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Impoliteness Strategies Reported and Issued on Website Reviews by Clients of New York and Madrid Social Services Centres

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Abstract: This paper analyses the negative reviews that some users of social services in New York and Madrid posted on Google. The aim is to relate the impoliteness strategies that the users of these centres reported to have received or that they issued themselves with the cultural values of the groups they belong to. To achieve this, twenty American and Spanish centres were analysed, obtaining more than two hundred negative comments that, qualitatively and quantitatively analysed, were related to impoliteness strategies. These impoliteness strategies were linked to the four social characteristics already presented in a previous study. Also, the chi-square formula was applied to the data. Thus, this study has shown that the use that speakers make of impoliteness strategies is related to the cultural values of the group they belong to.

Keywords: impoliteness strategies, cultural dimensions, social characteristics, users' reviews, social services centers

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1. Introduction

There is a significant number of articles dedicated to analysing social services in social networks, whose main purpose is to check the assessment that users make of these services and to analyse the implications this may have (Boddy & Dominelli, 2016; Evers, Haverinen, Leichsenring, & Wistow, 2019). However, in this article, the analysis focuses on examining the language used in the context of social services, in particular, the linguistic impoliteness strategies reported and issued by users of these services, to relate them to cultural traits. In this sense, we have not found any articles that focus on such parameters, hence the originality of the paper.

1.1. Impoliteness, context, and social characteristics

Impoliteness is not an element of discourse that can be clearly delimited and unequivocally defined. To begin with, many researchers no longer regard impoliteness as something opposed to politeness but as two complementary phenomena (Bousfield, 2006; Culpeper, 1996; Mills, 2005). In any case, the role of context is always vitally important (Culpeper, 2010; Schiffrin, 1991). In fact, nowadays, "one cannot find any mainstream politeness theorist explicitly arguing that either politeness or impoliteness is wholly inherent in linguistic expressions" (Culpeper, 2010). Rather, the current trend is to try to adopt a discursive or postmodern approach (Bousfield, 2010; Culpeper, 2010; Locher, 2006; Mills, 2003) and consider context as a crucial criterion. Multiple elements configure context, all of them conditioning the appearance of impoliteness. Among these elements, we may find the participants, the intention, and the cultural values that guide them in the interaction, etc. In this paper, by using the term attack, we mean conveying impoliteness through a linguistic expression issued with a result of diminishing, menacing, endangering, etc., somebody's public image or public rights. Thus, impoliteness can occur when:

1. The speaker utters, either intentionally or not, an expression that threatens or attacks the public image or social rights of another person
2. The hearer perceives that his or her public image or social rights have been threatened or attacked, whether or not the speaker did it intentionally

In addition, the relationship that the speakers establish among themselves (Fuentes Rodriguez, 2012; Kienpointner, 2008) or the relationship that participants establish with negative emotions and cultural values (Kaul de Marlangeon, 2017; Wilutzky, 2015) influences the perception of impoliteness. Specifically, this article aims to explain the use of impoliteness by relating it to the social characteristic that the sender attacks or that the listener feels are attacked. Social characteristics (Pacheco Baldó, 2019) are four key features common to all individuals that, depe-

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-nding on the cultural group to which they belong, receive different attention. In other words, social characteristics are part of the context since they are part of the cultural background of the participants. First, we can talk about the *public image of singularity*. This concept is inspired by Brown and Levinson's positive image (1987), whose idea of the *face* was taken up later by Spencer-Oatey, (2000, 2003) to refer to the need of every individual to feel valued and appreciated by others. Therefore, the public image of singularity refers to the need to be positively valued by the rest of the individuals and that they recognize that one has his or her own unique values and abilities, which allow him or her to do things right. The concept of singularity just aims to emphasise somebody's desire to be valued positively as an individual, but at its core, the basic idea is the one upheld by Spencer-Oatey. Secondly, we can talk about *public rights*. This concept is inspired by Spencer-Oatey's *sociality rights* (2000, 2003), that were defined as everyone's need to maintain intact their social and personal rights, including the sense of social justice and the right of association. In a way, they referred to Brown and Levinson's concept of negative public image (1987). My concepts are also inspired by Bravo's (1999, 2002) notions of autonomy, affiliation and role. In this paper, the public right of equality refers to the need for individuals to be treated fairly and equally in comparison with other individuals, that is, to feel that they have the same rights. The public right of affiliation refers to the desire to be part of society or a group and not to be an outcast but a useful member of a community. It differs from Bravo's concept of autonomy because it emphasises the desire for being accepted, not only for being seen by the group. Finally, the public right of independence refers to the desire to keep our physical and emotional territory free from attacks, meddling or threats. This concept especially focuses on the idea of not feeling overwhelmed, and this should be considered a right, not simply a desire.

These social characteristics are prioritized by each cultural group according to their values and beliefs. For example, for an individualist cultural group such as the United States, the public image of singularity and the public right to equality is very important, but also the public right to independence is crucial because of the importance of defending the autonomy and independence of the individual and his or her nearest environment. However, for a tribal-collectivist culture such as the Spanish one, the public image of singularity and the public right of equality receive most of the attention, but also the public right of affiliation is vitally important since in tribal-collectivist cultures, belonging to small social or family groups is highly valued (Leaptrott, 1996). The term tribal was coined by Leaptrott (1996) to refer to cultural groups halfway through the continuum of individualism-collectivism. The term tribal-collectivist culture is used in this paper to refer precisely to cultures which are neither totally individualist nor collectivist.

In a previous study, I presented a list of impoliteness strategies related to these four social characteristics (Pacheco Baldó, 2019). These social characteristics may be attacked with impoliteness strategies, either directly or indirectly, as well as either intentionally or not. Below is a list of these strategies, as they were found in the analysis.

1) Impoliteness strategies that attack the public image of singularity or the desire to be seen as someone valid, skilled and who can do things properly: Insulting, mocking, stating somebody's negative aspect, self-impoliteness, stating that somebody has made a mistake, putting the blame on somebody, disqualifying somebody with negative adjectives (new), ignoring, not taking into account somebody's opinion, questioning somebody's abilities, insinuating that somebody has made a mistake, insinuating somebody's negative aspects.

2) Impoliteness strategies attack the public right to equality because they are aimed at making someone feel that he or she is on an inferior level or that rules do not apply to them the same as to the rest: Despising someone, disregarding someone, highlighting differences, abusing differences, telling someone that he or she is in debt, using obscene and rude language, not showing empathy, exaggerating one's own capabilities, not abiding by general rules, insinuating that someone is in debt, not abiding by politeness rules, using mock politeness.

3) Strategies of impoliteness that attack the public right of affiliation as they intend to convey the idea of exclusion from the group: Ridiculing someone in front of others, breaking the relationship, denying the possibility of a future relationship, using inappropriate group markers, seeking conflict with difficult topics, excluding from an activity, using a dark language that cannot be understood by the hearer.

4) Strategies of impoliteness that attack the public right of independence because they target the other's boundaries, which are considered everyone's right: Threatening, invading somebody's physical or emotional space, interrupting abruptly someone's speech, boasting about doing something that harms someone else, ordering someone to do something immediately, not using a deferential language, insinuating that the other's territory could have trespassed.

This list of strategies could be further extended as new ones appear in successive analyses.

1.2. Cultural dimensions in the study

The cultural dimensions described below could explain the differences in the use of impoliteness strategies found in this analysis. However, the context will always determine the cultural options that participants activate, to the extent that the options chosen may be opposite to those commonly used (Correa, Contreras, Ramírez, & López, 2002; Sifianou & Garcés-Conejos, 2018). The scholars taken as a reference in this analysis are Hofstede, Hampden-

Turner and Trompenaars. Nowadays, they are considered gurus in intercultural communication as their analysis includes thousands of respondents from dozens of countries. There are many voices that defend the applicability of the parameters established by these authors (Bennet, 2004; Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007), although we must always avoid stereotypes, which are only preconceived ideas about countries that usually turn out to be false. They respectively have exhaustive websites –www.hofstede-insights.com and www3.thtconsulting.com– where people from all fields of study can find advice on how to interact with different cultures. Finally, we could say that their parameters are updated to the extent that Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars' book in 2021 deals with the importance of cultural values of nations and cultural dimensions in the COVID-19 pandemic, and Hosfetede's dimensions are currently used to analyse the impact of this pandemic upon other aspects (Gokmen, Baskici, & Ercil, 2021).

One of the cultural dimensions that have been most frequently studied in intercultural literature is identity, also known as individualism. This dimension refers to the relationship that the individual establishes with other individuals in society. It tells us about the strength or weakness of the bonds that are established among them and how important it is for these people to stay connected to support networks or, conversely, to feel independent. The United States is considered as a paradigmatic example of individualism, and different authors place it first place in the rankings of this dimension (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Following Hofstede (1991), in individualist cultures, people prefer individual independence and freedom of action and expression, so their speakers often adopt a clear and direct discursive style. This emphasis on individual independence also applies to the nuclear family, which plays a crucial role in the person's public image. In addition, people feel that everyone is responsible for their actions, and they also like to believe that laws apply to everyone equally. Spanish cultural preferences are halfway through the continuum of individualism-collectivism, and we can refer to these groups as tribal-collectivist ones. For these cultures, the importance of the individual and his or her nuclear family is shared with that of small groups and social networks that are woven into all areas, i.e., personal, work, family, etc. Thus, for example, apart from the nuclear family, the extended family tends to play a more prominent role in these groups than in individualist ones. Trust is established within these groups, which leads them to express honestly and confidently among themselves, but it also forces them to maintain loyalty and a sense of duty. Unlike individualist cultures, people believe that laws may not apply equally, as they are influenced by the type of relationship established among individuals.

Another dimension that has arisen in the analysis is masculinity-femininity. (Hofstede, 1991, 1998; Hofstede et al., 2010). This dimension tells us to what extent the roles typically assigned to men and women are differentiated in culture. Thus, in a masculine culture, roles are strongly divided, while, in feminine culture, there are not so many differences between the roles and tasks carried out by men and women, both in the family and at work. Apart from this feature, the most important trait for this study is that masculine cultures are cultures that value public achievements and recognition. This implies that competitiveness among its members is well-seen and accepted as a means of achieving goals. On the contrary, for feminine groups, it is ideal for maintaining harmony and consensus through cooperation among participants. In these groups, individual achievements are not so much valued, and it is more important to show and feel concern for the needs of others. Hofstede places the United States in the upper middle part of the scale, with 42 points, so it is prone to masculinity, while Spain is located in the lower middle side of the ranking, with 62 points, and therefore it shows traits of femininity.

Among the seven dimensions that Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) developed in their model, the one called individualism-communitarianism has been considered in this study. It describes the same values as Hofstede's individualism dimension. Also, universalism-particularism and specific-diffuse have been considered. By universalist cultures, such as the United States, the authors refer to cultures in which citizens expect processes, norms, and laws to be always applied on an equal basis, regardless of the relationship among the participants. For this reason, it is not important that, when doing business, for example, participants establish a strong relationship since standards and processes are above personal relationships. On the contrary, it is important for participants in particularistic cultures to strengthen ties and bring together positions to understand each other's needs. For these groups, the situation and context are more important than the norm, and this should be adapted to the needs of the context. Spain is located halfway through this continuum. This implies that, on the one hand, relationships and ties established among participants are important, and on the other hand, that there is a strong preference for rules and laws, hoping that they will be applied equally, in theory, although being fully aware that this does not happen in practice. This need of the Spanish group to have a wide repertoire of laws and regulations can be linked to its high uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010), by which participants need to have a wide array of standardised processes, laws and norms that provide them with certainty when facing the ambiguities and uncertainties that the future holds.

Another Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars dimension that can be found in the analysis is specific-diffuse. The main difference between these two poles is that in specific cultures, people tend to separate the private sphere from the public sphere and also, and they usually adopt a direct discursive style (Woo & Lee, 2007). Another feature, which is the one that interests us here, is that for specific cultural groups, such as the United States, the result is more important than the relationships and interactions that occur during the process. One of the keys to achieving an optimal result is to identify any possible failures, inconveniences, or problematic functions during

the process and to try to modify or change them. According to the authors, the United States would be again at the top of the scale, while Spain is halfway. In diffuse groups, it is more important to maintain cooperation and good relations to achieve the ultimate objectives, and differences in status, age and social stratum are generally respected.

2. Methodology and corpus

This study was conducted from January to March 2020. Twenty centres that offer social services in the cities of New York and Madrid were analysed. These cities were chosen as they are very important cities in these countries and somewhat representative of these cultural groups. Likewise, they are cities comparable in two main parameters, their population and their per capita income. (INE, 2018, 2019; Statista, 2018; United Census Bureau, 2018).

As for the corpus of informants or reviewers, it is important to note that, due to the relative anonymity typical of this type of digital media, it was difficult to know with certainty people's nationality and, therefore, the cultural group to which they belong. To try to solve this pitfall and to attempt to provide homogeneity to the study groups, names that referred to nationalities different from that of the studied groups were discarded. Furthermore, comments in which serious grammatical – not spelling – errors were found were also removed from the study since they may be a clear indication that the client does not belong to the specific cultural group under study. However, other demographic traits such as gender, economic status, etc., were not taken into account since, when analysing a cultural group as a whole, these variables may not be considered. What this study has tried to collect is the prevalence in the use of impoliteness strategies found in the centres of New York and Madrid, but not to draw a thorough profile of the clients of these services. Besides, the variables that authors such as Hofstede or Hamden-Turner, and Trompenaars describe refer to characteristics at the national level, not at the individual one. Furthermore, as we will see, the results can be grouped in large homogeneous blocks of impoliteness strategies, which can be taken as an indicator that the informants from which the data come are also homogeneous, thus clearing the doubts about the validity of the data. Regarding ethical issues relating to the privacy of both clients and centres, it is understood that they both accept the terms and conditions required by Google, which implies that the comments poured there are public.

By analysing the reviews that Google allows to post about these centres, the author was able to collect more than 500 comments from 200 service users or clients, 99 of them visited the American centres, and 101 users went to the Spanish centres. It should be noted that each service user is informed to have received or issued more than one strategy, so the number of strategies found exceeds that of clients.

First, all the negative reviews found on Google about these centres were registered in a Word document. Then, a deductive thematic analysis was carried out to identify impoliteness strategies. For this analysis, the list of strategies mentioned above was taken as a reference – grouped by the social characteristic they attack. If the impoliteness strategy found was one reported by the user, it was noted down in the left margin of the statement. If the strategy had been issued by the user to attack the centre's public image or public rights, then it was noted down in the right margin of the statement. This process was repeated a week later, and the results were compared to check they were the same in both cases and that they were consistent, in other words, that the comments had been assigned to the correct impoliteness strategy. This exercise is called intra-coder reliability, and it is a common way of giving consistency to sole author studies (Frisby, 2017).

After this qualitative analysis, two tables were drawn up to proceed to quantitative analysis. These tables showed the number of service users that reported to have received impoliteness strategies and the number of service users that had used strategies to attack social characteristics, i.e., public image or public rights. Finally, the impoliteness strategies were grouped according to each social characteristic, and then the percentages of each group were obtained. For example, in the line of Table 1 that shows the strategies reported by clients, we can see that a total of 103 strategies were found in the group of American centres, 66 of which attacked users' public right of equality. This leads to a percentage of 64.07% in this social characteristic for this group. Conversely, in the line of the table that refers to the strategies issued by clients, we can observe that from a total of 140 strategies that were issued in the Spanish group, 132 attacked the public image of singularity, which gives a percentage of 94.28%.

Next, for a better display of results, all the data were merged into a single table. This table includes, on the one hand, the strategies reported by clients and, on the other hand, the strategies that clients issued to attack the centres. Finally, the chi-square formula was applied to these figures to check if the differences found in the analysis were statistically significant or not.

2.1. Analysis and discussion

Table 1 specifies the percentages at which the social characteristics were attacked in each group of centres. Since the public right of affiliation was only attacked with one strategy, and on one occasion, it has not been included in the table.

Table 1: Numbers and percentages of reviews with strategies that attack the three social characteristics, as reported or issued by both groups.

	Reviews with strategies that attack the public image of singularity		**Reviews with strategies that attack the public right of equality**		**Reviews with strategies that attack the public right of independence**	
	USA	SPAIN	USA	SPAIN	USA	SPAIN
Reported by clients	29 / 103	70 / 107	66 / 103	34 / 107	8 / 103	3 / 107
	28,15%	65,42%	64,07%	31,77%	7,76%	2,91%
Issued by clients to attack the centre	140 / 155	132 / 140	11 / 155	8 / 140	3 / 155	0 / 140
	90,32%	94,28%	7,09%	5,71%	1,93%	0%

Source: calculated by the author.

Now, let us take a close look at these results, dividing the analysis, on the one hand, into impoliteness strategies that the users of the centres said they received and, on the other hand, impoliteness strategies that the users issued to attack the centres or their workers.

2.2. Impoliteness strategies reported by clients

Users of social services in the two cultural groups were reported to have suffered impoliteness differently. Firstly, as can be seen in Table 1, 64.07% of the strategies informed by the users of the American centres were aimed at attacking their public right of equality. Up to 28.15% of strategies attacked their public image of singularity, and finally, 7.76% of the strategies involved an attack on the public right of independence. Secondly, as regards the strategies reported by users of the Spanish centres, 65.42% of them attacked their public image of singularity. Up to 31.77% were aimed at attacking their public right of equality, and, finally, service users claimed on 2.91% of the occasions that their public right of independence had been threatened.

First, the fact that users of the American centres felt mostly attacked in their public right of equality – 64.07% – could be related to the cultural dimension of universalism-particularism (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000). As mentioned above, the United States is one of the first countries in the ranking of this dimension. One of the key features of universalism is that all citizens want to be treated equally, and they also want laws to be applied equally. In this context, what citizens perceive is that their rights are violated since the workers of the centres do not respect the rules of politeness and good manners when addressing them. In this situation of economic or personal hardship in which they find themselves, the violation of politeness rules makes them feel a sense of helplessness and injustice. The types of attack that people cite most are the fact that they are not treated with respect, but with rude language and bad manners, and also that the workers of the centres show no empathy for their plight as if they did not care at all. For universalist cultures, rules, processes, and obligations are more important than the relationship established among people. Clients expect to be treated according to the rules, in this case, with dignity and respect, and they also want that workers in the centres do not make value judgments that deprive them of the social benefits to which they are entitled. Examples include statements such as the following ones:

> "*I have never been spoken to so rudely before in my life… completely unacceptable behaviour." Human Resources Administration's user.*
>
> *"Rude and disrespectful people." Human Resources Administration's user.*
>
> *"The staff are very nasty… The poor skills they have with people..." ACS's user.*
>
> *"They treat people like garbage and disrespect women." New York City Food Stamp Office's user.*

As can be seen, users of the centres think that they have certain rights as citizens and that these are not being respected. Moreover, they also feel that, as human beings, they should have the right to be treated with respect and dignity. Let us remember that these rights are embedded in the cultural ideology of this country, i.e., everyone has the right to be treated equally, as well as the right to be independent and to pursue goals in life. Therefore, users of the centres feel betrayed and mistreated by the workers and think that their opportunities are reduced due to acts beyond their control.

The second most attacked social feature, according to users of the American centres, was the public image of singularity – up to 28.15%. The most common complaint was that citizens could not contact by phone, and therefore they were frustrated and felt ignored. In an individualist culture like the American culture, being ignored is completely contrary to the importance that the individual should be given (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010). Users of the centres complained about the attention received with comments such as the following ones:

> *"Disgusting no service. You just get recordings with voice mailboxes full and no one to answer your call." Department of Social Services' user.*
>
> *"I think they put me on hold, packed up and went home! Horrible service." New York City Adult Protective's user.*

Finally, it is worth noting that 7.76% of the strategies reported by users of the American centres, more than double that of the Spanish ones – were aimed at attacking the public right of independence. This is a fundamental right in an individualist culture since it defends individual freedom to act and to pursue personal goals, and therefore, any attack or restriction of that independence is considered a serious attack on the person. The attacks that service users mention refer to situations in which they felt threatened or invaded physically or emotionally. They stated these feelings with expressions such as these ones:

> *"... the Operations staff who just insult yell or threaten us with arrest or loss of our beds." Department of Homeless Services' user.*

> *"In no way should a mother be attacked after waiting on the cold, dirty floor for assistance with her child in her arms." Human Resources Administration's user.*

Next, let us move on to the results collected in the Spanish centres. The fact that users of the Spanish centres felt mostly attacked in their public image – 65.42% – can be related to the cultural dimension of identity (Hofstede, 1991; Leaptrott, 1996). As mentioned above, in a tribal-collectivist culture such as the Spanish one, the public image of singularity is one of the most valued social characteristics. For an individual to be accepted by the group, he or she should first be considered a valid person and someone able to function adequately in society. According to this analysis, the main complaint that users of these centres posted is that they felt ignored because their phone calls were not answered at all. Clients feel invisible to the centres, with no hope of engaging in a relationship with them which would help them get out of the difficult situation they find themselves in. Service users need to trust the social services system, but the first response they receive from them is indifference and ignorance. Be reminded that for tribal-collectivist groups, the relationship that individuals establish with the public system is of great importance. Individuals believe that the State, as an official body, has somehow an obligation to help them in times of need (Hofstede, 1991). Therefore, feeling ignored, they not only see their public image undermined, but they also think that their hopes of being helped are dashed, and they will not be able to solve the problem that prevents them from leading a more dignified life. Service users expressed their frustration with phrases such as the following ones:

> *"Una vergüenza, no hay forma de contactar por teléfono." Centro de Servicios Sociales Zaira' s user. [Shame on you, there's no way to contact by phone.] [My translation]*

> *"No sé para qué ponen el teléfono si nunca lo cogen. Es una entidad pública y no está cumpliendo con su función." Consejería de Políticas Sociales y Familia's user. [I don't know what they have the phone for if they never pick it up. It is a public entity and it is not fulfilling its role.]*

> *"Nunca atienden al teléfono, tampoco contestan los emails." Agencia Madrileña para la Tutela de Adultos' user. [They never answer the phone nor emails.]*

The second most common complaint that users of the Spanish centre mention have to do with attacks on their public right of equality – up to 31.77%. In particular, users refer to the lack of empathy shown by workers and the fact that they were not treated politely. In addition to thinking that their right to be treated in the same way as other citizens are infringed, they also feel underestimated and undervalued, as their problems do not receive the importance they believe they deserve. They expressed frustration with expressions such as the following:

> *"Ha sido desolador… Cero empatía, cero ayuda…" Centro de Servicios Sociales Zaida's user. [It's been bleak... Zero empathy, zero help…]*

> *"No solo no me da una información clara, sino que me trata con todo el desprecio que uno se pueda imaginar." Centro Base III Delicias' user. [They don't only fail to give clear information, but they treat you with all the contempt one can imagine.]*

Once analysed the impoliteness reported by these clients, let us move on to the impoliteness that they issued towards the centres.

2.3. Impoliteness strategies issued by clients

Concerning the strategies that users of both groups used to attack the centres or workers, we can say that there are hardly any differences. Both groups prioritized attacks targeting the public image of the centres, with a clear desire to undermine their reputation. Thus, 90.32% of the strategies used in the American centres and 94.28% of the ones used in the Spanish centres were aimed at attacking this social characteristic. In addition, 7.09% and 5.71%, respectively, were attacks on their public right of equality. Finally, only 1.93% of the strategies used in the American group were attacks or threats to the public right of independence.

These results are as expected if we consider that, when attacking the centre, clients in both groups focus on trying to destroy the centre's public image. The ultimate purpose is that other citizens do not consider the centre or the worker there as a useful asset for society, nor as an entity with a unique and irreplaceable value. On the contrary, their desire is to convey that the centres are invalid entities and that they could be dispensed with at any time.

Looking more closely at the strategies that people used, we learn that in both groups, among other comments, the main attack was to use disqualifying adjectives in the first place and to insult the centre or workers

in the second place. That is, in both cases, the goal is to discredit the public image of the recipient since the client tries to erode the worker's or the centre's public image. The difference between the two strategies is that insulting goes one step further than using disqualifying adjectives, as it conveys a greater attack, outrage and contempt for the other. In the American group, the most used disqualifying adjectives were the following ones: useless, worthless, horrible service, terrible service, nasty staff, incompetent people, unprofessional, heartless, disrespectful, lazy, unorganized, a disaster, unacceptable, the worst, rude, etc. Up to 50 strategies out of 155 of the comments placed by users in this group contained this type of disqualifying adjective. When people wanted to express more anger, they used insulting and hurtful expressions such as: what the hell…? the ghetto hood rat's tool, imbeciles, stupid, dammed lazily; this place sucks, inept staff, you should be ashamed, trash, boogers, they are scam artist, crooks, etc. They used this type of insult on 26 occasions.

As for the clients of the Spanish centres, up to 40 of the strategies, out of a total of 140, consisted of using disqualifying adjectives and expressions to discredit the people who had provided the service or even the whole centre. The most repeated comments were the following ones: pésimo, fatal, horrible, insensible, patético, lamentable, nefasto, lo peor, muy deficiente, incompetence, maleducado, inútiles, poco professional, inhumano, irrespetuoso, decepcionante, etc. [disastrous, awful, horrible, insensitive, pathetic, lamentable, terrible, the worst, seriously deficient, incompetent, rude, worthless, unprofessional, heartless, disrespectful, disappointing, etc.] To go one step further, users of the Spanish centres used insulting expressions such as: panda de sinvergüenzas, son una vergüenza, cero patatero, una mamandurria, borde, macarra, asqueroso, repugnante, unos mierdas, etc. [bunch of scoundrels, crooks, zero (an absolute duffer), bullshit, churl, thug, gross, revolting, piece of shit, etc.] In this group, in up to 32 times, service users issued this kind of insult.

A small difference in the use of two other strategies draws our attention, i.e., to blame someone and to say that someone has made a mistake. In the group of American centres, these strategies were used on 16 and 14 occasions, respectively, while in the group of Spanish centres, they were only used on 5 occasions each. These data could be related to the fact that the United States is a specific culture, that is, the opposite of to diffuse (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000). This means that emphasis is placed on searching for the error and for someone to blame. In these cultures, attention is paid to the product and not so much to the process nor to the relationships that have been created. Specific cultures place more effort into finding the defective part and replacing it if possible. In the present context, by insisting on someone's mistakes, the user wants to emphasise that the centre or worker does not function as it should, and it is the system's obligation to replace it. It could also relate to the strong preference for competition and achievement of goals, which is typical of cultural groups with a high masculinity index (Hofstede, 1991, 1998). Thus, by insisting that a person does not do his or her job well, the user wants to convey the idea that the worker is not productive in society and that he or she should be replaced by another individual who is better than him or her. Some examples found in the American group are these ones:

> *"I believe my case has slipped between the cracks, and no one is available to help." Adult Protective Services' user.*
>
> *"They never do what they are supposed to do." Human Resources Administration's user.*
>
> *"They mess up people's cases." NYC Human Resources Administration, St Nicholas Job Center's user.*

Finally, it draws our attention to the fact that even if it is at a very low percentage – 1.93% of the comments – users in the American centres' used strategies attacking the public right of independence. As we saw, this right has greater importance in the American cultural group, given the high rate of individualism that it has. Examples include expressions such as:

> *"They're gonna pay." ACS's user.*
>
> *"They deserve to have their children taken from them." ACS's user.*

For the Spanish cultural group, this right is not so important, and this cultural group pays greater attention to the right of affiliation. However, in this context, it is obvious that people do not want to establish any kind of bond with the centres, and therefore they do not even bother to attack this right.

2.4. Chi-Square test on the results obtained in the analysis

To find out if the differences between the two groups of data were statistically significant, i.e., if the differences between the two cultural groups were important, the chi-square formula was applied. As we had two sets of data, we had to create two contingency tables. On the one hand, impoliteness is reported by clients of the centres, and on the other hand, impoliteness is issued by clients of the centres. These tables showed the number of strategies observed in the variables of the analysis. The variables were, on the one hand, cultural groups, with two modalities: Spanish and American, and on the other hand, impoliteness strategies associated with the three social characteristics of individuals analysed here. Then, we defined a null hypothesis, hereinafter Ho, and an alternative hypothesis, H1. These hypotheses relate to the existence or not of an association between the different variables. Thus, the null hypothesis would be as follows:

Ho: There are no significant differences between the frequencies obtained in the group of Spanish centres and those obtained in the group of American centres with regard to the use of strategies of impoliteness that attack the social characteristics.

Then, the alternative hypothesis would read:

H1: There are significant differences between the frequencies obtained in the group of Spanish centres and those obtained in the group of American centres in terms of the use of strategies of impoliteness that attack the social characteristics.

Then, the chi-square formula $\chi 2 = \Sigma (O - E)2 / E$ was applied to the data in the contingency tables with a 0.01 degree of statistical significance, which corresponds to 9.21 following Pearson's table (Velez, Ramos, Hernández, Carmena, & Navarro, 2004). On the one hand, as for the data regarding differences reported by clients of the centres, the result was 12.32. This means that, with a confidence level of 99%, the null hypothesis must be rejected, and we must accept the alternative hypothesis because the result is higher than the figure given in Pearson's table. In other words, the differences observed in the impoliteness strategies reported by clients are statistically significant.

On the other hand, as for the data concerning differences in impoliteness strategies issued by clients of the centres, the result was -0.82, clearly below 9.21. Thus, in this case, we must accept the null hypothesis, which reads that there are no differences between the frequencies obtained in the group of Spanish centres and those obtained in the group of American centres.

3. Conclusions

This article aims to establish a relationship between the attacks that users of social services centres in New York and Madrid reported and issued and the predominant cultural values of the cultural groups to which they belong. At the same time, these cultural values have been linked to the social characteristics predominant in each group. Firstly, it has been shown that when it comes to reporting impoliteness received, differences arise in the data from each group. Thus, users of the American centres reported a higher number of attacks targeting their public right of equality – 64.07% –i.e., the desire to be treated with fairness and justice, as dictated by the rule. Due to the universalist (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000) and individualist character of this group (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010) – as opposed to particularism (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000) – people believe and desire that rules have to be respected by all and applied to everybody equally. These service users feel that the rule of being polite has not been respected in this difficult context in which they find themselves and they feel very much attacked because of this. Moreover, since this rule has been breached by someone who has access to the allocation of basic resources, i.e., someone in a position of relative power, this violation of the rule is even more malicious (Caza & Cortina, 2007). In addition, also because of their marked individualist character, they perceived that their public right of independence was attacked to a greater extent than in the Spanish group – 7.76% versus 1.93%.

As for the users of the Spanish centres, the social characteristic that they claimed to have been mostly attacked was the public image of singularity – 65.42%. These data have been related to the need to be recognized as a valid and suitable individual, as an essential prerequisite of being worthy of the aids offered by the system. Recognition by the group, in this case, the State – as a protective body –first involves going through a positive assessment by the other, and that is what these citizens perceived that did not happen. Besides, for tribal (Leaptrott, 1996) and particularistic cultural groups (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000), it is very important to establish rapport in any transaction, and this is completely impossible in this context, in the eyes of the service user, if the centre completely ignores him or her.

Secondly, as for the strategies that service users applied to attack the centre or its workers, the analysis has shown that there are basically no differences in both groups. The social characteristic mostly attacked by service users of both groups is the public image of singularity, and both groups use disqualifying adjectives and insults to try to destroy the recipient's public image. The only noteworthy issue is the fact that the clients of the American centres used, up to three times more than the clients of the Spanish ones, the strategy of blaming someone for a negative fact or situation and the strategy of highlighting somebody's negative aspects. Both strategies are aimed at indicating that the worker does not know how to do his or her work properly. This fact relates to the specific – as opposed to the diffuse – character of the American cultural group (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000), which means that in the event of failures in the final result, people insist on seeking the cause of the error. In addition, this is done with a clear and direct discursive style (Woo & Lee 2007). In this case, these citizens are determined to denounce the person who they think is to blame for their desperate situation. Besides, it also reminds us of the competitive nature of masculine societies (Hofstede, 1991, 1998; Hofstede et al. 2010), as the American culture, where the fact of highlighting somebody's negative aspects can become a valid means of achieving a goal. Finally, as in the strategies reported by service users in American centres, in the group of strategies used by them, it was also found a higher percentage of those that attacked the public right of independence due to, once again, their strong individualist character.

Finally, an interesting line of research that could be opened is if different types of social services centres reflect any differences as well. For instance, if Food Stamp Centres have different clientele than Adult Protective Services and if this can be somehow reflected on the negative reviews that they report an issue.

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