

¿Cuáles son sus recomendaciones?: A Comparative Analysis of Spanish and English Advice Given on a Mexican Subreddit

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Abstract

Advice has been studied in many genres, from newspaper columns to online forums to bathroom stalls (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; DeCapua & Huber, 1995; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2006; Locher & Hoffman, 2006; Locher, 2006; Limberg & Locher, 2012). Despite this thorough research, there is a current lack of Web 2.0 studies that incorporate the community's voting system as a live perception tool. The present study seeks to address how advice is realized in the r/Mexico community on Reddit and how this advice is perceived via comment karma. It incorporates methodologies from Locher (2006), Placencia (2012), and Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring, 2004, 2013; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015). In particular, this study analyzed the meaning level of advice-giving (e.g., the supporting and head acts involved in realizing these moves) and the interactional level of advice-giving (e.g., directness and community evaluation of said advice). Overall, it finds that direct strategies containing unmitigated imperatives are preferred advice realizations in this community. According to the voting system, English and Spanish advice threads positively evaluate direct strategies with supporting acts, such as general information or personal experience.

Keywords: Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, Advice, Reddit, Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

The speech act of advice has been studied in both Spanish and English through many mediums, including radio, newspapers, face-to-face interactions, online columns, and online forums such as *Lucy Answers* and *Yahoo!Respuestas* (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; Félix Brasdefer, 2005; Fitch, 1994; García, 1993; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2006; Locher, 2006; Márquez-Reiter, 1997, 2003; Placencia, 2012). While there are some pragmalinguistic tendencies toward direct or indirect deliveries of advice according to language, the level of directness of advice is not universal for each dialect of each language. In particular, some researchers find that English speakers prefer to give indirect deliveries of advice (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; Fitch, 1994; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2006). While the majority of these researchers found that conventionally indirect strategies were preferred in this language, Harrison & Barlow (2009) found that online users in an arthritis forum utilized non-conventionally indirect strategies more frequently, which may be due to situation-specific factors. On the other hand, research on Spanish suggests that direct deliveries of advice are preferred (Félix Brasdefer, 2005; Fitch, 1994; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2006; Márquez Reiter, 1997, 2003; Placencia, 2012), except for Peruvian speakers who prefer indirect advice (García, 1993).

While research on advice has certainly been thorough in describing online advice, studies on these types of interactions have not considered the evaluative value of voting systems present on many current online forums. Clearly, the community's perception of the advice merits investigation because it can indicate the appropriateness of the advice as well as reveal community discourse practices. The speech act of advice has been defined as giving suggestions or options to the interlocutor for a future action (Searle, 1975). According to Searle (1969, p. 67), advice "...is not trying to get you to do something in the sense that requesting is. Advising is more like telling you what is best for you." In 1975, he classified advice-giving as a weak directive, since it is aimed at influencing the behavior of others by suggesting a future action. This directive can be expressed either directly (i.e., as an imperative) or indirectly (i.e., as a suggestion, hint, or conventionalized expression). However, it has been found that the politeness systems that govern what constitutes appropriate deliveries of advice vary between Spanish and English.

The purpose of the current study is to examine the pragmalinguistic variation of advice interactions in Spanish and English according to directness and its positive or negative evaluation by the community. For this study, I utilize data from forums created on a small bilingual community, r/Mexico, a part of the social website, Reddit, which allows users to interact and co-negotiate appropriate advice sequences with the original poster (OP henceforth). Additionally, users 'upvote' and 'downvote' comments, providing a live diagnostic tool for felicitous conversations in this community. In essence, this voting system works in a way that numerically displays the goals of advice posts in the community by assigning a point value to both the comment and its author's reputation on the site. I will

show that directness and brevity is preferred in this community by both Spanish and English speakers and that they use supporting moves with imperative advice acts. Furthermore, I will provide evidence that this online community can be characterized as encouraging and direct through negative evaluations of discouraging, vague comments and positive evaluations of concise, encouraging comments.

In the next sections, I will discuss the work that has been done on advice and the paucity of CMDA research on Reddit. Then, I will detail the current methodology and data, present the results in terms of threads initiated in either Spanish or English, and provide a discussion of the implications of said results in light of the previous cross-linguistic findings.

2. Literature review

2.1 Spanish and English advice speech acts

Many researchers have observed that there is no sentence type that has been consistently and unambiguously associated with giving advice. Rather, advice can be given explicitly or implicitly through imperatives, interrogatives or declaratives (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; DeCapua & Huber, 1995; Locher, 2006; Locher & Hoffman, 2006; Searle, 1975). In this sense, research has indicated that imperatives are typically direct deliveries of advice and interrogatives and declaratives are suggestions or strong hints, but the form that directness takes is subject to pragmalinguistic variation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2005; Locher & Hoffman, 2006; Locher, 2006; Placencia, 2012). Directness can also be operationalized by lack of external modification of the utterance, or rather, tentativeness (Márquez Reiter, 2003). Nonetheless, what constitutes advice is that the sincerity condition must be the speaker's desire and the "propositional content is always that the hearer H does some future action A" (Searle, 1975, p. 11). The speaker can express this wish either directly through imperatives or indirectly through a non-imperative suggestion or conventionalized expression.

Previous studies have shown that the realization of advice is subject to cross-linguistic and cross-dialectal variation. Indeed, researchers have observed that English speakers show a tendency to give indirect advice and to avoid the use of direct imperatives in order to empower others to make decisions for themselves (DeCapua & Huber, 1995; Fitch, 1994; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2006). Conventional indirectness oriented toward negative politeness is the preferred medium for advice in English in these studies. Advice in English is also sensitive to the context in which the advice is given. In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Harrison & Barlow (2009) observed that users in an arthritis forum provided feedback to care plans via personal narratives. This represents a non-conventionally indirect suggestion oriented toward positive politeness through identifying with the interlocutor's shared personal experience. These users still allowed the OP freedom to choose their own path of action, which is in contrast to previous findings on advice strategies in other languages. Nevertheless, when

there is little risk to either the speaker's or the hearer's face, English speakers may utilize direct advice (Bordería-García, 2004).

Research on Spanish advice indicate a distinct politeness system, in which directives are more likely to be acceptable according to the relationship between parties. Fitch (1994) finds that the level of intimacy in a relationship, *confianza*, is crucial in determining imperative usage. That is, higher *confianza* allows for higher rates of imperatives between individuals given that it is understood that one party is helping the other with his or her friend's best interest in mind. Conversely, hierarchical relationships characterized by authority, such as employer-employee, benefit from lack of *confianza* in terms of accepted, frequent directive use. Indeed, Hernández Flores (1999) observed that advice interactions could be viewed as a way to include the interlocutor into the social group and to gain intimacy in a relation. Other researchers also observe direct deliveries of advice both in person and online (Félix Brasdefer, 2005; Fitch, 1994; Kaul de Marlangeon, 2006; Márquez-Reiter, 1997, 2003; Placencia, 2012). However, in contrast to these studies García (1993) finds that this system is not universal for all varieties of Spanish, in that Peruvian Spanish speakers utilize indirect strategies associated with positive politeness much like the politeness system observed in English.

The previous literature show that there is much pragmalinguistic variation of advice-giving between English and Spanish, in that imperative usage in Spanish advice has been more frequently observed, while indirectness is slightly favored in English advice. However, there are no pragmalinguistic universals for Spanish or English and these strategies vary according to situation-specific as well as community-specific constraints. The present study addresses these discourse moves and strategies in Spanish and English as well as their perception within a bilingual community on Reddit.

2.2 Reddit & CMDA

To explore the discursive advice strategies¹ between English and Spanish the present study focuses on advice threads in the popular, social website, that has not been widely examined in the CMDA literature: Reddit. The purposes of this website are largely for entertainment, social networking, and news by means of link-sharing and text posts. The entire website is public and may be viewed without user registration. In order to submit content, post comments, and vote posts and comments up or down, one must register with a user handle. In terms of 'upvoting' and 'downvoting', a user handle provides voting power to mark another user's reputation on the website. A high number of 'upvotes' for submissions and comments, known as 'karma', equates to a prestigious reputation as well as higher visibility of individual comments and posts.

¹ In this study, discursive practices are defined as the collective speech moves through which we construct a greater cultural concept, which in this case is advice (Foucault, 1980).

In order to systematically examine language use in an online format, this study employs Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA henceforth) to analyze the directness of advice acts and their evaluation by the community, specifically the meaning (i.e., the macro speech act of advice, including supporting acts and the head act) and interaction levels (i.e., the directness and evaluation of advice comments). This approach is defined through “its focus on *language and language use* in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of *discourse analysis* to address that focus” (Herring, 2001, p. 1). Given the entirely online presence of this community, CMDA is more appropriate for understanding online interactions than typical discourse methods that do not focus specifically on this genre. In particular, this genre contains unique features not present in face-to-face interactions, such as asynchronic discourse, that can be addressed with this methodology.

Currently, there are few studies that have investigated online advice, and within this line of research none have focused on the online evaluation tools sometimes present in these virtual communities (Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2006; Placencia, 2012). For example, Both Harrison & Barlow (2009) and Locher (2006) focus specifically on describing only the speech act of advice online, where there is presumably no voting system present that could indicate positive or negative evaluation. Furthermore, although the *Yahoo! Respuestas* community observed in Placencia (2012) has a similar voting system to Reddit, it was not utilized as a perception tool in her study. However, there is one study that has examined the success rates of Reddit comments and posts in this community in terms of age and gender from a CMDA perspective (Finlay, 2014). The analysis focused on the structural level (i.e., comment and utterance length in comments) as well as the social level (i.e., karma in relation to age and gender of participants). Overall, he found that longer, more complex comments received positive evaluations within the community. This finding could inform the current study, as it would be expected that short imperatives with few supporting acts associated with many Spanish-speaking communities would not fare well in the general community’s commenting practices.

The current study focuses on a smaller subreddit, r/Mexico, and analyzes the meaning level (i.e. the macro speech act negotiating advice-giving) as well as the interactional level (i.e. directness and community evaluations of said advice). Therefore, this study expands our current understanding of how this community’s voting system works in relation to the discursive practices involved in advice. In addition, this study illustrates a lack of cross-linguistic differences in the direct or indirect realization of advice in Spanish and English within this community.

3. Method

As evidenced by the previous sections, there are currently very few studies on online advice and a lack of CMDA studies that incorporate community perception tools, such as upvoting and downvoting, into their analysis. The present study addresses the gap in understanding in how advice discourse practices are

implemented in advice on the popular social media website Reddit in a subreddit community that operates in both Spanish and English. Additionally, it includes the community's negative and positive evaluation of these discourse practices.

Primarily, this study focuses on advice threads in a subreddit, r/Mexico, which operates similarly to the online advice forums described above. This medium allows for more interaction among users than typical advice columns, much like *Yahoo!Respuestas* in Placencia (2012). In *Yahoo!Respuestas*, users can comment directly upon the OP's prompt or they can respond to other users in the same thread, which provides a rich, conversational style similar to radio and face-to-face interactions. In contrast, users can respond to conversational turns at any point of the nested discourse thread. With this feature, users have more opportunity to clarify information with the advice-seeker before delivering advice, which is not an available discourse practice in previous studies on online advice (Locher, 2006; Placencia, 2012). Additionally, *Yahoo!Respuestas* users can upvote comments for more visibility similar to the Reddit community; however, this interactional component was not analyzed in Placencia (2012). The analysis of community evaluation via karma in the present study is advantageous for observing how the community selects certain discursive practices as acceptable and appropriate.

The research questions of this study are the following:

- What discourse practices do the Reddit users employ in r/Mexico in order to give advice? How is advice given in English-initiated versus Spanish-initiated threads?
- According to Reddit's up-voting and down-voting system, what are the most popular discourse practices in positively and negatively evaluated comments on r/Mexico? How does this voting system reflect the communicative goals of r/Mexico?

3.1 Data

Data for this study was collected from the website and subreddit, www.reddit.com/r/Mexico. A total of four popular advice threads in both English and Spanish (i.e., under "hot posts" within the search bar, tagged "AskMexico") were considered. As not all "AskMexico" posts on this subreddit can be classified as advice, only posts that were made with advice-seeking qualities observed in previous literature will be considered. In line with Searle's (1975) definition of advice, threads were only considered if the responses demonstrated propositional content containing a suggestion toward a future course of action. This operationalization eliminated general information-seeking posts about Mexico from the current analysis, in which the poster would receive facts rather than future courses of action.

Four advice threads were analyzed (i.e., two initiated in Spanish and two initiated in English), which was restricted to the most popular "AskMexico" topic: travel. It can be argued that travel advice threads are more representative of the community interactions given their majority presence. In contrast, other advice

threads, such as book recommendations, are far less verbose than travel threads. While book suggestion threads can be classified as advice, the request can be answered by naming titles of books, which leaves no room for discourse or for interpretation that all book titles would be a suggestion for future course of action as they could also represent declarations of preference. This corpus of travel advice threads has an average of 46 comments, with a range of 33-63 comments. In total, 437 advice moves and supporting acts were documented, which is sufficient for a qualitative analysis of this community. Only 25 requests for advice and supporting acts were observed in this data; therefore, requests for advice are not within the scope of the current analysis. Users in these threads have been anonymized. Nonetheless, it remains that this information is searchable online, yet it presents no threat to the personal security of the analyzed individuals. All of each authors' original spellings and phrasings are maintained.

3.2 Data analysis

In order to analyze this data, a combination of CMDA (Herring, 2004, 2013; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015), the categories of discourse moves in advice observed by Locher (2006), and the (dis)affiliation strategies outlined in Placencia (2012) (e.g., seeking closeness, conveying warm feelings, offering reassurance or encouragement, conveying empathy, and humor) were utilized in order to make connections to previously attested data in online communities. A chart of the terminology presented in Locher (2006) along with definitions and original examples from the r/Mexico advice corpus is provided in Table 1 below. To operationalize directness and indirectness, the current study uses the same coding as Locher (2006), in that imperatives and performative verbs (e.g. *should*, *have to*, and *need to*) constitute direct deliveries of advice, language-specific conventional expressions (e.g. *I think that*) represent conventional indirectness, and hints and suggestions via personal experience and general information are coded as non-conventionally indirect. In regard to Placencia's (2012) (dis)affiliation strategies, only encouragement and humor were observed in the current study.

Table 1. Discourse practices observed in Locher (2006) with supporting examples from r/Mexico data

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Definition</u> | <u>Examples from r/Mexico</u> |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Assessment | The advice giver recapitulates and evaluates the situation | Me parece muy bueno que te quieras regresar acá , vas a ver que tu país te extrañaba, la comida aquí no tiene igual y es lo que más vas a amar... 'It seems really nice that you want to return here , you'll see that your country missed you, the food here has no equal and it is what you will love the most...' |
| Disclaimer | Explicit statement of insufficient knowledge or limitations | While I don't have anything good to say about Mexico City because its a big city and I don't like big citys. I don't think society was the problem here. |
| Advice | Suggestions for future action. Can be realized as a declarative, imperative, or a question. | Primero vente de vacaciones y explora realmente el mercado laboral y si te gusta el ambiente, no tomes una decisión drastica sin probarte primero. 'First go on vacation and really explore the job market and if you like the environment, don't make a drastic decisión without trying it for yourself first.' |
| Referral | Suggestion to seek help elsewhere | May I suggest reading http://wikitravel.org/en/Spanish_phrasebook and http://wikitravel.org/en/Mexico and maybe do a few lessons on Duolingo. |
| General information | Reporting facts or delivering information | Aquí hay discriminación clasista pero el racismo es prácticamente inexistente. 'Here there is classist discrimination but racism is practically inexistent.' |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Personal experience | Anecdotal story of what has personally helped them or others in the same situation | I arrived speaking almost no spanish. I took a spanish course at a local community college before hand, didn't help much. Just the people close to me understood me without having to say much. I used my hands a lot. At one point all i had to do was give certain gesture and my friend with be able to relay my thoughts. 6 Years later I'm tanner and still horrible at spanish but I get by now without much help but you either think I'm "de norte" ('from the north') or retarded. |
| Explanation | Further development of what is meant of an utterance | Try tortas ahogadas, they might sound kind of disgusting for a newcomer but they're delicious! |
| Metacomment | Referring back to the speech of another participant | No podría explicarte sin escribir un muro de texto, y sin echarme a medio /r/mexico encima, así que te recomiendo lo que ya dijeron algunos redditores: [provides a list of previously given advice] 'I can't explain it without writing a wall of text, and without bringing half of /r/mexico onto myself, so I recommend to you what some redditors already said:' |
| Farewell | Departing signature | Good luck [at the end of a comment] |

As previously mentioned, CMDA in conjunction with the methodologies described above help to triangulate the answers to the first research question regarding discourse practices and directness of advice. This framework provides a locus of investigation in which to answer the current study's research questions. Within CMDA, I analyze the meaning level of macro advice speech acts (i.e., the supporting acts and the head act of giving advice) as well as the interactional level (i.e., positive or negative evaluation of said advice).

For my final research question regarding the voting system, I analyzed the interactional domain of advice given that negotiation of background information is present in this medium through the implementation of the upvoting and downvoting system and the nested discourse. This voting system allows for analysis of the community's perception of good advice. In order to address this question, comments with high and low karma values in each thread were analyzed for (in)directness and discourse practices present.

4. Results

4.1 Spanish advice

The following advice moves under analysis are in response to Threads 1 and 2, which are presented below in figures 1 and 2, respectively. In both of these advice request sequences, the OP marks their identity as a potential traveler or immigrant to Mexico from the United States. This out-group marking and their use of Spanish allows the advice-givers and the OPs to operate in both Spanish and English in the comments section.

^
AskMexico
Viaje por México en carro
(self.mexico)

24
submitted 8 months ago by

^

Hola [/r/mexico](#)! Soy estadounidense y tengo 19 años. Mis amigos y yo estamos pensando en viajar de EEUU a Monterrey/Guadalajara/ Puerto Vallarta en coche. El coche tiene placas estadounidenses así que no estamos seguros si sería algun problem con robos, sucuestros, etc. He leído las noticias y sé que hay violencia, pero tambien tengo amigos mexicanos que me han dicho que ningún problema, todo seguro. El plan sería cruzcar la frontera en Laredo, quedarnos dos noches en Monterrey, sigue a Gudalajara, Puerto Vallarta y tal vez DF y regresar. Tienen urgencias o recomendaciones?

English translation:

‘Trip through Mexico by car

‘Hello, r/mexico! I am American and I am 19 years old. My friends and I are thinking about travelling from the United States to Monterrey/Guadalajara/Puerto Vallarta by car. The car has American plates so we aren’t sure if it will be a problem with robberies, kidnappings, etc. I have read the new and I know that there is violence, but also I have Mexican friends that have told me that no problem, everything safe. The plan would be to cross the border in Laredo, stay two nights in Monterrey, continue to Guadalajara, Puerto Vallarta, and maybe DF and return. Do you have suggestions or recommendations?’

Figure 1. Thread 1, Travelling through Mexico



English translation:

‘I want to return to Mexico after 20 years of living in the United States, I came here when I was 8 years old. What warnings or advice can you give me before trying to return?’

Figure 2. Thread 2, Immigration to Mexico

In general, many commenters responded to Thread 1 with supportive advice and warnings regarding the OP’s safety in Mexico. In contrast, the OP of Thread 2 did not provide the community sufficient information for giving advice; therefore, the parties negotiated for more information, in which the OP revealed that he wanted to immigrate illegally. Many of the commenters dissented with the OP’s decision to immigrate and/or provided accounts of their own personal experiences immigrating to Mexico.

A distribution of discourse moves has been summarized below in Tables 1 and 2. Additionally, a sum of the moves present in both threads has been provided in Table 3. It should be noted that some utterances can constitute multiple types of discourse moves (e.g. an utterance with a direct advice move supported by a disclaimer or other moves).

Table 2. Discourse moves present in Spanish-initiated thread, *Viaje por México en carro* ‘Trip through Mexico by car’

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>% of data (N)</u> |
|---------------------|--|----------------------|
| Assessment | Otra cosa que me dejó pensando, es que si todos con de 19 -23 años; mejor no vallan a DF ‘Another thing that left me thinking is that if you all are 19-23 years old; it’s better that you don’t go to DF’ | 2.65% (3) |
| Disclaimer | No sé de que ciudad vengas... ‘I don’t know from which city you’re coming from...’ | .88% (1) |
| Advice | No manejes en coche ‘Don’t drive by car’ | 60.18% (68) |
| Referral | http://aplicaciones4.sct.gob.mx/sibuac_internet/ControllerUI?action=cmdEscogeRuta | 2.65% (3) |
| General information | una vuelta en un barrio equivocado podría ser peligrosa. ‘a turn into the wrong neighborhood could be dangerous.’ | 23.01% (26) |
| Personal experience | Yo transito por estas vias con regularidad y nunca he visto nada, inclusive en las mismas rutas pero en la libre ‘I travel through these roads regularly and I haven’t seen anything, including in the same routes but in the freeway’ | 7.08% (8) |
| Explanation | 2)sean serios en los retenes (osea no se comporten como pendejos) ‘2) behave seriously at the checkpoints (rather don’t behave like idiots)’ | 2.65% (3) |
| Metacomment | Está de la chingada la situación en este país, quien les diga que no se está negando a la realidad. ‘It’s fucked up the situation in this country, whoever tells you that it isn’t is denying reality.’ | .88% (1) |
| Farewell | NA | 0% (0) |
| Total | | 100% (113) |

Table 3. Discourse moves present in Spanish-initiated thread, *Quiero regresar a Mexico después de 20 años de vivir en Estados Unidos, vine acá cuando tenía 8 años. Que advertencia o consejo me pueden dar antes de intentar a regresar?* ‘I want to return to Mexico after living in the United States for 20 years, I came here when I was 8 years old. What warning or advice can you give me before trying to return?’

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>% of data</u> (N) |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Assessment | Me parece muy Bueno que te quieras regresar acá... ‘It seems really Good that you want to return here...’ | 1.39% (1) |
| Disclaimer | While I don’t have anything good to say about Mexico City because its a big city and I don’t like big citys. | 2.78% (2) |
| Advice | Anyways to each his own you got to hustle it. | 3.89% (28) |
| Referral | NA | 0% (0) |
| General information | Aquí hay discriminación clasista pero el racism es prácticamente inexistente. ‘Here there is classist discrimination but the racism is practically inexistent.’ | 23.61% (17) |
| Personal experience | Desde los 9 meses de edad me llevaron a Estados Unidos y a los 21 años regrese a Mexico. ‘When I was 9 month old they brought me to the United States and at 21 years old I returned to Mexico.’ | 29.17% (21) |
| Explanation | NA | 0% (0) |
| Metacomment | Que te muevas a esta ciudad ya que mencionaste en tu post te interesa el ámbito aerospacial ‘Move to this city since you mentioned in your post you’re interested in the aerospacial field’ | 4.17% (3) |
| Farewell | NA | 0% (0) |
| Total | | 100% (72) |

Table 4. Total discourse moves in Spanish-initiated advice threads

| <u>Term</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Assessment | 2.16% (4) |
| Disclaimer | 1.62% (3) |
| Advice | 51.89% (96) |
| Referral | 1.62% (3) |
| General information | 23.24% (43) |
| Personal experience | 15.68% (29) |
| Explanation | 1.62% (3) |
| Metacomment | 2.16% (4) |
| Farewell | 0% (0) |
| Total | 100% (185) |

Within both of these threads, the most frequent discourse practices are advice moves (51.89%, 96 tokens), general information (23.24%, 43 tokens), and personal experience (15.68%, 29 tokens). Individually, it is observed in Thread 2 that general information and personal experience supporting acts are nearly as common as advice. These supporting acts represented non-conventional indirect strategies of imparting advice to this user.

In terms of directness of the advice moves, participants of both threads prefer direct advice rather than conventionally and non-conventionally indirect strategies, which can be observed in Table 5 below. Non-conventionally indirect advice moves containing personal narratives in Thread 2 were numerous, but these macro speech acts also contained imperatives generally within the concluding remarks.

Table 5. Summary of directness of advice moves in Spanish-initiated advice threads

| <u>Directness</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>#1</u> | <u>#2</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-----------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Direct | Solo usen carreteras federales 'Only use federal highways' | 50 (74.53%) | 29 (74.36%) | 79 (73.83%) |
| Conventionally indirect | De Monterrey a Guadalajara puedes irte por el tramo de Saltillo-Matehuala-SLP-Aguascalientes-Guadalajara 'From Monterrey to Guadalajara you can go via the stretch between Saltillo, Matehuala, SLP, Aguascalientes, and Guadalajara' | 8 (11.76%) | 2 (5.13%) | 10 (9.35%) |
| Non-conventionally indirect | La ciudad de Durango es muy segura 'Durango city is very safe' | 10 (14.71%) | 8 (20.51%) | 18 (16.82%) |
| TOTAL | | | | 107 |

Depending on the thread in question, highly evaluated advice was encouraging and direct or discouraging and direct. In Thread 1, many of the highly evaluated comments include encouraging comments that enhance the public image of Mexico, which was logical given that the OP wanted to visit Mexico as a tourist. In Thread 2, the community became aware that the OP is planning on moving to Mexico illegally, and, in effect, the top voted comments are largely discouraging, as in *no tomes una decision drastica sin probarte primero* 'don't make a drastic decision without trying it for yourself first' [8 points]. Counter to tendencies in both threads to highly evaluate direct advice, the top comment in Thread 2 is a lengthy personal narrative given in English about their experiences moving back to Mexico, living in Mexico as an outsider, and their reservations about the

matter, which is provided in the Appendix (11). Nevertheless, this exposition is punctuated with a direct imperative: “Take a trip for a couple months”.

Overall, direct advice is still the preferred medium of advice in both threads, as evidenced by other high-scoring comments consisting of a series of Spanish imperatives:

- (1) **Primero vente de vacaciones y explora realmente el mercado laboral si te gusta el ambiente, no tomes una decision drastica sin probarte primero.** [8 points in Thread 2]
 ‘First take a vacation and really explore the job market and if you like the environment, don’t make a drastic decision without trying it for yourself first.’
- (2) **No manejes en coche, pórtense serios en los retenes militares, nada de efectivo en carretera, solo para algún imprevisto, no vayan a más de 120 km/h, solo usen carreteras federales**
 [25 points in Thread 1]
 ‘Don’t drive, behave seriously during the military stops, no cash on the highway, only for some unforeseen accident, don’t go faster than 120 km/h, only use federal highways’
- (3) **Usen las autopistas, las carreteras de cuota son más seguras.**
 [16 points in Thread 1]
 ‘Use the freeways, the toll roads are safer.’

In sum, encouraging, direct posts were voted higher in the Thread 1 and discouraging, indirect posts were down voted. Conversely, Thread 2 was largely discouraging and more tolerant of certain indirect strategies; however, direct deliveries were preferred.

Negatively evaluated comments typically followed the opposite trend in Thread 1, in that discouraging and indirect advice were downvoted. In particular, the following very negative, non-conventionally indirect comment had the score of 0 points and remained at the end of Thread 1:

- (4) **Está de la chingada la situación en este país, quien les diga que no se está negando a la realidad. Fíjate nada más en el montón de consejos que te dan para que no te pase nada, ¿tú crees que eso ocurre en un país decente? Con una sola falla te estarías exponiendo a que te ataquen los militares o a que te secuestre el narcotráfico. Mejor váyanse a pasear a Canadá, amigos. O a Costa Rica**
 [0 points in Thread 1]
 ‘The situation in this country is fucked up, whoever tells you it isn’t is kidding themselves from reality. Just consider the amount of advice that they are giving you so that nothing happens to you, do you believe that that happens in a decent country? With just one mistake you would be exposing yourself to military attack

or to drug dealer kidnappings. You'd be better off wandering around Canada. Or Costa Rica.'

With this comment, the user attacks the national pride of the community by implying that it is not a decent country based on the advice that has been given by other users. Given that this community defines itself through a specific country, it is clear that the members would have positive feelings or nostalgia toward Mexico that are counter to this user's sentiments. This is even more apparent through the negative evaluation of this comment. The face-threatening nature of the supporting acts is evidenced by this comment's low karma score. While this user does punctuate his comment with direct advice, it still remains negatively evaluated by the r/Mexico community.

Therefore, within the two Spanish-initiated threads from r/Mexico, the following components appear to constitute appropriate advice: directness, general information, and a selective encouraging tone.

4.2 English advice

The following analysis of advice moves are in response to English-initiated Threads 3 and 4, which are presented below in figures 3 and 4, respectively. These threads represent both an out-group German tourist and a Mexican resident who request suggestions for their future trips. Due to their medium selection, the interaction in the comments section is conducted primarily in English, suggesting language accommodation of the community to fit the needs of the OP. Both of these cases demonstrate convergent orientation toward the OP's medium selection.



Figure 3. Thread 3, German traveler

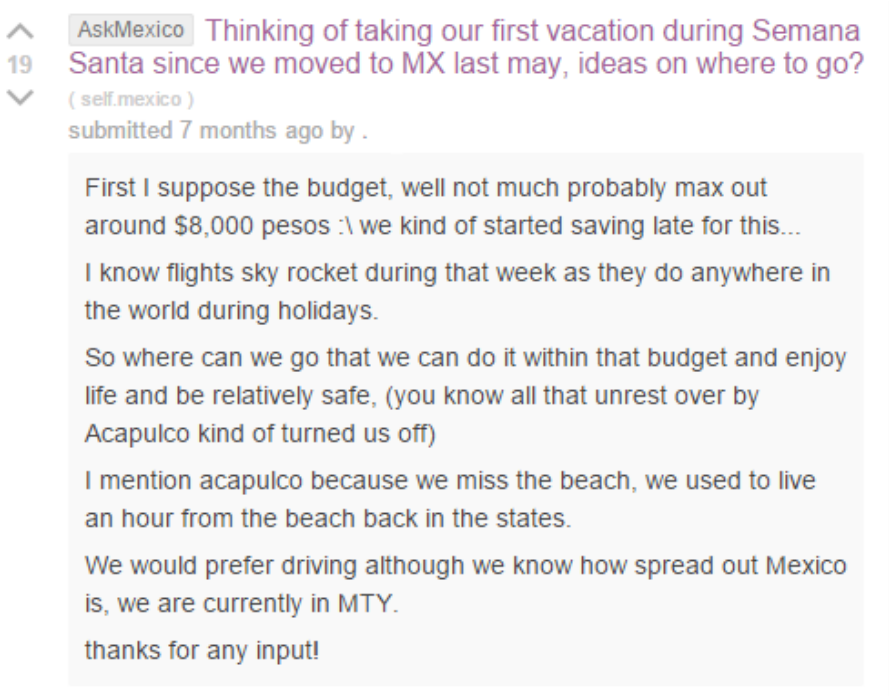


Figure 4. Thread 4, Semana Santa plans

These threads, which both pertained to travel plans, contained an array of encouraging advice supported by cautious warnings from personal experience and general information. In general, many commenters indicated their support that the OPs wanted to experience Mexico, but expressed safety concerns for certain areas and noted the unrealistic expectation that the second OP would find cheap holiday travel plans to an uncrowded beach.

A distribution of discourse moves has been summarized below in Tables 6 and 7. Additionally, a sum of the moves present in both threads has been provided in Table 8. Again, some utterances can constitute multiple types of discourse moves.

Table 6. Distribution of discursive moves in the thread, “I am going to visit a German friend who lives in Guadalajara to go on a two week roundtrip by car in the area – what should I know about your country?”

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>% of data (N)</u> |
|---------------------|---|----------------------|
| Assessment | Two weeks is a long time, how far do you guys intend to go? | 2.91% (3) |
| Advice | By all means go to a restaurant called “LOS CHILAQUILES” best Mexican cuisine of all. | 65.05% (67) |
| Referral | Since your friend has been sometime there already, I guess he knows the rest. | .97% (1) |
| General information | There are some dangerous and nasty areas across the toll free roads., so caution is advised. | 12.62% (13) |
| Personal experience | Guadalajara is one of my favorite cities in Mexico I think you’ll have a great time! :) | 7.77% (8) |
| Explanation | Try tortas ahogadas, they might sound kind of disgusting for a newcomer but they’re delicious! | 8.74% (9) |
| Metacomment | He is going to Guadalajara, not Mexico City. | .97% (1) |
| Farewell | Hope you have an awesome time there | .97% (1) |
| Total | | 100% (103) |

Table 7. Distribution of discursive moves in the thread, “Thinking of taking our first vacation during Semana Santa since we moved to MX last may, ideas on where to go?”

| <u>Term</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>% of data (N)</u> |
|---------------------|---|----------------------|
| Assessment | Sadly man, living in Monterrey makes going to the beach a little hard. | 1.34% (2) |
| Advice | Don’t go on a trip in Semana Santa. | 48.99% (73) |
| Referral | http://xilitlacaracol.com/ | 5.37% (8) |
| General information | Any beach is also more expensive during that week. | 25.50% (38) |
| Personal experience | I really liked swimming in fresh water in the middle of the jungle | 11.41% (17) |
| Explanation | I don’t recomend any beach on Semana Santa, <u>they are so full of people that you won’t be able to enjoy and rest</u> | 2.01% (3) |
| Metacomment | Like others said, SPI for the beach is your best bet | .67% |

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------------------|
| | driving from Mty. | <i>(1)</i> |
| Farewell | Hope this helps to give you some options or ideas of what you're looking for. [at the end of a comment] | <i>.67% (1)</i> |
| Disclaimer | Not sure how far they are from you though. | <i>4.03% (6)</i> |
| Total | | <i>100% (149)</i> |

Table 8. Total distribution of discourse moves in both English-initiated advice threads

| <u>Term</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Assessment | <i>1.98% (5)</i> |
| Advice | <i>55.56% (140)</i> |
| Referral | <i>3.57% (9)</i> |
| General information | <i>20.24% (51)</i> |
| Personal experience | <i>9.92% (25)</i> |
| Explanation | <i>4.76% (12)</i> |
| Metacomment | <i>.79% (2)</i> |
| Farewell | <i>.79% (2)</i> |
| Disclaimer | <i>2.38% (6)</i> |
| Total | <i>100% (252)</i> |

It can be observed in the Tables 5-7, that advice (55.56%, 140 tokens), general information (20.24%, 51 tokens), and personal experience (9.92%, 25 tokens) are the most favored discourse moves. Interestingly, the most highly evaluated comments contained both a direct advice move and a supporting move.

In Table 8 below, it can be observed that, in total, direct strategies are favored in English exchanges; however, there remains a large presence of indirect advice moves given that indirect advice is often accompanied by direct advice. Despite the prevalence of these indirect strategies, these strategies were not highly evaluated by the community through the voting system; therefore, we can assume for this data, the community prefers direct methods of advice.

Table 9. Directness of advice in two English-initiated threads

| <u>Directness</u> | <u>Example</u> | <u>#1</u> | <u>#2</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Direct | Try tortas ahogadas | 59 (88.06%) | 34 (46.58%) | 93 (66.43%) |
| Conventionally indirect | Maybe Galerías mall would be a better option | 5 (7.46%) | 19 (26.03%) | 24 (17.14%) |
| Non-conventionally indirect | Andares has some good restaurants | 3 (4.48%) | 20 (27.40%) | 23 (16.43%) |
| Total | | | | 140 |

Largely, positively evaluated advice in both of these threads was direct and accompanied by encouraging and humorous discourse strategies. In the following example, a commenter encourages the OP to visit other places during Semana Santa even though the advice-giver is directly advising against the OP's original travel plans.

- (5) **I dont recomend any beach on Semana Santa, they are so full of people that you wont be able to enjoy and rest. Any beach is also more expensive on that week. I would recomend something like San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, San Miguel de Allende or Guanajuato. For San Miguel you need to fly, but you can get to Guanajuato in a 8 hours road trip.**
[11 points in Thread 4]

Further, the implementation of humor can be observed in the following exchange within the highest voted comment in the first thread:

- (6) **If you ever try "mexican food" in Germany or elsewhere, forget about that crap, prepare yourself to touch the heaven whit the different regional cuisine here in Mexico**
PS: Also prepare some pepto bismol or alka seltzer
[17 points in Thread 3]

The advice speech acts in example 6 above show three direct, imperatives with tones of encouragement and humor. The advice-giver uses scatological humor within the post-script, to which the OP responds, "Preparing to shit my pants, got it!". The community and the advice-seeker appear to accept this type of humor and direct advice, as evidenced by this explicit response and the karma value given to this comment.

On the other hand, negatively evaluated comments were vague or did not address the OP's original request as per the provided background information, as observed in the two examples below:

- (7) **This is all you need** [-4 points in Thread 3]
Text link leading to a website for kidnap and ransom insurance

- (8) **Tampico. All the Regios (MTY) go there on semana santa, since is the nearest beach.** [0 points in Thread 4]

Indeed, the OP expresses negative evaluation of these comments in their responses. For example, the OP responded to example 7 with, 'I can't tell if you are serious or not... is that a good thing?'. Later it is confirmed in the thread that this link was a joke; however, the community's confusion and offense taken toward this comment is demonstrated both in its comment responses from the community and its negative karma. To the comment illustrated in example 8, the OP replied, "thats where we are originally thinking but like you said everyone goes there, so we are trying to find something more off the beaten path even though I am sure during that period it'll be harder". The OP's preference for a less populated vacation spot is discussed in the highly evaluated comment threads. This explicit reaction and negative evaluation demonstrate that the commenter in example 8 does not align with the OP's objectives. For both of these cases, it is evident through both the community evaluation via karma and the explicit comments that these negatively evaluated comments did not match the thread's objectives.

In sum, the following components appear to constitute good advice in these English-initiated threads: directness, humor, general information, and personal experiences.

5. Discussion

Globally, the advice given in this data is direct and encouraging in both languages. Additionally, this study observed very little pragmalinguistic variation between Spanish and English despite previous research indicating differences in directness (García, 1993; Placencia, 2012). The tendency toward direct advice in this community is consistent with Placencia's (2012) findings for the Spanish-speaking *Yahoo!Respuestas* online community, in that direct advice was more prevalent than in previous studies on English advice. This does not account for the directness found in English comments in this data. While the English advice data presented here is more direct in comparison with the conventionally and non-conventionally indirect advice interactions studied in Locher (2006), García (1993), and Harrison & Barlow (2009) note that both types of indirect advice acts were more tolerated in English if they were considered support for a direct advice act. Interestingly, even Spanish advice comments displayed a tolerance for these supporting acts. Nevertheless, for both languages, advice moves were more frequent than any other type of discourse move, such as general information and personal experiences.

There are several tendencies in the acquisition of second language pragmatics that may support the findings for a preference toward direct advice in both languages as well as the tolerance of indirect supporting acts. In particular, the findings present in Martínez Flor (2003) show that Spanish learners of English utilize direct expressions of advice, which emulates patterns in their native

language. It is likely that the community members that have written English comments could be second language learners, which could account for the prevalence of direct advice. If this finding holds true for American learners of Spanish, it would be likely that the use of indirect supporting acts could be a pragmatic remnant from tendencies in English. Additionally, Bordería-García (2004) found that English speakers give direct advice when there is no risk to the speaker's or hearer's face. Regardless of linguistic background, there may be no such face risk in this anonymous community, which would also condition the prevalence of direct advice in both languages. A further motivation could be the problematic nature of indirect advice in cross-linguistic interactions. For example, Koike (1996) found that a conventionally indirect strategy used by native Spanish speakers, negated interrogatives, was difficult for American learners of Spanish to process with a neutral pragmatic value. In English, this delivery can appear impolite despite being neutral in Spanish. Therefore, direct advice may be favored for clarity, politeness, and positive evaluation from the community given that the general population of Reddit outside of this subreddit is predominately English-speaking. Therefore, I argue that the cross-linguistic pragmalinguistic similarities present in r/Mexico may be explicated through community members approximating pragmalinguistic norms of each language. This merger may create a hybrid system that tolerates directness in English and allows for indirect acts in Spanish.

While Finlay (2014) found that long and complex comments typically receive more karma, the current study demonstrates that concise, direct comments are the most highly evaluated within this subreddit, with the exception of one highly evaluated personal narrative. Although direct advice was prevalent and positively evaluated, the consideration of community evaluations provides a nuanced view of its conditional acceptability. In particular, personal experiences were highly evaluated and more frequent in the thread regarding the OP's illegal immigration to Mexico. This exceptional positive evaluation may reveal that indirectness can be advantageous according to topic; however, more data would be necessary to confirm this possibility. Nonetheless, comments that achieved high karma scores were typically direct in both languages. Indeed, comments containing series of imperative advice acts were the most frequent advice delivery to be highly evaluated by the community. Conversely, negatively evaluated comments typically were indirect or unclear. This supports the idea that the r/Mexico community prefers direct advice for considerations of clarity.

Nevertheless, it is important to contextualize this proposed hybrid system of pragmalinguistic strategies in the greater Reddit community, with both advice speech acts and other types of speech acts. With this preliminary contribution to the CMDA literature regarding r/Mexico, future studies would benefit from studying monolingual interactions in the larger Reddit community to observe possible contrasts to the proposed community norms in the bilingual community of r/Mexico. Additionally, these monolingual interactions typically have more populous threads that receive comparatively more comment karma. Therefore, the

community's evaluation of advice in monolingual threads would provide a richer view of discourse practices and their acceptance or rejection.

6. Conclusions

Overall, the current study found that for both Spanish and English advice in r/Mexico, directness was preferred. Nevertheless, indirectness was tolerated conditionally, as evidenced by the community's positive evaluation of personal experiences and advice supported by general information. The prevalence of highly evaluated direct advice moves may be associated with the preference for direct advice in Spanish. This tendency could be conditioned by the acquisition of second language pragmatics and by considerations of clarity in a bilingual community. Ultimately, the current study shows that this bilingual community does not display pragmatolinguistic differences between Spanish and English advice that previous research has reported. Instead, it appears that a hybrid system that allows for direct advice in English has been created to bridge these pragmatic differences between second language learners of English and Spanish. Nevertheless, given that the current study is one of very few CMDA studies on Reddit, this contribution has yet to be contextualized in the greater Reddit community. The assertions that a hybrid system exists in this bilingual community could be better supported by continued speech act research on both the monolingual and bilingual communities on Reddit.

These findings encourage exploration of possible hybrid pragmatolinguistic strategies in other bilingual communities in computer-mediated contexts. Indeed, the analysis of larger bilingual communities online with different language backgrounds represented in the current study could provide interesting implications for how cross-cultural differences are negotiated online.

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Appendix A. r/Mexico examples consistent with the affiliation strategies from Placencia (2012)

Encouragement

- (9) **Do: eat all kind of food with out hesitation. Find a bottle of "7 leguas blanco. 100% agave tequila"**
 And be happy drinking it.
 Dont do: use or buy drugs, put your garbage out of a trash can.
 For Anthing else you are at home. [10 points in Thread 3]

Humor

- (10) **If you ever try “mexican food” in Germany or elsewhere, forget about that crap, prepare yourself to touch the heaven with the different regional cuisine here in Mexico**
PS: Also prepare some pepto bismol or alka seltzer
 [17 points in Thread 3]

Appendix B. Positively evaluated comments from r/Mexico

- (11) **The other Americans I have met have all pretty much have the same reason for living here. Young and old. Something about this place that just brought us and we couldn't let go after visiting. I live , breath, work, and have my family here. I'm a citizen. Mexicano. I can do the crazy grito de gallo from the banda music with enough alcohol in the blood.**
I arrived speaking almost no spanish. I took a spanish course at a local community college before hand, didn't help much. Just the people close to me understood me without having to say much. I used ym hands a lot. At one point all i had to do was give certain gesture and my friend with be able to relay my thoughts. 6 years later I'm tanner and still horrible at spanish but I get by now without much help but you either think I'm “de norte” ‘from the north’ or retarded .
Anyways to each their own you got to hustle it. Take a trip for a couple months. Looking for easy work? Speak English wel and some Spanish. Hotels are almost hiring especially in tourist areas. Pay is not bad from what others have told me.
Good luck [9 points in Thread 2]
- (12) **Do: eat all kind of food with out hesitation. Finad a bottle of “7 lenguas blanco. 100% agave tequila”**
And be happy drinking it.
Don't do: use or buy drugs, put your garbage out of a trash can.
For Anything else you are at home. [11 points in Thread 3]

Appendix C. Negatively evaluated comments from r/Mexico

- (13) **No recomiendo ir a la ciudad de Mexico en carro con placas de Estados Unidos, hasta para un mexicano de otro estado es dificil ir y no porque la ciudad sea complicada, sino porque cuando cruzas la caseta ya se encuentra un policia tratandote de extorsionar por el simple hecho de ser de fuera. Pero de en general las carreteras mexicanas son muy seguras pero caras. [0 points in Thread 1]**
 ‘I don't recommend going to Mexico City with a car with American plates, even for a Mexican from another state it's difficult to go there and not because the city is complicated, but rather because when you cross the toll booth then you run

into a policeman trying to extort you for the simple fact that you're not from there. But in general the Mexican freeways are very safe but expensive.'

- (14) **Millones de mexicanos se han ido a vivir a los EEUU. Millones mas quisieran estar en tu lugar. Eso te deberia poner a pensar. 1000, habitantes de Ciudad Juarez hanHUIDO hacia El Paso TX. Ven de vez en cuando de turista pero no cometas el grandisimo error de venirte a vivir aca.** [2 points in Thread 2]
'Thousands of mexicans have left to go live in the United States. Thousands more would want to be in your place. That should make you think. 100,000 residents of Cuidad Juarez have FLED to El Paso TX. Come as a tourist every now and again but don't make the *huge* mistake of coming to live here.'
- (15) **Dont go on trip in Semana Santa , is the time of the year with when tourist place are more full, is nightmare, better save more and is better if you the first two weeks of december to Cancun , you have no idea how cheap it is the first two weeks , alsoe in december cancun is amazingly warm, very nice...** [2 points in Thread 4]