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The construction of future and hypothetical dialogues in third-party complaints as enactments of a subsequent direct complaint

Virginia Acuña Ferreira*

Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas, Universidad de Zaragoza, c/Atarazana, n° 2, Teruel, E-44002, Spain



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ABSTRACT

This article shows that third-party complaints can orient to future or possible actions to solve an ongoing conflictive or problematic situation with the absent complainers. Relying on data from naturally occurring interactions among speakers of Spanish and Galician, the article analyses instances of future and hypothetical dialogues in complaint sequences about absent parties and demonstrates that these are designed as enactments of a direct complaint to be addressed to such people. Sequentially positioned in the complaint development, these enactments serve to rehearse this confrontation as a future remedial action, inviting audience's assessments, as well as to reinforce the legitimacy of the complaints by demonstrating how these can be defended in addressing to the complainers. In so doing, even though in a fictitious way, complainers can vent their feelings of indignation against these people, avoiding the problems of real direct complaints as face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

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1. Introduction

In her ethnographic research on the verbal practices of groups of Black children in Philadelphia, Goodwin (1980, 1982, 1990, 1990/1991) found that girls engaged in what they called the 'he-said-she said', a form of public dispute that was employed "to accuse someone of having talked about behind her back" (Goodwin, 1990/1991: 264). These disputes constituted a multistage event, as they occurred after certain preliminary actions. Among these, it was essential the telling of an 'instigating story', by which a girl reported to another what an absent third party said about her in her absence, maligning her character (Goodwin, 1990/1991: 267). The purpose of these stories was to induce the recipient to confront the offending party, so the listener often responded with a 'future story', in which she projected what she was going to say to her, making accusations like: "Kerry what you said about me" (1990/1991: 269). According to Goodwin, the final confrontation was not oriented to find a solution, but the peer group pressured the offended party to commit and participate in it: "failure to do so can itself be considered a form of offense or a demonstration of lack of character" (Goodwin, 1980: 681).

The present article addresses a phenomenon that presents similarity with the future stories created by the offended girl in the research just reviewed. In my corpus of naturally occurring interactions among adults, I identified the construction of dialogues that also project a future or possible confrontation with absent parties because they caused a trouble, offense, or

* Permanent address: Calle San Telmo, n° 36, Tui, Pontevedra, E-36700, Spain.

E-mail address: Virginia@unizar.es.

harm to the speaker. Unlike future stories in the 'he-said-she-said' event (Goodwin, 1980, 1990, 1990/1991), these dialogues are not produced in response to an interlocutor's instigating story, but after the same speakers' telling of a 'complaint story' (Günthner, 1997a; Haakana, 2007; Acuña, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Selting, 2012). In these stories, the speakers report on the misconduct of a third party, who plays the role of 'antagonist' and is usually absent from the reporting context, trying to obtain affiliation from the audience, that is, some recognition "that the complaint teller's (negative) feelings are justified, i.e. that her/his situation is complainable" (Traverso, 2009: 2386). Despite that, in my data, audience provides responses of this type, the complaint activity does not necessarily stop here, but in some cases, the speakers go on by creating dialogues in which they project what they will say to the antagonist(s) or to other absent third parties who can help to solve a problematic situation for them.

Dialogues of these types are thus part of complaint activities that stand out as a 'big package' (Sacks, 1992: 354) in the conversation, as they not only include narratives about past events to contextualize the misconduct of third parties, but also point to a future or possible confrontation with them. In this article, I aim to examine the occurrence of these future or hypothetical constructed dialogues as a contribution to the study of complaint activities in conversation, putting the focus on their sequential positioning and design, their discursive and social functions, as well as on audience's responses to them. The analysis is drawn on instances taken from three naturally occurring interactions among adult speakers of Spanish and Galician, who are friends, relatives, or acquaintances. In the following section, I will first provide an overview of research on complaints, explaining their definitions and the differentiation of so called indirect or third-party complaints, in contrast to direct complaints. As will be emphasized, studies have not generally paid much attention to complaints as a prospective activity, which can orient to future or possible events.

2. Previous studies on complaints

From a pragmatic perspective, based on the notion of speech acts, complaints can be broadly defined, following Padilla Cruz (2019: 23):

as *expressive* acts wherewith the speaker, or *complainer* or *complainant*, expresses a variety of negative feelings or emotions [...] The feelings and emotions voiced by the complainer concern some state of affairs –another person's behaviour, appearance, traits, mood, etc., an event and, evidently, some injustice, too– which is regarded not to meet (personal) expectations or standards, or to violate sociocultural norms. (Padilla Cruz, 2019: 23).

Other authors approach complaints as 'speech act sets' (Cohen and Olshtain, 1993), because they can "co-occur with other speech acts, such as threats, warnings, admonitions, and suggestions" (Vásquez, 2011: 1709). In conversation-analytical studies, complaints are generally taken in this way, as an umbrella term for several related speech acts (Laforest, 2009), or as a category that encompasses "different sets of activities which share a common feature: speakers point out some transgression or misconduct on the part of the subject who caused a trouble and/or performed some complainable action" (Monzoni, 2009: 2465). Note that this definition does not include the expression of negative feelings or emotions as a necessarily salient feature, while it has been remarked that "a complaint involves some kind of grievance" (Edwards, 2005: 7), in contrast to mere criticisms or accusations. Also, the complainable matter does not have to refer to another person's action, but "can also be a fact, an object or a situation" (Traverso, 2009: 2385).

An important distinction has been established between direct and indirect or third-party complaints, although applying different criteria. Pragmatic studies tend to make this difference considering the illocutionary force of the semantic formulae that are employed in expressing complaints (Vásquez, 2011: 1709). In interactional studies, however, such differentiation is usually based on the participation frameworks in interaction. According to this, direct complaints are those that are addressed to the 'complainee', that is, to the subject who caused the trouble and/or performed a complainable action. They constitute face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987), so they tend to be reduced to a minimum, especially in everyday situations (Laforest, 2009). By contrast, the addressee of indirect or third-party complaints is not the complainee, but someone who is told about the complaint matter and is expected to provide support and sympathy as affiliative responses (Traverso, 2009: 2386). Since the complainer needs "to paint a picture of events for the addressee" (Laforest, 2009: 2453), complaints of this type are usually much longer than direct complaints. Most studies on them analyse situations in which the complainees are not physically present (e.g. Edwards, 2005; Drew and Walker, 2009; Traverso, 2009; Ruusuvuori and Lindfors, 2009; Acuña, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2008, 2011a; 2011b; Rääbis et al., 2019), although Heinemann (2009) has demonstrated that they can also be expressed in the presence of the complainees, as the complainers can exclude them as ratified participants, for example, by using third-person pronouns in referring to them.

The present study relies on data from naturally occurring interactions in which participants engage in third-party complaints according to the latter criterion and from the broad perspective on 'complaining' that is generally taken by interactional studies. Thus, the talk revolves around the actions or behaviour of absent third parties, insofar as they involved a grievance for the speaker, occurring in situations of high confidence with the recipients. In line with other studies that have examined third-party complaints in these situations, the complaint activities take up extended sequences, including negative emotions displays (Günthner, 1997a, 1997b; Acuña, 2002, 2004, 2011a, 2011b; Selting, 2012; Rääbis et al., 2019), as well as the reporting of past events. As mentioned in the Introduction, these reports take the form of complaint stories (Günthner, 1997a; Haakana, 2007; Acuña, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Selting, 2012), which are often based on the reconstruction of past dialogues. As in the 'he-said-she-said' event (Goodwin, 1980, 1982, 1990, 1990/1991), reported speech has been remarked as a

salient feature of third-party complaints (Holt, 1996, 2000; Günthner, 1997a, 1997b; Drew, 1998; Acuña, 2009, 2011a), noting a preference for direct reported speech (DRS), as this style allows “to provide access to, an evidence of, a reprehensible comment” (Holt, 2009: 199), as well as to embed “the speaker’s attitude toward the reported utterance” (Holt, 2000: 438), thus serving as an evaluation device.

The elements noted above reaffirm the general categorization of complaints as ‘retrospective acts’ (Trosborg, 1995), “in that the speaker focuses either on a past action by the complainee or on a past event”, as noted by Márquez Reiter (2005: 483). To the best of my knowledge, her study on complaint calls to a caregiver service company is the first one that has explicitly pointed to these activities also as prospective acts, in that callers “seek to influence the behaviour of the call-taker by getting him/her to remedy the situation or offer some sort of compensation” (2005: 505). Complaints in this study are not classified as direct or indirect following the criteria applied here. However, in another study, Márquez Reiter (2013) categorizes complaint calls in these institutional contexts as direct complaints in that the telephone agent is “an institutional representative and/or perceives the client’s negative feelings as being about her” (Márquez Reiter, 2013: 232). Also, as an institutional representative, this agent can solve the situation complained about by providing the service or compensation that is requested by callers.

In relation to third-party complaints, its possible prospective character also has been pointed out in a recent theoretical characterization of ‘venting’ by Padilla Cruz (2019). Drawing on Thorson and Baker (2019) original description of venting as a social practice that can lead to ‘epistemic work’, this author aims to characterize it from a pragmatic and conversational perspective. According to him, venting is a specific type of indirect complaint in which the speaker “has firm expectations for subsequent remedial action against a state of affairs” (2019: 22). Such subsequent remedial actions, however, are mainly related, in this theoretical proposal, to the audience’s expression of affiliation by sharing the opinions and emotional stances of the venter. Venting is thus defined “as an indirect prospective form of complaint” (2019a: 27) in this sense, that is, because of the interactional goals of the speakers, who try to influence the recipients to validate their viewpoints and feelings, as a strategy to jointly do epistemic work and thus repair the damage they suffered by an injustice. For this reason, another essential characteristic of venting episodes is that they give rise to long sequences, in contrast to complaints that do not constitute venting, according to Padilla Cruz (2019), because they are only intended to express negative feelings and thus “may be performed by means of just one utterance or a brief sequence of utterances that is normally followed by reactions or responses” (Padilla Cruz, 2019: 25).

According to the above, complaint activities in my data meet the key elements to be considered venting, in that complainers aim to obtain audience’s affiliation regarding their viewpoints and feelings and the activities take up long sequences, as in many other studies on third-party complaints. It seems highly questionable to consider that there can be indirect complaints that are exclusively intended to express feelings, especially if they revolve around the complainable actions of third parties. In any case, the purpose of this article is not to discuss these issues, but to highlight that third-party complaints, from a general perspective, can be both retrospective and prospective, not only in the sense they try to influence on the recipients’ responses, but because they can point to future or possible next events by means of dialogues constructions, as remedial actions to solve the injustices complained about.

3. Methodology

The analysis in this article will draw on data taken from the the *Corpus of Galician/Spanish Bilingual Speech* of the University of Vigo (*Corpus de Fala Bilingüe Galego/Castelán*, abbreviated as *CofaBil*; (Rodríguez Yáñez, 2003), which was obtained in Galicia (Spain), through observant participation. This corpus comprises audio recordings and transcriptions of naturally occurring conversations that were held in a wide range of communicative situations among friends, relatives, classmates, or workmates. Some of these audio recordings were made by the author, also applying the ethnographic method of observant participation to study conversation in her own groups of friends, relatives and acquaintances (Acuña, 2009, 2011a). All members of these groups were informed of this research from the beginning and gave consent for some of their conversations to be recorded. To guarantee maximum spontaneity, the participants were not notified of the recording at the time of it, but after having done it, then requesting again their permission to use it in research work (Tusón, 1997: 98–99).

The data transcription (see [Appendix: Transcription Conventions](#)) is based on a convention system that is adapted from Álvarez Cáccamo (1990) and which is generally intended to reflect as much information as possible without hindering or obstructing the reading too much (Acuña, 2009). Prosodic features are included, as well as aspects of non-verbal communication to the extent that an audio recording allows (for example, claps or whistles). Each line of the transcription tends to correspond to a semantic-syntactic or (sub-)intonation unit, as these coincide with an ‘intentional movement’ (Rodríguez Yáñez, 2007), which is defined as the minimal unity in the conversational process. From this perspective, ellipsis, segmented constructions, or self-repairs are considered micro-moments of the discursive construction that, by providing them with a separate line, can be better visualised in the transcript (Rodríguez Yáñez, 2007: 44).

In my previous research on third-party complaints, I analysed six complaining interactions taken from the mentioned corpus to address different characteristic features of this practice, as well as its relationship with the display of gendered identities (Acuña, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b). Here, I will focus on instances of future and hypothetical dialogues construction, which were found in three of these complaining interactions. The participants are friends, relatives or acquaintances and speakers of Spanish and Galician, though I do not intend to establish a relationship between the object of the study and any aspect of the speakers’ identities. The data are not taken as ‘representative’ of any group of people, but as

evidence of a phenomenon in third-party complaints that contributes to knowledge on this interactional practice. Thus, I take Language and Social Interaction (LSI) as a subject matter (Fitch and Sanders, 2005) and combine analytical tools from different approaches to this broader object of study, such as Language Pragmatics, Conversation Analysis and Ethnography of Communication.

4. Data analysis

Most of the instances of future and hypothetical constructed dialogues that were identified in the data come from a conversation that took place in a pub among friends and acquaintances. The primary participants are three young males, aged in their 20's: Fran, Luis, and Paco (all real names are replaced by pseudonyms). They are members of a *peña madridista*, a small club of fans of Real Madrid C.F., which was constituted in their town to get tickets and to organise group trips to attend matches of this football team. For about thirty minutes, these participants generally complain about the troubles and injustices caused by the leaders of this club (Acuña, 2004, 2008, 2009). They co-construct the complaint activity, creating strong alliances as members of this club who share negative experiences and attitudes towards these leaders. However, it can be considered that the primary complainer is Fran, as he tells the central complaint story, which is mostly discussed during the conversation. This story revolves around a recent trip Fran had made to Madrid for a match. While his club had supposedly booked tickets for him to attend this match, he could not finally get them at the football stadium in Madrid, because he did not have an official card that could accredit him as a member of one of Real Madrid's fan clubs. Extract (1) captures a moment at an advanced stage of the interaction, in which Fran creates a hypothetical dialogue with one of this small club's leaders in relation to this negative experience:

- (1)
- 784 Fran = NO →
'no'
- 785 pues yo lo que no puedo es llevar un PALO de ir a madri ↑
'what I can't bear is suffering a blow because I travel to Madrid'
- 786 ..
- 787 y y y no tener las entradas →
'and and and I can't get the tickets'
- 788 por lo que sea ↑
'for whatever reason'
- 789 → no mira **neniño** ↑ <voz en falsetto>
'no, look, my little boy' <falsetto voice>
- 790 → mira →
'look'
- 791 → ni **neniño** ↑
'no little boy'
- 792 → ni HOS::tias →
'no bloody stupid things'
- 793 → a mí me das una acreditación ↑
'you give me an accreditation'
- 794 → Y YO ENTRO → =
'and I enter'
- 795 Paco = claro =
'of course'
- 796 Luis = [YA ESTÁ] ↑
'that's it'
- 797 → Fran [pa pillar] las entradas → =
'to get the tickets'
- 798 Luis = Y:: YA YA ESTÁ ↑ =
'and that's that's it'
- 799 → Fran = o:: dime ↑
'or just tell me'
- 800 → no →
'no'
- 801 → Y NO VOY ↑ =
'and then I don't go'
- 802 → Luis = {[ac] PERO ASEGÚ::RAME HOMBRE} ↑
'but give me an assurance, man'

In this extract, Fran refuses any excuse for his negative experience in Madrid, as he could not get the tickets for the match at the stadium (lines 784–788). Next, he creates a *falsetto* voice (line 789), to contextualise the speech of one of the leaders of his club, who seemingly starts to reject his complaint about this experience, *no mira neniño* ↑ ('no, look, my little boy', line 789), employing negation and *mira* ('look') as a marker of disagreement (Pons Bordería, 1988: 223). The enacted character also addresses Fran by using the vocative *neniño* ('little boy'), which is a Galician noun deriving from *nen* ('boy'), as it is formed by adding the diminutive suffix *-iño* (feminine forms, *neniña* and *nen*, respectively). This suffix is very common in

everyday usage of Galician people, both speaking Galician and Spanish, and it often has an affective meaning, as it seems to be the case here. The use of *neniño*, including this affective suffix, serves to mitigate the dispreferred action initiated by the enacted character, as it would be a rejection of Fran's complaint. Alternatively, the use of this vocative could be interpreted as a way of remarking age differences, as the leaders of this small fan club are much older than Fran and his friends.

Using again his normal voice, Fran contextualizes an affectively loaded reply to the club's leader: he repeats this latter's previous use of *mira* as a disagreement marker and strongly rejects his way of addressing him as *neniño* ('little boy'), including a swear word (lines 790–792). He then continues in this reply to blame the club's leader for what happened in Madrid, noting that he was not provided with a membership card of the club as the cause of the trouble with getting the tickets (lines 793–794, 797). Both Paco and Luis immediately co-align with this argument (lines 795–796, 798), but Luis does it more emphatically by heightening volume and using repetition (lines 796, 798). Reinforcing the blaming reply, Fran argues that the leader could just avoid offering tickets for a match if he is not able to provide such membership card (lines 799–801). In this way, he is anticipating another possible disaffiliative response by the leader, who could claim that their club does not have such official card. Again, Luis supports Fran's argument (line 802), taking up his role by talking in the first person and addressing the leader through an imperative and the vocative *hombre* ('man'): { [ac] PERO ASEGÚ:RAME HOMBRE } ↑ ('but give me an assurance, man', line 802). This is a collaborative completion of Fran's reply to this character, which is made affectively by means of heightened volume and an accelerated tempo, thereby displaying sympathy with this participant's indignation.

As the staging of this dialogue was contextualised only through prosodic keys (a *false* voice to represent the club's leader), it could be thought that it is intended as reporting a past interaction and not as the enactment of a hypothetical or future one. Some contextual factors help to resolve this ambiguity, however, in favour of the latter possibility. First, there is no reference by Fran in the overall interaction to the fact that he had already held a dialogue with this character about these events. Second, the staged dialogue is connected to Fran's previous utterances (lines 784–788) refusing possible excuses for such events. In line with these possible excuses, the leader's discourse is minimally represented as starting to reject Fran's complaint, while Fran's arguments to counter them constitute the focus of the dialogue. In this way, it seems more reasonable to interpret this dialogue as enacting a confrontation with the club's leader, because he is held responsible for Fran's trouble with getting tickets in Madrid.

As direct reported speech (DRS) is used in third-party complaints to demonstrate a reprehensible comment (Holt, 2009: 199), the creation of this dialogue provides access to a possible 'reasoning practice' (Drew, 1998) with the complaine, by which it can be demonstrated that this character cannot allege any reason to reject the complaint or to deny his responsibility. According to Goodwin (1982: 808–809), future stories that occur as part of the 'he-said-she-said' event are based on projecting an accusation against the absent offending girl, but also can include an anticipation of denials to such accusation by this party. In this way, the enactment of this future confrontation enables the offended girl "to rehearse future lines in that encounter" (Goodwin, 1982: 809). In this extract, the enactment of a future confrontation is more elaborated as a reasoning practice that is responding to a complaint's rejection, thus serving to rehearse ways to reinforce it and inviting recipients to provide assessments. Both Paco and Luis emphatically agree with Fran's arguments and even collaborate in the dialogue construction.

Some turns later, Fran constructs another dialogue with one of the club's leaders, in relation to the same events, as captured in the extract (2). Because of the impossibility to get the tickets for the match at the stadium office, Fran had to buy them in the resale, thus paying a much higher price. In this case, the dialogue is unambiguously introduced as a future verbal action:

- (2)
- | | | |
|------|--------|--|
| 1075 | Fran | [EL ROLLO] ES QUE A MÍ
'the matter is that' |
| 1076 | → | CUANDO ME VENGAN A COBRAR ↑
'when they come to collect' |
| 1077 | → | LE VOY A DECIR →
'I'm gonna say to him' |
| 1078 | | .. |
| 1079 | → | mira →
'look' |
| 1080 | Luis | = entiendes?
'you understand?' |
| 1081 | | (xx) = |
| 1082 | → Fran | = le voy a decir →
'I'm gonna say to him' |
| 1083 | → | mira →
'look' |
| 1084 | → | yo el otro día pagué →
'the other day I paid' |
| 1085 | → | sesenta y ocho billetes ↑
'sixty-eight bank notes' |
| 1086 | → | por unas entradas →
'for some tickets' |
| 1087 | | .. |

1088 → { [ac] DATE POR COBRAO } → =
 'give yourself for paid'
 1089 Luis = (xx) dentro de: : un mes o así =
 'in a month or so'
 1090 Fran = sí sí <ironicamente>
 'yes yes' <ironically>
 1091 pues va a cobrar <irónicamente>
 'he's going to collect' <ironically>
 1092 psst
 'bah'
 1093 va apanao ↑ =
 'he's deluded'

In this extract, Fran refers to the future moment when the leaders will intend to collect the money for the fees from each club member (lines 1075, 1076), and then he announces the creation of a dialogue with one of them in this situation. For this, he uses the verb *decir* ('to say') in a periphrastic construction that indicates a future action, LE VOY A DECIR → ('I'm gonna say to him', line 1077), which is like those employed in the future stories related to the 'he-said-she-said' event (Goodwin, 1982: 808, 1990/1991: 269). After a micropause (line 1078), Fran initiates this future dialogue, addressing the club's leader by means of the vocative *mira* ('look', line 1079), which in this turn-initial position generally functions as the marker of a dispreferred action, in this case a reproach or direct complaint. He disattends an interruption by Luis, who makes a question (lines 1080–1081), and repeats his previous utterances announcing what he is going to say to the club's leader (lines 1082–1083). Continuing with this dialogue construction, Fran notes the sum of money he had to spend (in the resale) to buy the tickets (lines 1084–1086). After a micropause (line 1087), he remarks that the leader must consider himself as paid: { [ac] DATE POR COBRAO } → ('give yourself for paid', line 1083). In this way, Fran is communicating his own resolution regarding his bad experience in Madrid, for which he blames the club's leaders: he rejects paying the correspondent fee as a member of this club. In response to Luis' comments that the time to pay is about in a month (line 1089), Fran reaffirms his position (lines 1090–1093), noting ironically that the leader *va apanao* ('he's deluded', line 1093) if he plans to charge the fee.

Thus, the dialogue in this instance is explicitly framed as the staging of a future interaction between the complainer, Fran, and one of the absent complainees ('I'm gonna say to him', line 1077). The discourse of the absent third party is not animated here, but the discursive focus is on the complainer's claim and defence of his own 'remedial work' (Goffman, 1971) in the unfair state of affairs: communicating his decision on not paying the club's fee, in order to compensate for the extra money he had to spend in the resale because of an ineptitude of the leaders. Note that, in this way, Fran is implicitly evaluating the required payment of such fee as an injustice. In the following turns, not shown in (2), Luis displays affiliation with this resolution, noting that he has avoided paying this fee for a long time. Then Fran constructs another future dialogue, which comprises the entire extract (3):

(3)
 1110 Fran [yo (xx) le voy a decir]
 'I (xx) I'm gonna say to him'
 1111 MIRA
 'look'
 1112 ..
 1113 pues
 'well'
 1114 <l>
 1115 que no ↑
 'no'
 1116 que no ↑
 'no'
 1117 que no quise: : →
 'I didn't want'
 1118 quiero ver el madrid barça ↑
 'I want to see the Madrid-Barça'
 1119 y no voy →
 'and I can't go'
 1120 ..
 1121 y: : decís que protestasteis por el →
 'and you say that you protested because'
 1122 que no: : ibais a coger →
 'that you weren't going to buy'
 1123 entradas por protesta ↑
 'any ticket because of the protest'
 1124 y el de #ciudad# ↑
 'and the one from #town#'
 1125 VA AL MADRÍ BARÇA →
 'he goes to the Madrid-Barça'
 1126 <l>

The future dialogue in this case is again explicitly framed by means of the verbal construction *le voy a decir* ('I'm gonna say to him', line 1110). Fran initiates his discourse, also addressing the club's leader with the vocative *mira* ('look', line 1111), to announce the dispreferred action. Following a micropause (1112) and some hesitation (lines 1113–1114), he employs negation repeatedly ('no', lines 1115–1116) as a rhetorical device to emotionally reinforce his complaint (Rääbis et al., 2019). Next, he refers to a Madrid-Barça match he could not attend either (lines 1117–1119). The trouble related to this match constitutes a different complainable matter that Fran is adding to strengthen his affective stance against the club's leaders and his decision to not pay the fee, according to the dialogue previously constructed in (2). Dersley and Wootton (2000: 400) note that this is a device commonly used by complainers in direct complaints. Following the rejection of the complaint by the complainees, the complainers tend to "escalate matters by adding further complained-of actions, these actions can be recognised as both additional to and connected with the original complained-of action" (Dersley and Wootton, 2000: 400). Thus, Fran's discourse here is again anticipating a possible rejection of his complaint and legitimising his decision not to pay the club's fee.

After a micropause (line 1120), he builds on this further complainable action, noting the reason why he could not attend that Madrid-Barça match: the club had communicated a protest situation against the Real Madrid C.F. by all the *peñas* or fan clubs in the province, for which tickets could not be purchased (lines 1121–1123). However, Fran emphatically adds that the leader of a supporters club of Real Madrid from another town attended that match (lines 1124–1125), implicitly accusing his own club's leader of a lack of honesty on this matter. This accusation leads to the co-telling in turns of another complaint story by Fran and Luis, not shown in this extract, which demonstrates that both knew that the leaders of their own club also attended this match despite the protest situation. Generally, in this interaction it becomes evident that the primary participants share much information about the club's bad management by its leaders and it is probably not the first time they share complaints about it. For this reason, according to Padilla Cruz's (2019) characterization of venting, this interaction could be generally described as an episode of 'maintenance venting', in contrast to 'heavy-load venting', in which "either what is talked about is utterly unknown to the audience" (Padilla Cruz, 2019: 26).

Extract (4) is taken from another conversation of about thirty minutes duration, which took place at home between a mother and her two daughters. The talk is focused on gossip and complaints about mutual acquaintances and is highly cooperative, that is, the participants also co-construct these activities. Much of the conversation revolves around a female acquaintance of the mother, Isa, as she tells several complaint stories about this woman. There are signals that Isa's complaints about her are not new, so this could be another case of maintenance venting. One of these complaint stories revolves around an event in the street, when the woman stopped Isa to ask her an indiscreet question about the friendly relationships of Isa's sister. Long after the telling of this story, Isa returns to focus on this event, announcing what she would do if this woman asked this kind of questions again:

- (4)
- 1747 → Isa y si algún día →
'and if some day'
- 1748 → me hace una pregunta ↑
'she asks me a question'
- 1749 (xx)
- 1750 → le digo
'I say to her'
- 1751 → Lola →
Lola
- 1752 → y a ti qué te importa?
'what does it matter to you?'
- 1753 <1>
- 1754 → pregu- ↑
'ask'
- 1755 → {[ac] POR QUÉ no te preocupas de tu vida →
'why don't you worry about your life?'
- 1756 → y dejas la vida de los demás?} =
'and leave that of others?'
- 1757 Ana = mm =
- 1758 → Isa = {[ac] es que no tienes bastante con tu vida?} =
'is that you don't have enough with your own life?'
- 1759 Ana = mm
- 1760 → Isa {[ac] yo no me preocupo de na::die} ↑
'I don't care about anyone'
- 1761 → no lo sé ↑
'I don't know'
- 1762 → y aunque lo supiera no te lo diría →
'and even if I knew it, I wouldn't tell you'
- 1763 <1>
- 1764 → sabes?
'you know?'
- 1765 → porque a mí no me importa la vida de los demás →
'because I don't care about others' lives'
- 1766 → me importa (xx) la mía ↓
'I care about mine'

1767 <1>
 1768 → {[ac] y hasta parece mentira ↑
 'and even I can't believe'
 1769 → que vayas a hacer esas preguntas} →
 'that you come to ask those questions'
 1770 te hace preguntas ↑
 'she asks you questions'
 1771 que es que
 'that it's that'
 1772 son impertine::ntes decirlas ↑
 'it's impertinent to ask them'
 1773 es:
 'it's'
 1774 {[ac] Mala ↑
 'bad'
 1775 educación} → =
 'manners'
 1776 Ana = mm =
 1777 Isa = {[ac] es que es d'él mala ↑
 'it's that it's bad'
 1778 educación} → =
 'manners'

In this extract, Isa uses a conditional structure to create a hypothetical scenario in which the target of her complaints asks her another indiscreet question, *y si algún día* → ('and if some day', line 1747), *me hace una pregunta* ↑ ('she asks me a question', line 1748). She then contextualises her hypothetical reply in that situation: *le digo* ('I say to her', line 1750). The following construction of this reply starts by linking three questions that are not asking for information but are oriented to censor the behaviour of the woman (lines 1752, 1755–1756, 1758). The first one, *y a ti qué te importa?* ('what does that matter to you?', line 1752) can be considered an indignation formula (Günthner, 1997a), in that it is routinely used to emotionally reject questions of this kind as an intrusive behaviour. The second one is based on a 'why' construction that is negatively framed and prosodically marked by an accelerated tempo and a local volume increase in *por qué* ('why'): {[ac] POR QUÉ no te preocupas de tu vida → ('why don't you worry about your life, line 1755), *y dejas la vida de los demás?* ('and leave that of others', line 1756). According to Günthner (1996), 'why' questions are often used not to seek a reason but as "reproaches focusing on another's misdeed" (1996: 272). This is exactly the case in this second question formulated by Isa, which is marked by prosodic features that contextualise a negative affective stance.

Isa still makes a third question that is also negatively framed, marked again by an accelerated *tempo* and based on the construction *es que no* ('is that you don't'): {[ac] es que no tienes bastante con tu vida?} ('is that you don't have enough with your own life?', line 1758). The use of negatively framed questions has been analysed by Monzoni (2009) in direct complaints as a strategy to accuse or blame the recipients for failures in their conduct. In this extract, however, this third question formulated by Isa works more like the previous 'why' construction, as it is once more oriented to censor the addressee's conduct as impertinent. Generally, the three questions formulated by Isa in this extract can be considered as reproaching activities in which, as Günthner (1996: 273) explains, the speakers "focus on an infringement of expectations concerning situatively appropriate behaviour and, in doing so, demonstrate their own orientation to moral rules and values".

Isa's orientation towards her own moral rules and values is made more explicit in the following turns in which she describes her own behaviour as strictly focused on her own life (lines 1760–1766), remarking a contrast between her own appropriate conduct and the inappropriate conduct of the woman complained about (Günthner, 1997a; Drew, 1998). By means of this contrast, the woman's conduct is also implicitly censored as an injustice, since Isa's claims that she does not interfere in anyone's life suggest that no one should do this with her own life or that of her relatives. She concludes by expressing her disbelief at the woman's questions (lines 1768–1769) and returns to speak about her in the third person (line 1770), marking the end of the dialogue. Finally, Isa explicitly evaluates the woman's behaviour as 'impertinent' (lines 1771–1772) and as an evidence of 'bad manners' (lines 1773–1775, 1777–1778).

The hypothetical dialogue in this extract is framed by means of a conditional structure, as a possible situation in which the target of the complaint again makes her indiscreet questions. This hypothetical discourse is constructed as a reaction to this complained action in situ by condemning it from a moral perspective as an intrusive question. Considering how the speaker repeatedly reproaches the woman's conduct, it can be concluded that said reaction is designed as a reprimand, which is aimed at getting the complainees to stop asking inappropriate questions. In this way, the dialogue construction serves to reinforce the speaker's complaint stance as well as to plan and to defend her remedial action to solve an uncomfortable situation. One of the recipients in the actual interaction, Ana, intersperses *mm* on several occasions, both in the dialogue construction (lines 1757, 1759) and after Isa's judgement of the woman's behaviour (lines 1776). Because the activity continues as this back-channelling is provided, it can be interpreted that Ana is in this way giving signs of approval and affiliation, though only by means of minimal responses. The reasons for this minimal support could be that Isa's enactment of a reprimand is viewed as a delicate matter and/or just that the recipient is intending to bring the complaint activity to a close. The fact that this interaction ends soon after the turns shown in this extract, because Ana is leaving, would strengthen the latter possibility.

Extract (5) stems from an interaction that was held between two women, Lola and Mari, while traveling on an urban bus. Lola complains because of the lack of achievement of a workmate, which often means that she must work more than she should have to (Acuña, 2002, 2011a, 2011b). Some recipient's responses in this interaction, which express surprise or ask for more information, suggest that this situation had not been previously talked about between the participants, so this would be a case of heavy-load venting. This interaction lasts six minutes, though the dialogue construction occurs again after the reporting of the past events and towards the end of the complaint activity. In this case, the complainer stages a future verbal action that is not addressed to the primary complainee but to her superiors at work:

- (5)
- 127 Lola { [p] pero me cago en Cris:to eh?
'but fucking hell, eh?'
- 128 ya está bien} ↓
'it's enough'
- 129 → **me CAGO en María santísima que lle hei** ↑
'fucking hell that I'm gonna'
- 130 → **dicir** →
'say'
- 131 → miren ustedes →
'you look'
- 132 → **a min** →
'she'
- 133 → **a min pegouma** ↓
'she double-crossed me'
- 134 → **pero ahora** ↑
'but now'
- 135 → **acabouse a zafra** →
'the story is over'
- 136 <1>
- 137 → E:L trabajo es repartido →
'the work must be distributed'
- 138 → { [f] [ac] **e se non reparten ustedes eu deixo a mitá pa ELA** ↑
'and if you don't distribute it, I will leave half for her'
- 139 → **e en paz eh?**
'and that's that eh?'
- 140 → **SAcabó eh?** =
'it's over eh?'
- 141 Mari = **e non:: o (tedes que) terminar e punto?** =
'and don't you have to finish and that's it?'
- 142 Lola = tut tut tut <negativamente>
tut tut tut <negatively>

The future dialogue in this instance is preceded by profanities, the first one in a *piano* voice, to express a strongly negative affective stance: *me cago en Cristo* ('fucking hell', line 127) and *me cago en María santísima* ('fucking hell', line 129). This latter expression is followed by the use of the verb *dicir* ('to say') in a periphrastic construction to frame the dialogue, **me CAGO en María santísima que lle hei** ↑ ('fucking hell that I'm gonna', line 129), **dicir** → ('say', line 130). Also, note that the speaker claims that it is the end of the situation ('it's enough', 128), which thus is implicitly evaluated as insufferable, and the future dialogue is contextualised as an action to solve it (lines 129–130). The following construction of this dialogue (lines 131–140) does not use the *piano* voice that was employed in the first utterances (lines 127–128). Thus, the speaker has heightened her volume to communicate a firm attitude in enacting her discourse, which is reinforced using the imperative *miren ustedes* ('you look', line 131) to address her superiors in Spanish (as in several of the instances discussed above), adding the subject pronoun *ustedes* ('you') which could have been omitted. The marked presence of second person pronouns as forms of address has been described as a strategy to display misalignment in direct complaints produced in Spanish (Márquez Reiter, 2013).

The rest of the dialogue, in which the speaker expresses her viewpoints and intentions, mostly occurs in Galician. Lola summarises the misconduct of her workmate by using an idiomatic expression (Drew and Holt, 1988), *a min pegouma* ('she double-crossed me', line 133), and announces her own solution to the conflict by combining the contrast conjunction *pero* ('but', line 134) and the temporal adverb *ahora* ('now', line 134) to claim the end of the unfair situation (line 135). After a pause (line 136), she argues that the work must be distributed equally (line 137), and then she issues a warning, employing a conditional structure and prosodic cues, such as a heightened volume and an accelerated *tempo*, which contextualise a peak of emotive involvement: { [f] [ac] **e se non reparten ustedes eu deixo a mitá pa ELA** ↑ ('and if you don't distribute it, I will leave half for her', line 138). The warning concludes with tag questions that strengthen the speaker's complaint stance and appeal to affiliation, **e en paz eh?** ('and that's that eh?', line 139), **SAcabó eh?** ('it's over eh?' line 140). The recipient's response to the actual interaction (line 141) is not referred to this enacted warning but displays sympathy by asking more details about Lola's work conditions. Lola responds negatively (line 142) and provides an explanation in the following turns, which are not shown in the extract.

Thus, in this extract the complainer creates a future dialogue, which is again explicitly framed by using a verb of saying (lines 129–130). Such future verbal action is not addressed to the person whose behaviour is complained about, but to other third parties who can remedy the situation and therefore are considered partly responsible for it. As in previous instances, the dialogue is focused on defending the complainer's own remedial action in the unfair situation, as Lola makes a warning to her superiors at work, stating her intention not to do half of the work tasks she usually does. To defend this decision, she makes an obligatory statement that the work must be distributed. In this way, she implicitly blames these characters for not having supervised this matter while also demanding that they take responsibility for this. The dialogue also displays the complainer's indignation in an intense way, communicating an attitude of intransigence because of an ongoing unfair situation that she expects and intends to end.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis above has shown that third-party complaints about transgressions or misconduct can include dialogues constructions as enactments of a future or possible subsequent confrontation with the absent complainees. These enactments were found in extensive complaint sequences, after reports of past events and/or dialogues and once the complaint was approved by audience's affiliation response(s). Following [Traverso's \(2009\)](#) study on the structure of extended complaint sequences, they are produced after completion of the 'core part', in the 'complaint development phase' that serves to sustain the activity by deepening the subject matter ([Traverso, 2009](#): 2393). Concerning their design, these dialogues tend to be explicitly framed by using verbs of sayings in future or conditional structures, some of which are like those employed in the future stories described by [Goodwin \(1982: 808, 1990/1991: 269\)](#) as part of the 'he-said-she-said' dispute event among girls. Another similarity in comparison to these stories is that the instances here examined include accusations that are fictionally addressed to absent third parties, although they also have shown the performance of other speech acts that can be subsumed in the category of direct complaints ([Laforest, 2009](#): 2453), such as blamings, repeated reproaches leading to a reprimand, demands and warnings. As shown in the analysis, the complainers blame the complainees for an ineptitude, reply to their possible arguments to avoid responsibility (anticipating disaffiliative responses), accuse, or repeatedly reproach them for their misconduct, and warn them on the actions they intend to take, if they do not attend their demands, to end an unfair situation or to make up for. In this way, future and hypothetical dialogues in these complaint sequences seem to be much more elaborated than those created by offended girls in the 'he-said-she-said' event ([Goodwin, 1980, 1982, 1990, 1990/1991](#)). This greater elaboration can be related to the fact that said dialogues do not occur as a response to another person's instigating activity but constitute an expansion of complaint activities initiated by the same speakers. In the complaint development phase, they serve as a powerful rhetorical device to reinforce the legitimacy of the complaints by demonstrating how these can be addressed to the complainees and defended against them on a next social encounter. In pointing to these subsequent social encounters, a particular feature of the participation frameworks in the interactions here examined should be highlighted: the complainers maintained their usual contact with the complainees, as they are members and leaders of a club, acquaintances from a small town, and workmates. Such circumstance could be an important condition for third-party complaints to be expanded in this way.

Along with its rhetorical and persuasive potential, it has been evidenced that the dialogues analysed are employed to rehearse direct complaints as a remedial action that can solve an ongoing conflictive or problematic situation and to elicit audience's approval in this respect. The complaints are thus not only oriented to get validation and sympathy regarding past complainable actions, but also to solve such situations and to probe audience's reactions to these planned future actions. In the instances addressed, these reactions are affiliative to a varying degree. In some cases, the recipients emphatically express agreement with the dialogue, collaborate in its construction or contribute to the complaint development. In other cases, the dialogue construction is only supported by minimal responses of approval, or it is not specifically attended because the recipient asks for other details concerning the complainable matter. A response like this latter can change the focus of the activity, leading to an explanation, for example, contrary to the complainer's goals. According to [Traverso \(2009: 2394\)](#), this is one of the reasons why displaying affiliation in the complaint development phase can be a difficult matter for the recipients. The data here addressed raise two other possible dilemmas for them in this respect: the enacted complaints could be viewed as too emotional and/or inadequate as face-threatening acts ([Brown and Levinson, 1987](#)), and/or the interaction is taking too long. Future research could deepen on these issues, because dialogues of this type may constitute a delicate activity to achieve affiliation, as they are enacting a confrontational interaction. In terms of [Drew and Walker \(2009\)](#), they can be perceived by recipients as "going too far". In any case, it seems clear that they also constitute a valuable strategy for complainers from the point of view of emotions display. Recipients' affiliation in the previous core part of the complaint sequence creates a favourable atmosphere for complainers to take a step further by addressing a direct complaint to complainees and thus displaying affective stances against them. In addressing these people, even though in a fictitious way, complainers can vent their feelings of indignation (taking 'venting' in its more literal sense), avoiding the inconveniences of real direct complaints as face-threatening acts ([Brown and Levinson, 1987](#)) and having an audience that seems to be on their side.

In sum, the present study has demonstrated that third-party complaints can orient to future or possible actions and events to solve a conflictive or problematic situation with such people. The analysis has shown that these actions are projected by constructing dialogues that are designed as enactments of direct complaints to be addressed to the absent third parties, with whom contact is maintained. Such dialogue constructions fulfil significant social and discursive functions, in contributing to sustain the complaint activity and to rehearse the future confrontation, inviting audience's assessments. They also contribute

to reinforce the legitimacy of the complaints by demonstrating how these can be defended against the complainers. In so doing, they function as a venting strategy as well, allowing complainers to experience the performance of a direct complaint in a friendly interaction, without the restraints that the complainers' presence potentially entails.

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Declaration of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Appendix. Transcription conventions

Rounded print	Spanish
Bold print	Galician
Line of transcription	Intonational phrase
↑	Rising intonation phrase-final
↓	Falling intonation phrase-final
→	Sustained intonation phrase-final
?	Interrogative intonation
mala ↑	
educación →	Emphatic accentuation
..	Pause shorter than one second
<3>	Pause of indicated length (in seconds)
HOS::tias	Lengthened sound
pregu-	Truncated sound
Fran: Y YO ENTRO → =	
Paco: = claro =	No interval between turns
Luis: = [YA ESTÁ] ↑	
Luis: = [YA ESTÁ] ↑	Conversational overlap
Fran: [pa pillar] las entradas →	
(tedes que)	Uncertain transcription
(xx)	Unintelligible segment
CAPITALS	Local volume increase
{ }	Segment affected by a phenomenon
{{f}}	<i>Fortis</i> volume
{{p}}	<i>Piano</i> volume
{{ac}}	Accelerated <i>tempo</i>
<ironically>	Additional comments
#town#	Confidential details

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Virginia Acuña Ferreira obtained her PhD at the University of Vigo in 2007, with a dissertation on gendered discourse in naturally occurring interactions in Spanish and Galician. Her research has generally focused on the analysis of everyday conversation, to examine gendered identities display, storytelling, humour, gossip, third-party complaints, and Spanish/Galician codeswitching. She has published a wide range of articles on these subjects in international journals and is the author of the following books: *Género y discurso: las mujeres y los hombres en la interacción conversacional* (Lincom 2009), and *La realización de quejas en la conversación femenina y masculina* (Lincom 2011).