasks, each including a scenario for a complaint (partner A test) and an apology (partner B test). The situational descriptions of all scenarios included in the test were classified as occurring in the workplace environment, either at a hotel location (tasks 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8) or at a travel and tourism agency (tasks 3, 5 and 7). In terms of input, all scenarios were considered for the status of the complainer or apologiser over the other interactant, the social distance between interlocutors (Brown and Levinson, 1987) and the severity of offense in the realisation of the speech act (Olshtain and Weinbach, 1985). Each social variable, in turn, included two dimensions which led to eight possible variable combinations (2 x 2 x 2) for each communicative act.

As for status, complaint situations were classified as low (tasks 1, 2, 3 and 4) or high (tasks 5, 6, 7 and 8) and apology situations as high (tasks 1, 2, 3 and 4) or low (tasks 5, 6, 7 and 8). Regarding the social distance between the interactants, both complaint and apology situations were planned to be as close (tasks 1, 3, 5 and 7) or distant (tasks 2, 4, 6 and 8). Finally, the severity of offense in the realisation of complaints and apologises was conceptualised as more (tasks 3, 4, 7 and 8) or less severe (tasks 1, 2, 5 and 6). Tables 3 and 4 show a summary of the complaint and apology scenarios respectively. Additionally, the scenarios did not mention the speech act that was being investigated, but instead used the general cues "You explain" rather than you complain or "You respond" rather than you apologize, thus allowing the respondent some flexibility in response without rising awareness (Grabowski, 2007; Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). (See Appendix A for test directions, Appendix B for complaint scenarios or partner A test and Appendix C for apology scenarios or partner B test).

Table 3. Summary of the IDCT complaint scenarios

Sit	Topic	Interlocutors	Status	Distance	Offense
1	cigarette breaks	student vs site supervisor	low	close	less
2	recommendation letter	receptionist vs general manager	low	distant	less
3	business meeting	travel agent vs agency manager	low	close	more
4	a lost hotel reservation	group leader vs. hotel manager	low	distant	more
5	misspelled business documents	general manager vs. personal assistant	high	close	less
6	casual conversations at front office	reception manager vs receptionist	high	distant	less
7	late at work	manager vs travel agent	high	close	more
8	false educational credentials	chief executive hotel group vs receptionist	high	distant	more

Note. Sit = situation

Table 4. Summary of the IDCT apology scenarios

Sit.	Topic	Interlocutors	Status	Distance	Offense
1	cigarette breaks	student vs site supervisor	high	close	less
2	recommendation letter	receptionist vs general manager	high	distant	less
3	business meeting	travel agent vs agency manager	high	close	more
4	a lost hotel reservation	group leader vs. hotel manager	high	distant	more
5	misspelled business documents	general manager vs. personal assistant	low	close	less
6	casual conversations at front office	reception manager vs receptionist	low	distant	less
7	late at work	manager vs travel agent	low	close	more
8	false educational credentials	chief executive hotel group vs receptionist	low	distant	more

Note. Sit = situation

It is important to mention that the eight tasks were first used in a pilot study with twelve learners (six English NSs and six NNSs) to analyse whether i) all situational variables (i.e. status, distance and offense) were perceived in a similar way and ii) all scenarios elicited the speech act being investigated (i.e. complaints, in partner A test and apologies, in partner B test) as well as a range of conventional expressions. For these learners, a brief explanation was given to familiarise them with the speech acts of complaining and apologising, as well as the three situational variables involved in the scenarios. After checking their responses, some situations were modified to overcome some of the limitations noted by them and obtain, thus, the final version of the scenarios.

4.3. Worksheet generation

The last stage in producing the IDCT was the design of the instructions to be given to learners to complete the eight written interactive tasks. The IDCT elicited eight dialogues in written form from two different learners who were to negotiate complaint-apology sequences from their inception to their conclusion in as many turns as needed. Directions inform learners to read each situation and complete with the partner the interactive worksheet for each task (see Appendix D for a sample task worksheet). Beginning with task 1, Person A (i.e. the complainer), is asked to begin writing what he/she would actually say in the first turn. Then, the worksheet is passed back and forth to Person B (i.e. the apologiser) until the conversation comes to its natural conclusion. This process must be repeated for each of the eight tasks. This way, and following Grabowski (2007), the tasks have a degree of reactivity (Bachman and Palmer, 1996) and each interlocutor's response has an effect on the subsequent responses of his/her interlocutor and vice versa.

Immediately after their performance in each task, learners are asked to fill out a retrospective verbal report questionnaire (see Appendix D). Therefore, the complainer will be asked to answer questions for Person A and the apologiser questions for Person B. The main purpose of this questionnaire is to find learners' perception of the appropriateness of the

strategies used to perform each speech act in each task, as well as examine whether the social variables (i.e. status, distance and offense) have had an influence on this perception.

5. Final remark

Reacting appropriately to complaints seems to be crucial as it is an important issue in keeping successful communication and maintaining social relationships, specifically in many work situations where organisational roles and values are likely to play an important role. Consequently there is a need to examine those conditions that influence how the complaint-apology adjacency pair is taught and subsequently assessed in English language programs preparing learners for the workplace. This requires the elaboration of data collection instruments that may elicit these two speech acts in a variety of communicative situations at work. To that end, this paper has aimed to develop a discursive type of instrument, that of an IDCT, to assess learners' use of strategies when complaining and apologising in many work situations within the Tourism industry. Additionally, and in order to get learners' insightful information that is not accessible through an analysis of DCT response data, a retrospective verbal protocol has been designed for learners' completion after their performance in each task. In this way, the use of triangulation to validate data obtained from the IDCT will serve to improve construct validity. In short, through the development of this practical interactive tool, it has been our intention to contribute to the increasing area of ILP research devoted to assessing learners' pragmatic competence in instructional settings.

   Considering all the previous aspects related to the design of the IDCT, it is worth mentioning that the value of this interactive task is two-fold: i) it can be employed to collect learners' pragmatic data regarding their production of the speech acts of complaining and apologising in different communicative situations, and ii) it can also serve for pedagogical purposes. In fact, the scenarios could be implemented as oral and written tasks in different ways with the aim of making learners reflect on their own production, and guiding them in their process of acquiring pragmatic knowledge in the foreign language setting. With this type of activities, learners can begin to take notice of the importance of sociopragmatic issues in the acquisition any second or foreign language.

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Appendix A

Test Directions
(Adapted from Grabowski, 2007)

1. In your task packet, you will find eight situations in the workplace environment that you will act out with your partner. For each task, you will be given a description of a situation and the role that you will play. Read the description of the first situation that you will play.
2. Complete a conversation with your partner by writing it in the worksheet provided for each task. Write what you would *actually* say to the other person in this situation. If you are given role A, you will write first.
3. When finished, pass the task worksheet to your partner to respond. Take turns passing the worksheet back and forth until the conversation is finished. You will do the same thing for each of the eight tasks.
4. Continue the conversation until its natural conclusion, that is, until you feel the conversation is finished. You can use the back of the pages if necessary.
5. Finally, fill out the short questionnaire immediately after each performance. You can use your L1 if you feel more comfortable.

Appendix B
Partner A Test
Task 1

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are a student enrolled in a degree program in Hospitality and Tourism Management. As part of your practicum, you work in a top market hotel performing front desk receptionist duties. By coincidence, your site supervisor is a close friend of yours. Your friend takes a cigarette break every hour and lately, he/she has been asking you to cover for him/her by doing his/her job when he/she goes out to smoke. As you have little experience, guests get impatient because check-in and check out take a while. You are tired of covering for your site supervisor, and plan to talk to him/her about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 1 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 2

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are a receptionist in a two-star hotel. You are applying for the position of head receptionist in a highly reputed hotel. The interview committee wants to have a recommendation letter from your employer. The hotel general manager, who you barely know, agrees to write this letter. When you read the letter, you discover it only gives generic bromides about your current job. You think your excellent job in the hotel deserves more than a generic letter of recommendation. You go to your boss' office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 2 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 3

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are a travel agent working in a leading travel agency. You have an important business meeting in which you count on the presence of your agency manager, and close friend of yours, to help you make important decisions. However, he/she forgets about the meeting. This is the second time that the same thing has happened with this person. After the meeting, you go to the agency manager's office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 3 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 4

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are the tour representative of a group of 20 retired people (aged 60 plus) which has just arrived after a long journey at a luxury hotel in the tiny village of Jukkasjarvi,

Sweden. The unknown man/woman at the hotel reception desk tells you there is no trace of a reservation for a coachload of 20 people. The booking for five days was made three weeks ago and a deposit was sent directly to the hotel bank account. The cold and tired passengers are seated in the coach waiting for hotel check-in. You go the hotel manager's office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 4 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 5

Scenario
You are the general manager of a tour operating company responsible for coordinating its daily operations. Your personal assistant, and close friend of yours, does a very good job in supporting you in all aspects of administration and secretarial duties. However, the other day he/she handed in to you a business document with a few misspelled words. You ask your personal assistant to come to your office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 5 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 6

Scenario
You are a reception manager in a highly reputed hotel in charge of supervising other reception employees. You observe a newly-arrived receptionist, who you haven't seen before, having casual conversations with clients regarding personal aspects. The employee code of conduct advises to keep safe distance from clients regarding personal involvement to ensure appropriate professional skills. You ask this new receptionist to go to your office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 6 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 7

Scenario
You are the manager of a large travel agency. One of the travel agents, and close friend of yours, has a tendency to be habitually late at work resulting in lost sales for the company. You go the travel agent's office to talk about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 7 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Task 8

Scenario

You are the chief executive of a Hotel Group. Your group is seeking for a general manager in a recently opened hotel in London. A prerequisite to get this job is to have a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA). You found that an applicant for the job, who is currently working as a receptionist in one of your hotels, has lied about having an MBA. You don't know this person but, as one of your workers, you want to talk to him/her about this fact. *You explain:*

(Use task 8 worksheet to write what you would say. You will write first).

Appendix C
Partner B Test
Task 1

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are a receptionist in a top market hotel and the site supervisor of a students'
practicum performance. By coincidence, the student under your supervision is a close
friend of yours. Lately, you have the strong urge to smoke every hour and you ask the
student to cover you when you go out to smoke. The student under your supervision
wants to talk to you about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 1 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 2

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are the general manager of a two-star hotel. You have been asked by one of your
best receptionists, who you barely know, to write a letter of recommendation for the
position of head receptionist in a highly reputed hotel. You agree and write a generic
letter of recommendation for him/her. The receptionist wants to talk to you about this
fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 2 worksheet to write what you would say).

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Task 3

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are the agency manager in a leading travel agency. A travel agent, and close friend
of yours, has an important business meeting and counts on your presence to help
him/her make important decisions. However, you forget the meeting. This is the second
time that the same thing has happened with you. The travel agent wants to talk to you
about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 3 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 4

<u>**Scenario**</u>
You are the hotel manager of a luxury hotel in the tiny village of Jukkasjarvi, Sweden.
You have been informed by the hotel receptionist that a group of 20 retired people
(aged 60 plus) has arrived to check in at your hotel and there is no trace of this
reservation. The tour representative, although he/she doesn't know you personally,

wants to talk to you about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 4 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 5

Scenario
You are the personal assistant to the general manager of a tour operating company, who is also a close friend of yours. You do a very good job in supporting him/her in all aspects of administration and secretarial duties. However, the other day you handed in to the general manager a business document with a few misspelled words. The general manager of the company asks you to go to his/her office to talk about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 5 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 6

Scenario
You are a newly-arrived receptionist in a highly reputed hotel. While working, you have casual conversations with clients regarding personal aspects. However, the employee code of conduct advises to keep safe distance from clients regarding personal involvement to ensure appropriate professional skills. The reception manager of the hotel, who you haven't seen before, asks you to go to his/her office to talk about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 6 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 7

Scenario
You are an agent working in a large travel agency. You have a tendency to be habitually late at work resulting in lost sales for the company. The manager of the travel agency, and close friend of yours, wants to talk to you about this fact. *You listen and respond:*

(Use task 7 worksheet to write what you would say).

Task 8

Scenario

You work as a receptionist in a worldwide hotel chain. The hotel group is seeking for a general manager in a recently opened hotel in London. Candidates are required to have a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) and although you don't have it, you decide to lie about having this Master's degree. The interview committee has discovered you used false educational credentials and now the chief executive of the Hotel Group, who you don't know, wants to talk to you about this fact. *You listen and respond*:

(Use task 8 worksheet to write what you would say).

Appendix D
Sample Task Worksheet

Task 1 worksheet

PERSON A will write first	
Person A	Person B
1.	
	2.
3	
	4.
5.	
	6.

PTO for more space if required.

Please answer these questions after your performance in the above scenario.

Person A
1) How appropriate do you think your **explanation** was?
Inappropriate   1   2   3   4   5   Very appropriate
2) Which social factors might influence your rating of appropriateness?

Person B
1) How appropriate do you think your **response** was?
Inappropriate 1   2   3   4   5   Very appropriate
2) Which social factors might influence your rating of appropriateness?

PTO for more space if required.