Responding to compliments online: The case of Airbnb online experiences

Irene Cenni - Ghent University
irene.cenni@ugent.be

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Resum. Respondre als compliments en línia: El cas de les experiències online d'Airbnb. El present article investiga les respostes als compliments publicats a Airbnb Online Experiences, una plataforma llançada recentment. L'estudi contribueix i amplia el conjunt de recerca actual sobre pràctiques de compliment en línia. Tot i que les investigacions anteriors es van centrar principalment en les respostes als compliments a plataformes orientades a les connexions socials (com Facebook o Instagram), en aquesta contribució el focus es posa en una plataforma de comunicació social i empresarial (Airbnb). Partint del marc elaborat per Maíz-Arévalo (2013) sobre les dades de Facebook, examino la distribució de diferents estratègies de resposta de compliment en un corpus d'Airbnb. A més, es farà una discussió qualitativa dels resultats, elaborant alguns exemples reals extrets del corpus. Les troballes destaquen algunes tendències específiques en les estratègies de resposta de compliment adoptades pels amfitrions d'Airbnb. Els amfitrions van optar de manera aclaparadora per acceptar estratègies, mentre que es van evitar evadir o rebutjar estratègies. A més, es va observar un ús recurrent d'estratègies d'apreciació i compliments. Notablement, les estratègies d'acord i d'autopromoció (autopromoció) també es van testimoniar al conjunt de dades, que solen estar absents en altres plataformes (com ara Facebook). Finalment, en les seves respostes, els amfitrions també van incloure emoticones, expressions encoratjadores i invitació personalitzada al contacte futur, promovent la proximitat i un cert grau d'informalitat amb els seus interlocutors.

Paraules clau: *respostes als compliments, pràctiques de compliment en línia, discurs digital, respostes a ressenyes en línia, Airbnb Online Experiences.*

Abstract. Responding to compliments online: the case of Airbnb Online Experiences. The present article investigates responses to compliments posted on Airbnb Online Experiences, a

recently launched platform. The study contributes to and expands the current body of research on compliment practices online. While previous research predominantly focused on responses to compliments on social-oriented platforms (such as Facebook or Instagram), in this contribution the focus is on a business-driven environment (Airbnb). Departing from the framework elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo (2013) on Facebook data, I examine the distribution of different compliment response strategies in an Airbnb corpus. Further, a qualitative discussion of the results will be provided, elaborating on some actual examples extracted from the corpus. The findings highlight some specific trends in the compliment response strategies adopted by Airbnb hosts. Hosts overwhelmingly opted for accepting strategies, while evading or rejecting strategies were avoided. Moreover, a recurrent use of appreciation and returning compliments strategies was observed. Remarkably, agreeing and self-enhancement strategies (self-promotion) were also attested in the dataset, which are usually absent on other platforms (such as Facebook). Finally, in their responses, hosts also included emoticons, encouraging utterances and personalized invitation to future contact, promoting closeness and a certain degree of informality with their interlocutors.

Keywords: *responses' to compliments, online complimenting practices, digital discourse, responses to online reviews, Airbnb Online Experiences.*

1. Introduction

As most of our everyday communications now happens online, there is a growing interest in exploring how our contemporary interactions unfold in digital settings (Virtanen & Lee, 2022). At present, the digital environments and linguistic phenomena inquired by linguists are extremely varied (Vásquez, 2022), with global platforms such as Twitter or Facebook attracting a significant amount of scholarly attention. The present contribution focuses on a very recent platform, Airbnb Online Experiences, and offers new insights on a specific linguistic practice: responses to compliments. Within interpersonal communication, compliments and responses to compliments represent one of the key speech acts fueling relational and phatic communication (Cenni & Vásquez, forthcoming).

Complimenting behavior has embodied a popular object of study since the 1980s, primarily inquired in naturally occurring oral interactions (Holmes, 1986, 1995; Wolfson & Manes, 1980). Yet, recent studies proved that the act of giving or receiving a compliment persists as common communicative strategy within digitally-mediated interactions as well (Eslami & Yang, 2018). As a matter of fact, the prevalence of social media offers new interactive contexts for the study of complimenting behavior online, with several scholars observing that giving/receiving compliments is as well-established and widespread a practice in digital interactions as it is in more traditional *offline* face-to-face communication (Placencia & Lower, 2017). Remarkably, recent scholarship

has shown that an increasing number of social media platforms have given rise to new patterns of interaction where compliments are concerned (Hernández Toribio & Mariottini, 2020; Rudolf von Rohr & Locher, 2020; Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva & Tragant, 2020). Specifically, in the last years, studies have tended to focus on patterns of complimenting behavior found on social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram), with communications taking place among peers, acquaintances, friends or family members. However, investigations looking into complimenting behavior occurring on platforms that are predominantly dedicated to a commercial activity, and among interlocutors without pre-existing relational ties, are extremely rare (Cenni & Vásquez, 2021).

The present study will address these gaps in current research investigating a specific facet of complimenting behavior, namely responses to compliments, focusing the attention on a particular digital context, Airbnb Online Experiences, a commercially-driven platform. In this way, the study aims to extend the scope of inquiry on complimenting practices within digital spaces, focusing on an understudied business-driven platform and considering interactions between interlocutors with no prior relationship.

1.1. The context of the research: the Airbnb Online Experiences platform

Airbnb is a major player in the sharing economy. Launched in 2008, was originally intended as a platform were local hosts could offer peer-to-peer accommodation as a cheaper alternative to hotel stays. In 2016, Airbnb started to offer a new service: Airbnb Experiences, through which local hosts offered leisure activities for guests in order to experience the place they were visiting in a more 'authentic' way. Examples of activities offered included: wine tastings, bike tours and cooking workshops. Recently, due to the travel restrictions and social distancing in force (caused by the Covid-19 break-out), Airbnb decided to still offer these leisure activities but in a fully-digital format, launching the Airbnb Online Experiences (AOE) platform (Cenni & Vásquez, 2021). AOE was inaugurated in April 2020, presenting a wide-ranging list of *virtual activities* (offered via Zoom) such as coffee tasting, baking, dancing, meditation classes, or even virtual (thematic) city tours (e.g., Street Art virtual tour of New York City), just to give some examples. This service immediately proved to be an instant hit. In just a couple of months more than 800 Online Experiences were offered on the platform from hosts from all over the world, and the reviews left by guests were extremely positive (Cenni & Vásquez, 2022).

After having attended one of these Experiences, guests are invited to leave a review on the platform to share their evaluation and remarks with their host and fellow participants. At the same time, the platform allows hosts to respond to these reviews. These latter texts - hosts' responses posted on Airbnb Online Experiences - form the dataset of the present study, which will be explored for responses to compliments (see also section 3 Methodology).

Figure 1 below shows an actual example of the sequential organization of participants' reviews and hosts' responses on the Airbnb Online Experiences platform. The red rectangle indicates the host's response text, under investigation in the present study. Pictures and (user)names of the interlocutors have been blurred for anonymization.

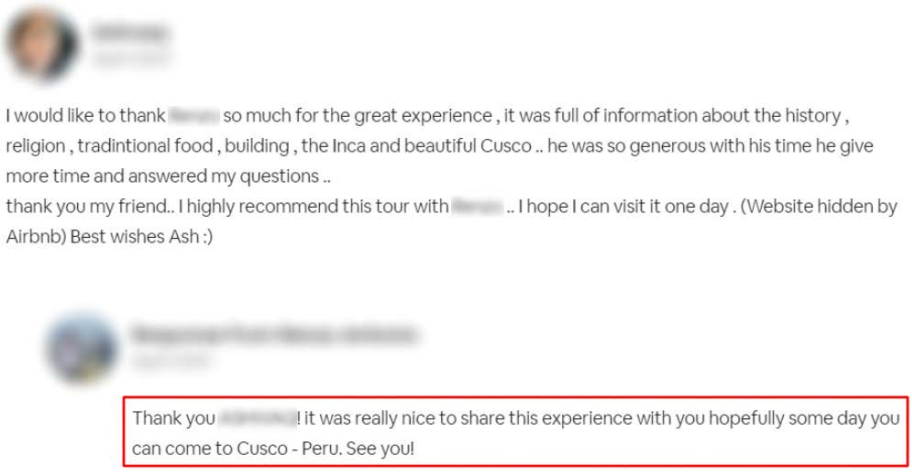

Fig. 1. Screenshot of the sequential organization of participants' reviews and hosts responses as displayed on the Airbnb Online Experiences platform.

Remarkably, unlike other platforms such as Booking.com or TripAdvisor, which typically collect and display reviews of various polarity[1], Airbnb is known for receiving an overwhelming majority of highly positive reviews from their guests (Bridges & Vásquez, 2016), and thus represents a very suitable environment for the investigation of compliments and responses to compliments.

In addition, to date, most of the studies looking at language or discursive features of user reviews and hosts'/service providers' responses mainly focused on negative reviews and/or speech acts that challenge the guest-host communication. For instance, several studies looked at the act of complaining and expressing negative evaluations, or explored how service providers respond to such complaints and negative remarks (Napolitano, 2018; Vásquez, 2011; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014; Zhu, Ma & Jiang, 2019). On the

1. Booking.com allows tourists to rate their stay by means of a scale from 0 to 10, whereas on TripAdvisor, consumers may give an evaluation ranging from 1 to 5 bullets (from very negative - to very positive). These two platforms are reknowned for hosting not only positive, but also average and (very) negative reviews (Vásquez, 2011, 2014; Baka, 2016).

contrary, the study of language-related aspects within positive reviews and responses in commercial-oriented contexts are still very limited (Cappelli, 2013; Cenni & Goathals, 2021; Feng & Ren, 2019).

As mentioned before, the present work aims to fill these gaps in current research, paying special attention to the specific compliment response strategies that host may include in these type of texts. Summing up, I believe that the context of the study is an interesting one for three main reasons:

- first, the business/commercial orientation of the texts, which is still only partially considered in the literature on compliment practices so far (see also section 1.2).
- second, the specific focus on responses to positive reviews, which are still understudied in the context of online reviews' discourse.
- third, the recency of the platform investigated, launched in this format less than two years ago.

1.2. Responding to compliments online: previous studies

A number of studies have investigated responses to compliments performed in various online environments. To date, responses to compliments online have been primarily studied in social media platforms such as Twitter or Instagram (Placencia & Powell, 2020). So far, though, the most investigated platform for complimenting practices, is undoubtedly Facebook (Eslami, Yang & Qian, 2020; Lower, 2020; Maíz-Arevalo, 2020; Ruiz-Tada et al., 2020).

The majority of these inquiries explored how complimenting behavior translates in the digital environment discussing the ways users adapted their compliment responses to the affordances of the new media they are interacting on (Placencia & Lower, 2017; Placencia & Eslami, 2020). Further, researchers focused on the elaboration of compliment response taxonomies, comparing the online practices to previous traditional and offline frameworks, as the ones of Holmes (1995) and Herbert (1990).

One of the most comprehensive frameworks to analyze compliment responses online is the one elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo (2013). Maíz-Arévalo investigated compliment responses among Spanish speakers on Facebook, adopting and extending the compliment responses' taxonomy elaborated by Holmes (1995). The original classification elaborated by Holmes comprised three main strategies: acceptance, rejection or evasion, which were, in turn, divided into subcategories. In her work, Maíz-Arévalo identified additional compliment response strategies which were not accounted for in Holmes' original classification. In particular, in her taxonomy, Maíz-Arévalo included the strategy of enhancing a compliment while responding to it, and the use of 'implicit' strategies, such as clicking the Facebook built-in "like" button or the use of (standalone) emoticons (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013).

For its analysis of compliment responses, the present study draws on the taxonomy elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo (2013). This will help reveal potential uniformities or

divergences between response strategies performed on Facebook vs. Airbnb Online Experiences platform (see section 4.1).

2. Research questions

Elaborating on prior research on compliment responses in digital spaces, the present case study addresses the following research questions:

(1) What are the compliment response strategies adopted by Airbnb Online Experiences hosts, and what is their distribution in the corpus?

(2) Are there uniformities or divergences when comparing compliment response strategies adopted in AOE vs. other more socially-oriented platforms, such as Facebook?

(3) Beyond specific compliment response strategies, what other communicative moves are hosts including in their response texts?

3. Methodology

In order to address these research questions, a corpus consisting of 200 hosts' responses downloaded from the Airbnb Online Experiences platform was analyzed. The corpus was collected based on the following criteria:

- Only responses to highly positive reviews were collected (ranging from 4,5 to 5 stars, which is the platform's top rate).
- No more than 5 responses from the same host were selected.
- Identical responses from the same host were excluded.
- Only responses written in English were considered[2].

The data was downloaded by means of a Python crawler in May 2020 and was subsequently coded using the Nvivo12 software. The data was analyzed as follows. First, building on the taxonomy of online compliment responses elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo (2013), the compliment response strategies adopted in the corpus were identified and coded (see also next sections). Second, I decided to analyze also the rest of the response

2. At the moment of data collection reviews and responses on the AOE platform were predominantly written in English, with an extremely limited number of reviews written in other languages (N<10). Also, I would like to underline that the communicative practices under examination are most probably performed within a context of English as Lingua Franca, since participants and hosts are located all over the world. Yet, Airbnb only shares the location of the users and therefore their L1 cannot be determined with certainty.

text, identifying the other functional units or 'moves' (Swales 1990, 2004) chosen by the hosts to construct their answers. In this second phase I followed a bottom-up saturation approach (De Ascaniis, Borrè, Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015), identifying separate moves according to the communicative functions they convey (Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 1990). The codebook was progressively refined in order to cover all communicative moves found in the empirical data. This analytical procedure has been widely adopted and represents an established method in discourse-oriented studies considering reviews and responses to reviews (Napolitano, 2018; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014; Zhu, Ma & Jiang, 2019).

In order to report the findings, I provide the number of responses in which a specific compliment response strategy has been found at least once. Of course, a single response text may include more than one response strategy. Subsequently, I applied the same procedure to the additional move categories making-up the text. Following this method I was able not only to detect the compliment response strategies adopted in the AOE context, but I also identified the other communicative moves that were included in the response text, thus offering additional insights into the discursive characteristics of the specific digital genre of responses to positive reviews on Airbnb.

4. Results

4.1. Compliments' response strategies on Airbnb Online Experiences

Having applied the taxonomy elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo on Facebook (2013) to the AOE data, I start by offering a comparison of the main response strategies detected in these two different online contexts (Table 1). This is followed by the presentation of the distribution of compliments' response strategies in the corpus (Table 2) and a qualitative discussion of examples extracted from the dataset.

Table 1. Main compliment response strategies: Facebook vs. Airbnb Online Experiences

Responding to compliments online	
Facebook	**Airbnb Online Experiences**
1) Accepting the compliment	**Yes**
2) Rejecting/deflecting the compliment	/Not found in the dataset/
3) Evading the compliment	/Not found in the dataset/
4) Implicit responses (emoticons; "like" button)	/Not applicable/
5) No response	**Yes**

A first striking result consists of a more restricted range of compliment response strategies detected in the AOE corpus. Indeed, the only strategies detected in the AOE context fall in the 'accepting the compliment' (1) or 'no response' (5) categories. Similarly to other platforms (TripAdvisor), also on AOE hosts can decide not to answer. Yet, since the focus of the present research is on compliment response strategies adopted on this specific platform, investigating the exact percentage of reviews going unanswered goes beyond the scope of the present study and has not been quantified (San-Martín Gutiérrez, Jiménez Torres & Puente Domínguez, 2018).

Remarkably, the strategies of (2) 'rejecting' and (3) 'evading' the compliment are absent from the AOE corpus. While these strategies embody valid options on Facebook (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013; Placencia, Lower & Powell, 2016), they appear to be disregarded in the AOE context. This could be attributable to the different communicative environments created on the two different platforms. On the one hand, Facebook interactions are typically relational, and usually take place between friends, family or acquaintances (Placencia & Lower, 2013), and in this type of interactional contexts evading or rejecting a compliment can be performed by the speaker aligning towards an expression of modesty. On the other hand, Airbnb is typically categorized as a commercially-oriented platform, since Airbnb Online Experiences are not offered for free (one has to pay to participate to one of these Experiences), and participants have no previous social ties with each other. In this sense, the lack of rejection and evasion of compliments seems to reinforce the framing of AOE as a business-oriented context of communication, in which compliments are gladly accepted, while refusing and avoiding them would be counterproductive, given that the commercial goal of hosts is to enhance their business and demonstrate the high quality of their services (Cenni & Goethals, 2021).

Concerning the use of emoticons, on the AOE platform, emoticons cannot be used to provide a standalone and implicit compliment response as identified by Maíz-Arévalo in Facebook (strategy 4), yet, they can be included in the hosts' response texts, juxtaposed to other strategies. In previous research, emoticons have been identified as a typical acceptance token on Facebook and Instagram (Placencia & Lower, 2013; Eslami, Yang & Qian, 2020). In the present AOE dataset, emoticons have been detected in N39/200 responses, indicating that around one out of five responses included an emoticon. The emoticons found in the dataset displayed a very limited variation, specifically, the great majority of the emoticons detected (N34) were 'smileys' (:)), and only a few instances of 'hearts' (<3) were found (N5). The use of emoticons in the Airbnb context is thus much less pervasive when compared to other compliment studies considering more 'relational/social' platforms such as Facebook or Instagram (e.g. Placencia & Lower, 2013). Yet, even if the use of emoticons is not frequent in this context, its partial presence indicates that, probably, a certain degree of informality is accepted, or at least tolerated, in this specific online context. Furthermore, the use of emoticons, even if partial, represents an interesting finding, since this tendency differs from results emerging in similar

investigations that focus on TripAdvisor. Specifically, within responses to positive reviews posted on TripAdvisor emoticons were practically absent (Cenni & Goethals, 2021), signaling a potential difference between appropriate/productive strategies used to respond to compliments on Airbnb vs. TripAdvisor. In other words, in general terms, it appears that AOE hosts adopt emoticons in their responses less frequently when compared to relational platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, but more often when compared to other business-oriented platforms, such as TripAdvisor.

4.2. Accepting compliments: different sub-strategies

As clearly shown in the work of Maíz-Arévalo (2013; Golato, 2002), accepting a compliment does not imply an univocal tactic, but allows the implementation of diverse accepting substrategies, namely: a) appreciation, b) agreement, c) downgrading the compliment, d) returning the compliment and e) enhancing it. Four of these substrategies have been identified in the empirical data (Table 2). Below, I will briefly discuss the distribution of the different (sub)strategies and then take a closer look at each of them, discussing examples from the corpus.

Table 2. The distribution of accepting strategies in Airbnb Online Experiences

Accepting compliments		
Categories of Maíz-Arévalo	**Airbnb Online Experiences**	**Occurrences in the corpus**
a) Appreciation	Yes	N182/200
b) Agreeing utterance	Yes	N31/200
c) Downgrading utterance	/Not found in the dataset/	N0/200
d) Returning the compliment	Yes	N120/200
e) Enhancing the compliment	Yes	N29/200

The first observation is that 'appreciation' strategy (a) embodies the most frequent compliment response strategy, detected in almost the totality of the responses N182/200. A second productive strategy adopted by Airbnb hosts is to 'return compliments' to their interlocutor, a strategy displayed in more than half of the responses N120/200. A restricted use of 'agreeing' (N31/200) and 'enhancing' strategies (N29/200) was also detected. Finally, it is noteworthy to observe a lack of 'downgrading' strategies (N0/200), which were absent in the corpus.

4.3. Appreciation for the received compliment

Showing appreciation for the received compliment represents a pervasive strategy, which is mostly worded as a thanking utterance. This is a rather expected communicative behavior, which emerged in several other compliment responses contexts in both offline and online interactions between friends, family and acquaintances alike (Placencia, Lower & Powell, 2016). Thanking the guest/participant also embodies an omnipresent strategy when responding to positive and even negative online reviews (Feng & Ren, 2019; Sparks & Bradley, 2017; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014).

In the AOE dataset, most appreciation strategies are highly routinized, in the form of a simple "thank you!", or "thank you for joining us", but some hosts thanked the reviewers in a more elaborated way, spelling out the importance of receiving positive reviews, such as in (1-2).

(1) Thank you so much for your Review and support, it really means a lot to us!
(2) Thanks so much for telling the "world" about your experience. I truly appreciate it when people take the time to write reviews.

A (limited) number of hosts (N20/200) also thank the reviewers for their 'private feedback' (3-4). Indeed Airbnb allows guests: (a) to send private feedback directly to their hosts, (b) to post public feedback on the platform, or (c) both. Additionally, examples such as (4) seem to suggest that the private feedback may be used by some guests to send less positive remarks and/or suggestions to improve the experience. Since this feedback could have been included in the public review, sending it privately indicates a great awareness of the wide readership on Airbnb. At the same time, sending a private feedback message embodies a specific communicative choice in term of politeness, where the reviewer decides to make a 'complaint' or 'remark' privately, thereby saving the 'face' of the host and preventing them from being exposed to public criticism.

(3) Thanks for your comments in the private feedback!
(4) Also thanks for your feedback in the private section, I aim to make this clearer moving forward.

4.4. Returning the compliment

As mentioned above, more than half of the responses included the strategy of 'returning the compliment'. The instances included in this category displayed some variation, from general compliments to more specific and personalized ones. Indeed, I detected some generic compliments, such as (5-6), which usually praised the guests in their role as participants or "students". Additionally, hosts also paid compliments to the

guests' performance, or the result(s) they achieved during the Experience (as in 7-8). Finally, hosts also paid the guests compliments on their personality or their attitude during the Experience (9-11).

(5) You were an awesome participant ☺
(6) You were a brilliant student !
(7) You did an amazing job !!!
(8) Well done! You bread looked super yummy!
(9) You brought great energy in this class!
(10) Molly! ok, with no disrespect to anyone else, you were the kindest person:)
(11) What a sweet guy you are!

The widespread adoption of this strategy throughout the corpus represents an additional specific feature of complimenting behavior within this digital context. Indeed, in other business-oriented review-based platforms, such as for instance Booking.com or TripAdvisor, it is very rare to find service providers returning compliments to their guests (Cenni & Goethals, 2021), probably because on those platforms the communicative environment is more clearly business-driven, and giving compliments to clients might be perceived as too personal and even inappropriate. While in the AOE case, after having shared an Online Experience together, the hosts-guests relational component appears to gain relevance and seems to promote a frequent use of the return compliment strategy.

4.5. Agreeing and Enhancing the compliment

While 'returning the compliment' highlighted the relational dimension characterizing the AOE platform, these last two strategies, namely 'agreeing' and 'enhancing the compliment', bring to the fore the more commercial dimension of this interactional context. Indeed, in some cases, the response writer decides to agree with (12-13) or even enhance (14-15) the received compliment.

(12) Yeah, to bake together online is sooo nice and indeed, it´s so nice to see other people´s kitchen.
(13) That is, indeed, a great offshoot of doing a cooking class this way - learning to cook in one's own kitchen is a very special experience.
(14) I am very happy of showing you a new lifestyle and a way to appreciate your surroundings!
(15) [Thank you!] Online experiences are a great opportunity to discover the world from home.

Specifically, 'enhancing a compliment' has been defined by Maíz-Arévalo (2013) as an acceptance of the compliment while maximizing it, leaning towards a self-praising

utterance. In the specific context, this category comprises examples such as (14-15 above) through which the hosts take the opportunity to highlight some positive features of their Online Experience. In some cases, hosts even included more 'promotional' utterances as (16-17), for instance advertising their Airbnb or Instagram profiles, thus taking advantage of the response space to include some kind of self-promotion.

(16) Keep checking my Airbnb profile, I have many food and baking events coming up!
(17) Follow me on my social accounts: @***** (anonymized Instagram account).

'Agreeing' with and 'enhancing a compliment' represent strategies usually avoided in more relational interactions and platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, where these strategies are commonly adopted with a humorous undertone, or otherwise categorized as signals of arrogance (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Placencia, Lower & Powell, 2016). This is different in this specific context, where a number of hosts decide to adopt these strategies to emphasize the qualities of the Experiences and boosting their service. The use of these strategies helps to expose the underlying commercial dimension of these interactions.

4.6 Additional communicative moves

Beyond the accepting strategies discussed above, in some cases, hosts included additional communicative moves to construct their responses. The empirical data showed a rather limited set of additional moves. Specifically, only three main moves were detected beyond the acceptance of the compliments, namely: 'encourage' the guest, 'solicit future contact' and 'closing pleasantries' (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of additional moves included in the response text.

Encouragement/Advice			N39/200
Solicit future contact	N70/200	Fixed formulas	N10/200
		Personalized	N60/200
Closing pleasantries	N69/200	Fixed formulas	N39/200
		Personalized	N30/200

Through the 'encouragement move' the host invites the guest to keep working on the activity or skill practised online in the AOE, as in (18-21):

(18) Chris you are on the good path. Add these little tricks when shopping wine and you'll be ready to be a sommelier:).

(19) Keep dancing, keep sharing and you'll be a pro in no-time!
(20) I hope you continue to make great food and enjoy it while doing so.
(21) I hope you keep practising and transforming your life more and more!

These examples are particularly interesting as they clearly expose the educational dimension included in many of the offered Online Experiences. Indeed, hosts of Online Experiences often assume the roles of facilitators and even teachers (Cenni & Vásquez, forthcoming), a role which is clearly mirrored in this kind of utterances.

Finally, considering then the last two moves: 'solicit future contact' and 'closing pleasantries' (Table 3), it is worth noting that 'closing pleasantries' are almost evenly distributed between fixed formulas ("*stay safe!*", "*cheers*", "*take care*") and personalized ones (. "*A big virtual hug to you and your dog*"). In a different way, the 'solicit future contact' category displays a lower adoption of fixed formulas (*"Hope to see you soon"*) showing a preference towards personalized realizations, such as (22-24), which help to create closeness between the interlocutors and lowers the formality of the response text.

(22) Can't wait for an email from you with you latest wine buys:).
(23) I can't wait to welcome you at my place next year! Hugs!
(24) I really hope we get to meet each other IRL[3], either in your Airbnb Bed&Breakfast or in my kitchen cooking and baking together.

Both the 'encouragement' move and the personalized 'invitations to future contact' emerge as a valid communicative options within AOE responses. Remarkably, both these strategies have not been found in other review platforms, as for instance TripAdvisor (Cenni & Goethals, 2021), and thus contribute to the confirmation of Airbnb Online Experiences as a distinct interactional context, with its own specific communicative features.

5. Conclusions

Building on the framework elaborated by Maíz-Arévalo (2013), a key finding is the detection of specific trends in the compliment response strategies adopted on the AOE platform. First of all, the corpus revealed a prevalence of accepting strategies, corroborating similar trends found in recent studies on compliment responses on other platforms (Placencia & Powell, 2020 -Instagram; Ruiz-Tada et al., 2020 -Facebook).

Taking a closer look to the accepting strategies adopted by hosts, it was interesting to notice not only a (rather common) copious use of appreciation strategies (thanking the participant) but also a rather frequent practice of returning the compliment to the AOE

3. IRL stands for "in real life".

participant, praising their personality, their effort, or their participation in the virtual experience (Cenni & Vásquez,). In particular, the act of returning the compliment was rather surprising, especially since the study considers a business-oriented type of text. Indeed, this practice implies a certain closeness between the interlocutors and hints at a more relational, and not only professional type of interaction. Another finding in this direction is the use of emoticons within the response texts. Even if their use is partial, it signals the acceptability of a rather informal interaction within this specific setting, when compared, for instance to communication on TripAdvisor, in which service providers typically avoid the use of emoticons (Cenni & Goethals, 2021). On the other hand, the findings also highlighted how hosts made use of more business-driven strategies, as the use of 'agreeing' and 'enhancing' strategies, with the scope of boosting/promoting their service.

Taken together, these results corroborate the observation that the specific digital context in which compliments and compliment responses occur plays a significant role in the strategies adopted by the interlocutors (Placencia & Lower, 2017). Moreover, the findings seem to point to the AOE platform as fostering a 'hybrid' type of interaction, in which conversational and interpersonal features (returning compliments, use of emoticons, personalized future invitations) are juxtaposed and intertwined with business and promotional discourse strategies (such as agreeing with the received compliment, enhancing it, and even including self-promotion strategies).

The present study contributes to and expands the current knowledge on compliment practices in online environments, by offering one of the first linguistic studies on compliment response strategies adopted in a business-related digital setting. Furthermore, the study provides deeper insights into the type of communication taking place on the Airbnb Online Experiences platform, hinting at a hybrid nature of the interactions that take place in this specific digital environment.

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