

“Tú sabes lo que le pasa a él?": the Role of (Relational) Epistemics in Indirect Complaint Sequences in Spanish and English Family Talk

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Abstract

Drawing on interactional pragmatics and membership categorisation analysis, this paper explores indirect (third-party-oriented and situation-oriented) complaints in Spanish and English interactions between family members where expectations of affiliation are contingent on (relational) epistemic (im)balances. We analyse how (1) disaffiliation is constructed through the recipient's more knowledgeable position in relation to the matter at hand, (2) complainability is legitimised when the recipient lacks epistemic access to the issue and (3) complaints are partially disattended by the recipient due to their inferior epistemic status regarding the situation. Throughout, we argue that (relational) epistemics is a necessary feature to incorporate in analysis, when it concerns the recipient's responses and, therefore, interpersonal achievement of social actions. We show how complainants treat the prior turns as relevant to the rights, obligations and expectations related to their relational categories and how extended sequences of complaints are co-constructed and negotiated in interaction.

Keywords

relational categories – indirect complaints – epistemics – (dis)affiliation – interactional pragmatics – membership categorisation analysis – Spanish – English

1 Introduction

Complaining is a highly complex and delicate social action where the appropriate match between action formation and action ascription strongly depends on how joint interactional work is constructed. Part of this interactional complexity that causes complaints to unfold in multiple ways lies in the fact that complaining (1) is not accomplished through fixed linguistic formats which makes action recognition and ascription harder, (2) involves various participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981) (i.e., direct and indirect complaints) with different expected responses (i.e., remediation and/or achievement of affiliation where relevant), and (3) is consequential for participants' relationships (Rodriguez, 2022a). This sensitive nature of complaints also manifests itself in many complaint sequences that start with or include other social actions under the umbrella term of troubles talk, for example, troubles-telling (Mandelbaum, 1991) or blaming (Pino, 2022). Moreover, complaining entails not only the expression of a negative affective stance towards a situation (e.g., bad weather), a person's behaviour, or an institution's wrongdoing that clashes with the complainant's expectations, but also the recipient's (fitted) response. As participants work to accomplish this interactional alignment and the overall management of trouble, they unavoidably display orientation to underlying moral and/or (inter)personal issues (Drew, 1998), which is where the sensitivity of the action lies.

Research on different types of complaints based on participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981) has demonstrated that complaining can project different responses and interactional outcomes (Boxer, 1993). *Direct complaints*, where complainants express their negative feelings towards the complaint recipient, in this case the complainees (i.e., the agent oriented to as responsible for the complainable matter), tend to receive denials as responses and aim primarily at remediation (Dersley and Wootton, 2000). In contrast, *indirect complaints*, where the complaint recipient is not the complainees, can be self-oriented, situation-oriented or third-party-oriented (Boxer, 1993). This paper is concerned with the last two types which project affiliation as the next relevant move (Boxer, 1993; for a detailed distinction, see Rodriguez, 2022b). In either case, complaining involves face (related to "the positive social value" of one's self-image [Goffman, 1955, 1967]) and/or moral (related to normativity in terms of

what is 'right' and 'wrong' [see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Kádár, 2021]) concerns for all the parties involved as each of them can be held accountable for different reasons in a complaint sequence (Konakahara, 2017). For example, a complaineé is to blame for committing a wrongdoing, a complainant may be accountable for moaning about a complainable matter, and a complaint recipient can be responsible for affiliating/non-affiliating/disaffiliating with, or disattending a complaint (see Mandelbaum, 1991). This social concern with keeping a positive self-image (Goffman, 1955, 1967) and good social relationships is visible in the "micro-interactional moral calibrations" (Stivers et al., 2011: 3) of consequences regarding failure to accomplish alignment (i.e., the shared conversational project) and affiliation (i.e., a matching affective stance) in the moment-by-moment unfolding of indirect complaints. These calibrations tend to be informed and greatly rely on the social shared knowledge of what is complainable (Schegloff, 2005) and how this knowledge can be used to legitimise a complaint. Alongside cultural knowledge, interactional histories, and relational categories, what interactants (think they) know about each other – the epistemics of social relationships (Raymond and Heritage, 2006) – is a key aspect of affiliative practices, in particular (see Lindström and Sorjonen, 2013: 368), and the social action of complaining, in general.

Epistemics, the study of how knowledge is organised, claimed and attributed in interaction, has been examined in various fields and disciplines, including sociolinguistics, sociology and conversation analysis (Drew, 2018; Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Heritage, 2012a, 2012b). Managing access to knowledge is an essential aspect of how conversation is co-constructed and progresses. The management of knowledge involves those who have access to certain 'knowables' (Pomerantz, 1980), whether first-hand or via hearsay, and those who lack (direct or indirect) access to some matters, thus creating asymmetries of knowledge or epistemic imbalances (Heritage, 2012b; Sidnell, 2012; Drew, 2018). Heritage (2012a, 2012b) holds that the "epistemic engine" drives sequences, which means that any epistemic imbalances tend to be redressed by interactants, thus moving from a less knowledgeable (K-) position to a more knowledgeable (K+) position and achieving a flat epistemic gradient or epistemic equilibrium that leads to a sequence closure (see also Drew, 2012, 2018).

Epistemics, referred to as an underlying system affecting the interlocutors and their talk and, thus necessary to incorporate into analysis of social interaction (Heritage, 2012a, 2012b; Bolden, 2018; Drew, 2018), has received much attention in relation to some social actions (e.g., assessment, informing or question-answer sequences). However, other complex and delicate social actions, for instance, complaining and responses to it, have not been thoroughly examined with a focus on epistemics and rights, expectations and obligations particularly associated with relational categories as relevant

to the analysis of how complaint sequences unfold (but see Rodriguez, 2022a). This paper aims to fill in this gap by examining indirect complaints in Spanish and English. It is structured as follows. In Section 2, we start with a link between epistemics and action formation and ascription, and then provide a detailed overview of existing studies that explore (only in passing) the ways in which epistemic domains are oriented to in complaint sequences. Data and method for this analysis are described in Section 3. In Section 4, we turn to the findings of this study regarding (relational) epistemics in indirect complaints in Spanish and English, namely, what role the recipient's positioning as (un)knowing plays in (1) disaffiliation with complaints, (2) legitimising complainability and (3) partially disattending complaints. In Section 5, we offer concluding remarks.

2 Epistemics and Social Action Formation and Ascription

Research has shown that epistemics is emergent through “the entire resources of language and sequence organization” (Heritage, 2008: 309; for a list of recourses, see Sidnell, 2012: 312) and “epistemic positionings are lodged within a trajectory of action within interaction” (Sidnell, 2012: 303). From the work on epistemics and social action done to date, it has become rather evident that epistemic positioning plays a key role in determining whether an utterance is conveying or requesting information (Heritage, 2012a, 2013), and can explain how interactants design recognisable social actions (Robinson, 2013). This makes the epistemics of social relationships a fundamental aspect not only of action formation (how turns are constructed by speakers) but also of action ascription and negotiation (how they are responded to by recipients) (e.g., Heritage, 2013; Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2014). In this section we provide a concise overview of some key studies of epistemics in social interaction, before moving to how epistemics is displayed in complaints.

To start, how interactants index their relative epistemic positions is visible in turn design, with the basic contrast being between the use of declaratives in tellings (invoking the speaker's K+ and the recipient's K-) and interrogatives in questions (invoking the speaker's K- and the recipient's K+) (Sidnell, 2012). Depending on the interactant's epistemic positioning relative to the domain of knowledge of oneself and others, the same turn design, however, can result in different interpretations of social actions. For instance, a declarative syntax with a final rising intonation from a more knowledgeable (K+) interactant is hearable as ‘informing’ and from a less knowledgeable (K-) interactant is treated as ‘seeking information’. Similarly, tag questions in a turn that falls

within the speaker's epistemic domain are interpreted as 'mobilising support for assertion', whereas the same features in the K- speaker's turn are hearable as 'seeking confirmation' (Heritage, 2012a, 2013).

Incongruities between turn formats and actions that turns perform can be observed in relation to different social actions, where the distribution of knowledge, relevant to social relationships and category membership, is a key to the social action ascribed and the relevance of the response. For example, in pre-challenges, while questions indicate the recipient's epistemic primacy and, thus epistemic obligation to respond and accountability if that does not occur, they also index the known-in-common answer whereby the challenge is initiated and oriented to as such by the recipients (Reynolds, 2011). Similarly, in the police interviewing context, the "what happened?" question is not hearable as a 'neutral' question indexing the speaker's K-, but tends to be treated as challenging a prior turn, thus resulting in the recipients constructing themselves as doing 'being ordinary' (Kidwell, 2009). In the case of other-initiated repair, in particular, partial questioning repeats, the recipient's understanding of whether the repair initiator is knowledgeable or not determines what kind of action is ascribed to the repair initiation. If the repair initiator is seen in a K+ position, the action that is indexed by repair initiation is to be treated as a form of disagreement and a challenge of the repeated item. On the other hand, if the repair initiator is treated as unknowing, then their repair initiation is interpreted as invoking lack of understanding or of adequate hearing (Robinson, 2013).

Negotiations of epistemic positionings, claims and authority are particularly complex in social interaction, involving various face considerations in relation to how knowledge and information are managed (e.g., see Heritage and Raymond, 2005). For instance, second-position assessments can construct shared knowledge (see also "parallel assessments", Heritage, 2011) on the matter, thus jointly assessing it and creating a sense of affiliation (see Hayano, 2017). Frequently, however, speakers compete over who knows more. This can lead to the upgraded second assessment in different turn formats in order to claim one's epistemic access and the right to assess the matter at hand. It can display the resistance of the "secondness" of their assessment's sequential position in terms of epistemic authority, for example, constructed through *oh*-prefaced second assessments that embody a claim to epistemic independence (Heritage, 2002a; for other formats, see Heritage and Raymond, 2005 and Raymond and Heritage, 2006). In the same vein, advice acceptance can index epistemic negotiations, in particular when advice has not been solicited, thus who knows more and has the right to advise is not shared by the interlocutors (Riccioni et al., 2014), or when the advisees position themselves as possessing

partial knowledge on the matter. This can be done through claims to prior knowledge, displays of established intent or accounts (Shaw and Hepburn, 2013; Mikesell et al., 2017). Unlike with questions, assessments, advice, informings, and assertions in interaction, the central role that epistemics plays in how complaining is interactionally accomplished has received limited attention particularly in relation to complaints in mundane conversations. We turn to this in the following section.

2.1 *Displays of Epistemics in Complaints*

While claims in relation to epistemics can be traced in some complaints studies, the significance of their intrinsic relationship has been addressed only in passing but not as a core aspect. Vöge (2010: 1558) defines the epistemics of complaining as “who complains about what to whom in which manner”, showing that it involves how participants orient to the expectations contingent on their interpersonal relationships. This link has been hinted at mostly in institutional settings (Watson, 1978; Monzoni, 2008, 2009; Vogue, 2010; Márquez-Reiter, 2013; Márquez-Reiter et al., 2015; Kushida and Yamakawa, 2018; Ruusuvuori et al., 2019), where the imbalance of epistemic status in relation to a complainable matter can be more easily attributed to role identities (e.g., patient-doctor or senior-junior). This has caused the management of knowledge to be seen as a product of factors exogenous to a given occasion (Drew, 1991). For instance, in exploring complaints about an absent third-party during institutional meetings, Vöge (2010) notices that members use seniority to demonstrate in-depth knowledge about their colleagues’ complainable behaviour, thereby achieving epistemic authority and negotiations of hierarchy. In ordinary interactions, on the other hand, research on indirect complaints has focused more on the management of affectivity and affiliation (Drew and Walker, 2009; Selting, 2010, 2012), as an expected response. It is surprising then that, despite being contingent on epistemic access, the role of epistemics in affiliative practices remains minimally explored (but see Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Rodriguez, 2022a).

The complexity of managing knowledge in complaints emerges from the positionings (K+ or K-) of the multiple agents involved in the social action (i.e., the complaine, the complainant, the complaint recipient, and the affected party). These positionings can be attributed, self-claimed, and negotiated in relation to categories and category-bound knowledge that can index appropriate expectations and/or responsibilities (Watson, 1978; Raymond and Heritage, 2006). Thus, attributions of (lack of) knowledge can be used to hold a complaine accountable for their actions (Watson, 1978; Monzoni, 2008, 2009). In third-party-oriented complaints to a suicide prevention agency,

Watson (1978), for example, notices that while complainants may orient to a complainees's category as a locus for the imputation of knowledge and responsibility for not acting upon it (e.g., a vicar who does not help his parishioner), complaint recipients may negotiate blame (see also Pino, 2022), questioning the complainees's epistemic access to the trouble. In general, different types of interrogative constructions play a crucial role in how knowledge and positionings are negotiated during complaints. In direct (i.e., recipient-oriented) complaints, Monzoni (2008) illustrates how call-takers at an ambulance call-centre are guided by complainants to display shared common ground (i.e., a similar epistemic status) through positive polar questions in Italian that project confirmation, making them unable to deny the complained-of action. A slightly different scenario is visible in the study of inbound calls to a call centre of a Latin American multinational holiday company, where misalignment of interactional agendas causes negotiations of affiliation to fail (Márquez-Reiter, 2013). In this case, both, complainants and complainees use yes/no questions to display a strong epistemic stance and establish common ground from which to rebut each other's arguments. In ordinary interactions, *why*-interrogatives have also been found to function as assertions through which complainants claim epistemic access to an accountable or complainable event, thereby conveying a negative affective stance (Bolden and Robinson, 2011). *Why*-interrogatives also display a K+ position and epistemic access to information that the questioner has more rights to know about (Koshik, 2005).

From the perspective of complainants, research has pointed out that they tend to use shared epistemic access to relevant information to legitimise a complainable matter (Monzoni, 2009; Rodriguez, 2022a). Such access can be marked through action formation (i.e., turn-design) and then be used to mobilise support from other recipients who, through their shared common ground, may endorse complainability (Bolden and Mandelbaum, 2017). In institutional direct complains in Italian, Monzoni (2009) demonstrates that negative interrogatives are not used by complainants to weaken the epistemic stance but rather to display that they have grounds to assume the complainable. By doing this, they challenge the recipient to confirm the complained-of action, thereby attributing responsibility to them and/or the institution. In business meetings, indirect complaints that involve third-parties can be highly risky depending on the hierarchical status of the participants. In German, Vöge (2010) observes that complainants who are at a lower rank in the institutional hierarchy may design their complaints as jocular and implicit, relying on the knowledge shared by the recipients to co-construct and bring the social action to the surface. This shared interactional effort is also visible in appraisal interviews in Finnish and

Danish (Ruusuvuori et al., 2019), where complainants rely on recipients (i.e., managers) and how they display access to knowledge before safely entering complaining. Furthermore, considering the affordances of online settings (e.g., Facebook), Márquez-Reiter et al. (2015) show that displays of knowledge can be used by complainants not only to challenge a company's (the complainee's) actions but also to form temporary alliances with other users who display a similar epistemic stance.

In ordinary interactions, it has been observed that complainants can legitimise complainability based on their own epistemic authority or resort to shared epistemic access. One way in which complainants claim epistemic authority in relation to a complainable and deal with the recipient's response is through *I-mean* prefaced utterances (Maynard, 2013). These self-initiated repairs can claim the speaker's epistemic right to clarify a complainable, thereby forestalling disaffiliation/disagreement or pre-empting an inapposite hearing, denying a potential complainable (Maynard, 2013). Similarly, complainants may use the epistemic hedger "I don't know" to treat a complaint as problematic and index that they are not fully committed to their epistemic status regarding the complainable (see Wheatherall, 2011). Complainants can also provide detailed accounts in an objective way to display first-hand knowledge (Konakahara, 2017) or use idiomatic expressions, slang, and references to shared experiences to index similar epistemic access in order to mobilise affiliation (Drew and Holt, 1988; Rodriguez, 2022a). References to shared experience have also been observed in multiparty interactions as complainants move into reminiscing to accomplish affiliation from co-participants who share epistemic primacy and the status to legitimise a complaint that has been previously contested (Bolden and Mandelbaum, 2017: 17). A more complex case can be observed when co-complainants share epistemic access to a complainable but appeal to different rights to legitimize the complaint, thereby engaging in negotiations of epistemic authority and providing selective affiliation (Rodriguez, 2022a).

With respect to complaint recipients, most claims appear in relation to indirect complaints where affiliation or solidarity-establishing behaviours (see Boxer, 1993), which is the preferred¹ response (Drew and Walker, 2009),

1 In conversation analysis terms, *preference* refers to certain social actions observably selected over other actions in talk-in-interaction (see Pomerantz, 1984). Preferred turns are constructed and treated as unmarked (Levinson, 1983), which is signalled by such interactional features as the lack of delays or accounts in responses, for instance, agreement is generally preferred over disagreement.

may (not) be provided. In institutional settings, research has demonstrated that police officers, doctors and psychiatrists withhold affiliation with complainants, orienting instead to problem-solving (Ruusuvuori and Lindfors, 2009; Stokoe and Edwards, 2007). This is visible in Kushida and Yamakawa's (2018) study on how psychiatrists respond to patients' first-hand experience. They argue that when patients design complaints with no delays or hesitation, psychiatrists orient to their epistemics of experience as K+ aligning with the complaint and changing their medication. In contrast, when patients complain with hesitation, psychiatrists orient to their own epistemics of expertise, refusing to change their prescriptions and, instead, using manoeuvres to evaluate the patient's reported symptoms as evidence of overall improvement. Nonetheless, in a different institutional context, Ruusuvuori et al. (2019) demonstrate that managers, as recipients of the complaint, can use their asymmetrical relationships with employees to facilitate entering complaining via evoking shared knowledge, indexing understanding of work-related issues, or displaying a clear affective stance in relation to a complainable matter.

In ordinary interactions, attention has been given to the way in which recipients design their affiliative turns. Couper-Kuhlen (2012), for example, notices that *I know* serves as a stance-congruent assessment which offers affiliation but from an independent epistemic position (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). In these cases, recipients imply that they do not simply go along with the complaint but might have made the same negative assessment independently (Heinemann, 2009), thereby generalising the reported complainable and treating it as recurrent shared knowledge. Recipients can also delay affiliation to prioritise 'articulating the unsaid' which can be done through *and*-prefaced formulations that project (dis)confirmation, appealing, in that way, to the complainants' epistemic authority (Bolden, 2010). A more detailed exploration of how these formulations are designed at the prosodic level shows that epistemic certainty can be modulated through intonation (Heritage, 2012a, 2012b). While rising intonation suggests a wider epistemic gap between a recipient and a complaine, falling intonation displays the speaker's stronger epistemic stance placing them on nearly equal footing with the complainant (Bolden, 2010). While most of these studies refer to recipients who share knowledge, little has been explored in relation to K- recipients. For instance, how unknowing recipients may hear complaints as simple news reports, consequently disattending them (see Mandelbaum, 1991) and orienting to solving the epistemic imbalance. This way, even though complainants tend to expect primarily emotional reciprocity, some recipients may orient to practical problem-solving, treating

the complaint as a request for advice (see Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2022). When advice is unsolicited, recipients self-attribute epistemic authority, which can be then contested and resisted by complainants (Riccioni et al., 2014; Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2022).

As evidenced here, while the role that epistemics plays in complaining has been acknowledged in previous research using data from various languages, it was not the focus of the analysis, thus such findings were treated as rather peripheral. To the best of our knowledge, no study has specifically focused on the role of epistemics in the co-construction of complaining particularly in ordinary interactions or in different linguistic contexts. Some scholars have argued that given the omnipresence of epistemics in interaction, the study of complaints does not require the exploration of participants' epistemic statuses or stances in order to understand the range of practices that may constitute this phenomenon (see Drew, 2018: 167). Nonetheless, since affiliation, a core practice associated with indirect complaints (Drew and Walker, 2009) presupposes access to knowledge (Stivers et al., 2011), foregrounding epistemics may be a crucial element to better understand how complaining is jointly accomplished. Furthermore, we argue that exploring how the management of knowledge is contingent on relational categories in ordinary interactions where, unlike institutional settings, asymmetries are not necessarily taken for granted, is essential for a more nuanced account of social organisation in interaction. Therefore, this study aims to explore indirect complaints in Spanish and English interactions between family members where expectations of affiliation are contingent on (relational) epistemic (im)balances. While focussing on how complainable matters are designed in both languages, we primarily address the salience of epistemics to how the recipients of third-party-oriented and situation-oriented complaints treat the prior turns as relevant to the rights, obligations and expectations linked to their relational categories and, thus how extended sequences of complaints are co-constructed and negotiated in interaction.

3 Data and Methods

The data for this study comes from ordinary phone conversations in Spanish and English from the *CallHome* and *CallFriend* corpora in *TalkBank*. All the extracts analysed in this paper are family conversations (even if they are part of the original *CallFriend* repository; for details, see Rodriguez, 2022a), i.e., they are between what can be broadly referred to as family members, whether close or more distant, for instance, a boyfriend and a girlfriend (Extracts 1 and 3), a grandmother and a granddaughter (Extract 2), an aunt and a nephew

(Extract 4), a brother and a sister (Extract 5) and a mother and a daughter (Extract 6). Given such relational categories, interactants bring into conversation certain expectations, entitlements, rights and obligations (e.g., Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005), which, as the analysis shows, is at the core of the participants' epistemic positionings in complaint sequences. After having explored the phone conversations available in the corpora, the extracts for this analysis were selected on the basis of (1) the complaint sequences being indirect (third-party- or situation-oriented), (2) the responses to complaints being interactionally treated as dispreferred (e.g., through pursuits of affiliation as a preferred response), and (3) the epistemic imbalances between the interactants that become visible in their interactional work. It is important to note that, as studies of social interaction have shown, a single case of an interactional phenomenon suffices for its existence to be observed (see Heritage, 1999: 70). In the same vein, this exploratory study aims not to look for regular patterns across a large collection of data but to examine the same interactional practices – in this case indirect complaints and responses to them – in select Spanish and English phone conversations.

The methodological approach that we take in this paper is interactional pragmatics in combination with some relevant aspects of membership categorisation analysis. Interactional pragmatics draws on two key properties: *emergence* and *situatedness* (Haugh, 2012). While emergence is linked to how actions emerge 'here-and-now', moment-by-moment in talk, where such aspects as turn design and sequence organisation (see Drew, 2013; Stivers, 2013) are the main components, situatedness of talk, referred to interlocutors' expectations that arise from their experience, (culture-specific) knowledge and interpersonal relationships, plays a crucial role in analysing meanings and actions in the construction of turns and sequences (Haugh, 2012). Membership categorisation analysis (MCA) (Sacks, 1992; Hester and Eglin, 1997) – referred to as the missing pragmatics of conversation analysis (Hester and Eglin, 1997: 14) – offers analytical tools to explore such categorial topics as identity, morality and culture (Jarryusi, 1984; Stokoe, 2012). The interactants' use of explicit category labels (e.g., "abuela" ['grandmother']), category-bound activities and attributes (e.g., supporting someone, being inexperienced) and category-implicative actions (e.g., complaints) is crucial to our understanding of how societies and cultures operate (Schegloff, 2007) and to our knowledge regarding the expectations, rights, obligations and responsibilities as relevant to and indexed via the relational categories (see also Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005). Through the micro-level analysis of social actions in interaction, it becomes possible to shed light into how members of society organise their social knowledge and orient to social orderliness (Hester and Francis 2004), to which this paper aims to contribute.

4 Analysis: the Role of (Relational) Epistemics in Indirect Complaints

In this section, we explore in detail how complaint sequences in Spanish and English are constructed as emergent in talk-in-interaction. More specifically, the overall objective of the analysis is two-fold: (1) it focuses on the role that (relational) epistemic imbalances – different access to the epistemic domain – play in the responses to indirect complaints, and (2) where made salient by interactants, (cross-)linguistic and (cross-)cultural affordances are also explored. Namely, in the Spanish and English phone conversations, we analyse how (1) disaffiliation is constructed through the recipient's more knowledgeable position in relation to the matter at hand (in Section 4.1), (2) complainability is legitimised when the recipient lacks epistemic access to the issue (in Section 4.2) and (3) complaints are partially disattended by the recipient due to their inferior epistemic status regarding the situation (in Section 4.3). Throughout, we argue that (relational) epistemics is a necessary feature to incorporate in analysis, when it concerns the recipient's responses and, therefore, interpersonal achievement of social actions.

4.1 *Disaffiliating with Complaints through the Recipient's K+*

While research has shown that affiliation is a preferred response to indirect complaints in ordinary interactions (Drew and Walker, 2009) that is interactionally pursued if not provided (Mandelbaum, 1991; Rodriguez, 2022a), the role that epistemic access and authority play in whether affiliation is provided or withheld remains underexplored. Through the analyses of interactions in Spanish and English, we show how (dis)affiliative practices on the part of the recipient are interactionally accomplished through the displays of their epistemic primacy and, as a result, index epistemic inferiority of the complainant.

Extract (1) comes from an interaction between a couple, John and Laura.² In the first seconds of the recording (data not shown), John mentions Dougo, someone whom John and Laura have known for some time and who has been offered by Laura to stay at their place, when needed, and while it is not occupied. John sometimes stays at that place and has the only available key. Some asymmetry of first-hand access to knowledge can be observed from the very beginning. While Laura has not seen Dougo recently, which is indexed through her inquiry “how is he doing?”, John reveals that Dougo is “annoying [him] a little bit”, thereby, through this affective stance, indexing his communication with Dougo as well as a forthcoming complainable matter – Dougo texting him to ask for the key to their place so that he can bring over “his boyfriends”.

² We use pseudonyms, unless the interactants' names are revealed in the phone recordings.

(1) [CH:EN:4365; 4.25–5.17]

- 1 JOH: .hh The way I kin[da see it is like; if you want a- a s- a so:ft
 2 LAU: [(or whatever) ((distorted))
 3 JOH: place to lie your head do:wn and fall aslee:p, .hh and wa:ke u:p,
 4 (0.2) y- cook foo:d or whateve:r, (.) .hhh a::nd; (0.4) putz arou:nd
 5 once in a whi:le, (.) tha:t's fi:ne. (0.2) .hh but if you want
 6 pla:ce whe::re; hh (0.2) fyou kno::w, £ it's- it's ti:me for a
 7 >Saturday Night Fever< pa:rty, I'm so:rry. i- i- it's;
 8 LAU: O:h, come o::n; he's not-
 9 JOH: khhh
 10 LAU: Qui:te like tha::t; [I mean good grief.
 11 JOH: [Yes, but still; that's kind of my::;
 12 (1.0)
 13 [You kno:w.
 14 LAU [No::, he's got people::; that he hasn't see:n fo::r; a quite a
 15 [whi:le.
 16 JOH: [But don't the:y, don't they li:ve somewhe(hh)re?
 17 (0.6)
 18 .hhh [phhhh
 19 LAU: [We::ll; ((distorted)) hhh
 20 (0.3)
 21 JOH: £You kno:w what I'm£ sa:y:ing.
 22 (0.3)
 23 LAU: N- n- n- we::ll, n:: no:t a:ll of them::; e- e- I mea:n::; I get the
 24 impre:ssion not a:ll of them can you go ba:ck to that pla::ce.
 25 (1.5)
 26 >I mean have you ever actually< ta:lked to him about it?
 27 (0.5)
 28 JOH: No::; but; a:nyway.=
 29 LAU: =We:ll; becau:se; I- some of the::m; (1.2) you kno:w, it's=-
 30 JOH: =Oh, I understa:nd, I think I: understand what you're sa:y:ing now.=
 31 LAU: =Yea[:h.
 32 JOH: [I think I figu:red it out that, .hhh (0.5) °yea:h.°

This extract shows a continuation of the third-party-oriented complaint sequence that started in the beginning of the phone conversation and continues for almost 10 minutes, with John as a complainant, Dougo as a complaine and Laura as a complaint recipient. In lines 1 and 3–7, John invokes the category “guest” through category-bound activities (e.g., “lie your head down”, “cook food”) as well as the behaviours that are category-deviant, i.e., to have “a Saturday Night Fever party”. Even though John projects a very negative and explicit stance in relation to the matter (for implicitly constructed negative assessment, see Extract 2), he constructs his turn with silences, hesitations and cut-offs, all of which index that what he is referring to is somehow problematic as it is linked to the category of doing being ‘promiscuous’ whose category-bound activities breach some moral expectations (see Jayyusi, 1984;

Stokoe, 2003), in particular as relevant to the “guest” category in this case. Through “you know” in a smile voice before exemplifying the propositional content, John signals the need for a clarification (Holmes, 1986) and starts constructing Dougo’s category as shared knowledge between himself and Laura, thus potentially mobilising understanding of the complainable matter and affiliation in relation to it (Clayman and Raymond, 2021). In line 8, Laura, however, does not affiliate with John, but, through “oh come on he’s not quite like that”, constructs John’s complaint as an exaggeration and resists Dougo being placed in the category of someone partying wildly with multiple boyfriends. This way she not only orients to saving Dougo’s public image, but at the same time threatens John’s face by defending her friend instead of showing agreement with her boyfriend. This can be explained by the fact that her assertion regarding Dougo’s categorisation displays her epistemic positioning as someone who knows Dougo well. By starting her disaffiliative turn with “oh come on”, Laura is also orienting to some partial knowledge about Dougo that John also has, which in itself slightly mitigates her disaffiliation with her boyfriend’s complaint. John’s epistemic positioning as constructed by Laura is visible in line 11, where he provides partial acceptance of his exaggeration (“yes”), but does not accept its bearing on the complainable matter (“but still”). Laura’s disaffiliative response is followed by a 1s silence, after which John and Laura start talking in overlap. In line 13, John uses the stand-alone “you know” with a falling prosody that functions as a “plea for cooperation” (Östman, 1981 in Holmes, 1986) and an affiliation pursuit (Clayman and Raymond, 2021) as relevant to their common knowledge and, we argue, their relational category as well. In lines 14–15, in overlap, Laura starts her turn with an elongated “no” and continues to provide an account for her disaffiliative response. Thus, she further claims her K+ position regarding Dougo’s situation, and interactionally, does not orient to affiliation as the appropriate and expected response not only for indirect complaints, but also as pertinent to the “boyfriend-girlfriend” category.

In line 16, John indexes some epistemic asymmetry between himself and Laura through the negative interrogative “don’t they live somewhere?” (Heritage 2002b) whereby suggesting that “they must”, thus, challenging Dougo needing to stay at their place and legitimising his complaint, while, simultaneously, indexing the situation as delicate (through laughter particles) and himself as possibly less knowledgeable on the matter. Once again, not having received the preferred response of affiliation from Laura, after silences in lines 17 and 20 and Laura’s “well” in line 19 marking dispreferredness of what is forthcoming (Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013; Heritage 2015), in line 21, John is still pursuing Laura’s understanding and affiliation as relevant to their

category-implicative expectations, this time through the *you know*-prefaced assertion “you know what I’m saying” with a falling prosody at the end of the turn (see “tú me entiendes” [“you know what I mean”] in Extract 2). This way, through “you know”, John is further displaying the certainty of the validity of his claim and their conjoint knowledge regarding it (Holmes, 1986). Similar to line 6, this is done in a smile voice, thus signalling not only Laura’s epistemic access to what John is referring, but also it being treated as unmentionable. Laura’s response combines two levels of her epistemic positioning linked to the two relational categories: with her boyfriend and with Dougo. While she does not question the meaning of John’s utterance in relation to the moral issues, thus displaying her understanding of the ‘unsaid’ (Bolden, 2010), in lines 23–24, she, nevertheless, shows further disaffiliation with John’s stance on the matter, even though it is mitigated through a slightly downgraded access to knowledge (“I get the impression”).

After a 1.5s silence, in line 26, Laura is indexing her own superior epistemic positioning and John’s inferior epistemic status, thus minimising the validity of his complainable (for a similar pattern, see Extract 2). She constructs it through a polar question, and the use of “ever” and “actually” in her turn design not only casts doubt regarding John’s epistemic access to the particulars of Dougo’s current situation, but also makes the question challenging or even accusation-implicative (Haugh and Sinkeviciute, 2018), thus holding John accountable for complaining about Dougo without having inquired about his personal circumstances (see Watson, 1978). This way she indexes possible expectations relevant to and appropriate for the “friend” category that have not been fulfilled by John. John orients to Laura’s turn as a request for information, with “no” confirming his K- position, thereby not ascribing the social action of accusation to Laura’s turn and distancing himself from what the responsibilities of a friend might be. This can explain why he, unlike Laura, does not link his inferior epistemic positioning with the validity of his complaint and seems to be ready to at least momentarily disregard the matter (“but anyway”), which could signal a sequence closure. In line 29, however, Laura does not align with it, thus showing a trajectory of her interactional project oriented towards the relationship with Dougo. It looks like she was going to index her epistemic primacy through “well because I [have talked to him]”, but abandons that shifting back to the topic at hand. After a 1.2s intra-turn silence, through the use of “you know”, now Laura is mobilising John’s understanding of her account (Clayman and Raymond, 2021), by invoking some shared knowledge of the delicate situation. In line 30, through “oh” and “I understand what you are saying now”, John is indexing his shift from a K- to a K+ position regarding the matter (Heritage, 1984). However, by saying

“I think I figured it out” in line 32, John does not construct Laura as the primary source of his epistemic change but places the responsibility for it on his own deduction skills.

A slightly different disaffiliative pattern can be observed in Extract 2 where first-hand access to relevant knowledge possessed by the complaint recipient is also used to account for and defend the complainees behaviour. The extract takes places nearly four minutes into the call between Corin and her grandmother. Prior to this extract, Corin has talked about how much she hopes to have a bank loan approved to pay for her Master's studies. Her grandmother finds this information unexpected as she suggests that Gustavo, Corin's father, should be paying for it and sanctions his category-deviant behaviour, thus indexing her K- position in relation to the reported situation. The suggestion triggers a series of situation-oriented complaints from Corin about managing two jobs while studying. In an affiliative move, her grandmother questions the lack of Gustavo's economic support, topicalizing his responsibilities and obligations as her father (line 135) and facilitating entry into a more delicate type of complaint (i.e., a third-party-oriented complaint).

(2) [CF:SP:4946 3.49–4.32]

- 135 GRA: baby Gustavo te tiene que ayuda::r, ay dios como va a ser eso.=
baby, Gustavo has to help you. Ay God how is that possible?
- 136 COR: =abue:la (.) él no me está °ayudando de na:da.°
137 >↑YO no sé lo que le pasa.< .hh (.) él e-, él ha estado ta:n
138 como tan difere:nte. a- .hh yo no sé: como tan así:,
139 hh. abuela yo le voy a dar un besito y él me empu:ja.
Grandma, he is not helping me at all. I don't know what's
happening to him. He has been so different, I don't know, like so
like that, Grandma, when I try to give him a kissdim, he pushes
me away.
- 140 (0.9)
- 141 COR: como que [yo no sé, y yo no he-=
like I don't know, and I have not do-
- 142 GRA: [°(>qué es lo que le pasa<°)
what's happening to him
- 143 COR: =yo no he hecho na:da. Tú me entiendes? que yo me (.) he portado
144 muy bie:n [con él.
I haven't done anything to him, you know what I mean.
I have behaved very well towards him.
- 145 GRA: [porque tú sabes lo que le pasa a él (0.3) que él
146 mismo ni se sabe comprender ya ahora, hh. porque Gustavo está
147 muy decaí:do. (0.4) ve- ésta go::rdo. Me dijo ay Taita,

- 148 yo sí estoy cansado, yo estoy decaí:do.
 because you know what happens to him? That he doesn't know how to
 understand himself anymore now because Gustavo is very depressed,
 he is fat, he told me "Ay Taita, I do feel tired, I'm depressed".
- 149 (0.3)
- 150 GRA: tú [supiste lo que le-
 did you know what-
- 151 COR: [ajá pero ento:nces él, él lo está sacañ:ndo
- 152 y Joanna está sufriendo también, toditos nosotros, hasta ma:mi.
 Uh huh but then he is letting it out and Joanna is
 suffering as well, all of us, even Mum.
- 153 (0.8)
- 154 COR: como que él [está t-
 it's like he is-
- 155 GRA: [es de verdad.
 that's true
- 156 COR: ay dios, abuela. .hh
 oh God, Grandma
- 157 GRA: como [APAGA:do está.

Right before introducing the third-party-oriented complaint in line 136, Corin explicitly invokes the category “abuela” (“grandma”) (see also Raymond and Heritage, 2006). Through such categorisation, Corin positions herself as a “granddaughter”, setting a safer frame for implementing the face-threatening social action, whereby she indexes her expectation of affiliation as relevant to the relational category “grandmother-granddaughter”. Corin’s complaint about her father “no me está ayudando” (“he’s not helping me”) marked by the extreme case formulation “de nada” (“at all”) (Pomerantz, 1986) and reduced volume is constructed as a sensitive breach of the “father” category-bound responsibilities and expectations that Grandma has previously invoked in line 135 “Gustavo te tiene que ayudar” (“Gustavo has to help you”). Despite their epistemic alignment in relation to the complainable, Corin still orients to the sensitive nature of complaining provided for by the close relational history and divergent epistemic access that Corin and her grandmother may have in relation to Gustavo’s current behaviour. This is visible in Corin’s account for her complaint in lines 137–138 where she deploys various strategies to mitigate her stance (e.g., epistemic hedgers, hesitation, cut-offs, and an example instead of overt assessments). First, she displays less commitment to her epistemic status through the epistemic hedger “yo no sé lo que le pasa” (“I don’t know what happens to him”) (Wheatherall, 2011). In her following utterance, Corin indexes epistemic access and authority to assess Gustavo’s behaviour

through her use of the present perfect construction “él ha estado como tan diferente” (‘he’s been like so different’). The choice of tense not only emphasizes her father’s current category-deviant behaviour but also signals the clash between what she has now witnessed for some time and their prior relational history. Her witnessing and being affected by her father’s negative change warrant her the epistemic and affective right to complain about him. Unlike what was observed in Extract 1, Corin, nonetheless, avoids the use of a strongly marked negative assessment in various ways. For example, she uses a slightly more neutral assessment “diferente” (‘different’) with lexical and prosodic emphasis (i.e., the elongation of “tan” [‘so’]). She deploys the epistemic marker “yo no sé” (‘I don’t know’) again as an avoidance strategy to mitigate the potential face-threatening effect of emotional judgement against Gustavo (González, 2018). Moreover, instead of providing an explicit assessment, Corin hints at it implicitly “como tan así” (‘like so like that’), by exemplifying her father’s complainable behaviour (Schegloff, 2005) in line 139. She escalates the complainable from not supporting her economically to the more sensitive category-bound expectation of reciprocating affection “yo le voy a dar un besito y él me empuja” (‘when I try to give him a kiss^{dim}, he pushes me away’). Such affective expectation can be salient in the Latin American cultural context, and thus escalating the complainable to an emotional transgression of that kind not only further legitimises her turn as complaint-implicative, but also makes grandma’s affiliation the next relevant move. This way, Corin has constructed complaining via updating Grandma’s knowledge about Gustavo, while carefully orienting to the epistemics of their relational categories (i.e., what a daughter/mother knows and has the right to say about her father/son).

Despite Corin’s falling intonation that signals her turn completion, opening a slot for Grandma to co-complain providing her own assessment of the situation, Grandma’s contribution is delayed by nearly a second. Partially echoing Corin’s turn in line 137 “qué es lo que le pasa” (‘what is happening to him’), and in overlap with her epistemic hedge “como que yo no sé” (‘like I don’t know’), Grandma’s turn is articulated softly and faster as if pondering in the light of Gustavo’s unexpected behaviour. This shows Grandma’s orientation to the epistemic rather than the affective domain, projecting disaffiliation. In turn, this triggers Corin’s pre-emptive move claiming the floor in line 141 and blocking a possible redirection of the blame towards herself through the defensive account (Pillet-Shore 2015) “yo no he hecho nada” (‘I haven’t done anything to him’). At this stage, similar to Extract 1, Corin attempts to mobilise her Grandma’s affiliation again using “tú me entiendes?” (‘you know what I mean?’) (Clayman and Raymond 2021). As a final resource in this turn, Corin emphasises her own alignment with the normative behaviour as an incumbent of the category “daughter”, “yo me he portado bien con él” (‘I have behaved

very well towards him”) in line 143, once again stressing her father’s unacceptable behaviour.

Grandma’s candidate understanding in lines 146–149 emerges as disaffiliative. As seen in Extract 1, she challenges Corin’s epistemic access to her father’s personal state “¿tú sabes lo que le pasa a él?” (“you know what happens to him?”) and indexes her K+ (Heritage, 2012a). After a 0.3s silence where Corin does not orient to it as a request for information, she displays her K-, allowing Grandma to continue her turn. Grandma then provides a candidate account on Gustavo’s behalf, first aligning with the change proposed by Corin in lines 137–138 stating that he does not know how to understand himself “ya ahora” (“anymore now”). She also frames her epistemic authority as direct first-hand knowledge warranted initially through visual evidence “Gustavo está muy decaído; está gordo” (“Gustavo is very depressed; he is fat”) and then through what Gustavo, himself, said to her “me dijo ‘Ay Taita, yo sí estoy cansado, yo estoy decaído’” (“he told me ‘Ay Taita I do feel tired, I am depressed’”), stressing the words “gordo”, “decaído” and “cansado” (“fat”, “depressed”, and “tired”). After a 0.3s pause, Grandma continues with potential new information, but, in overlap, Corin accepts Grandma’s account “ajá” (“uh-huh”) from a K+ position, as information already known to her. Following her project, Corin then disregards the account’s validity via the contrastive conjunction “pero” (“but”) thus maintaining her own stance and focusing again on the consequences of his behaviour.

In line 152, Corin once again escalates the complainable (Drew and Walker, 2009) in response to Grandma’s disaffiliative stance, extending the emotional consequences to other family members including her mother, thereby displaying further epistemic access, claiming a K+ position, and warranting the complaint seriousness. Nevertheless, Grandma does not provide her with the expected affiliation. Instead, after 0.8s silence in line 155 and almost in overlap with Corin, she acknowledges her point but pursues her own account stressing “como apagado” (“like spiritless”). Although Corin aligns with Grandma’s assessment in line 156 through the response cry (Goffman, 1978) “ay abuela” (“ay grandma”) and even upgrades it “como nunca” (“like never before”) in line 158, their interactional agendas and epistemic positionings are clearly divergent at this stage, impeding affiliation. By mobilising Corin’s responsibility of understanding her father’s hardship as relevant to the “daughter” category, Grandma not only attempts to restore their “father-daughter” relational category, but also fulfils her own category-bound responsibilities. Consequently, two layers of epistemic work are visible here: one focuses on the relational aspects of knowledge (i.e., what the recipient knows about the complaineé), while the other focuses on legitimising the complainable and the right to complain.

In Extracts 1 and 2, the complaint recipients face a dilemma in which they are expected to affiliate when conflicting elements in their epistemic and relational domains make them reluctant to do so. In both cases, epistemic access creates grounds for relational divergence between the complaint recipients with complainants and complainees. In other words, it seems that epistemic primacy functions as a trigger preventing them from affiliating with complainants, constructing disagreement, and rather orienting to complainees, thus saving their face. In both Spanish and English, recipients use ‘ancillary questions’ (Jefferson, 1984a) “have you ever actually talked to him about it?” and “¿tú sabes lo que le pasa a él?”, to delegitimise complainability at a point where affiliation is relevant (Heritage, 2011).

4.2 *Legitimising Complainability through the Recipient’s K-*

The second interactional pattern in which epistemic access plays a key role is when the unknowing party legitimises complainability and attempts to co-construct the indirect complaint.

Extract 3 is a continuation of the conversation between John and Laura and takes place at the end of their phone call. John brings up a new topic about his new glasses, which were “screwed up” by “country people” (the place where he is staying at the moment), which constitutes the core of this indirect complaint sequence that combines both situation- and third-party-oriented complaints.

(3) [CH:EN:4365; 20:29–21:23]

- 1 JOH: So [(things) were sort of s:prea:d- I mean they were- .hh =
- 2 LAU: [(re::ally;) ((distorted))
- 3 JOH: = [like the l: they were loo:se. they- (0.3) they were unwei:ldy =
- 4 LAU: [(How would that ha:ppe:n;) ((distorted))
- 5 JOH: = on my fa:ce.
- 6 (0.8)
- 7 LAU: That’s really wei:rd.
- 8 JOH: pt And so I was so:rt of; (.) a[nno:yed ab-
- 9 LAU: [So did you go ba:ck?
- 10 (0.2)
- 11 JOH: What’s that?
- 12 LAU: Did you go ba::ck? (0.3) a::nd; (.) tell them (0.3) to f:ix it?
- 13 (0.2)
- 14 JOH: No well- d- the gi::rl; I- dyou: dyou think I wa:nt this; (0.2)
- 15 this; .hhh you know this- (lidd:le) gi::rl this;; pt twenny-two year
- 16 old gi:rl to f:ix em?=n:o: wa::y:. .hh I mess- I- I- I sa:w them a-
- 17 an I was kinda loo:kin at e:m; .hh and she’s like; oo:h no: do:n’t
- 18 be:nd. she’s afraid I’m just gonna b:rea:k them¿ .hh but she: was
- 19 just doin wei:rd stuff; an she had no: idea what she was do[:ing an;
- 20 LAU: [No::; I

- 21 mean ta:lk to someone who's really in cha:rgə and say loo:k you guys
 22 have me:ssed up my gla:sses; a:nd; [what are you gonna do: about it.
 23 JOH: [.hh pt the:y were very, it's
 24 very su:btile; an I ha:d some; certain hypo:theses about what had
 25 actually ha::ppened to the:m
 26 (0.2)
 27 LAU: Uhu:h,
 28 JOH: Mka:y, .hh (0.2) but >i- b- wll they we:ren't to:tally messed.< but
 29 they looked- loo:ked- they were be:nt ou:t a little bit. .hh they
 30 were si:tting >too loo:sely on my fa:ce.< .hh a:nyway well I fi:xed
 31 them oka::y?
 32 (0.3)
 33 LAU: O:h. so it's oka:y no:[w?
 34 JOH: [Yea:h.

In lines 1, 3 and 5, John specifies the trouble, namely, his new glasses were “spread”, “loose” and “unwieldy” on his face, thus constructing a clear complainable matter. Laura, from her K- position, displays a surprise and negative assessment of what has happened (“really?” in line 2, “how would that happen?” in line 4 and “that’s really weird” in line 7). This can also be hearable as a request for elaboration and, therefore, interest in her boyfriend’s unfortunate situation, which can be recognised as appropriate for the “boyfriend-girlfriend” relational category. In line 8, John uses an affective, slightly mitigated, stance (“I was sort of annoyed”), which is an essential component of complaining (Drew and Walker, 2009; Haugh 2016). Orienting to the complainable, in line 9 in overlap and in line 12 after an other-initiated repair by John, Laura requests information regarding the solution of the situation (“did you go back and tell them to fix it?”), thus legitimising the complaint and suggesting that it should be formalised with the shop. In lines 14–19, John provides the dispreferred response (“no”) that is followed by the account starting with “well”. His account of unreliable service orients to Laura’s turn as possible advice-giving that is unnecessary in this context (e.g., Heritage and Sefi, 1992). Thus, the content of her advice and the social action of advice-giving itself are resisted (see Riccioni et al., 2014; Couper-Kuhlen and Thomson, 2022), which is a face-threatening act given Laura’s attempt at solving the unpleasant situation. This resistance – the unreliable service – is constructed through invoking the category of age (“twenny-two year old girl”) and its attribute of being inexperienced (“she had no idea what she was doing”).

Laura, in lines 20–22, however, does not orient to her advice as unnecessary, but pursues it further specifying that she referred to “someone who is really in charge”, which can function as a potential escalation of the complaint (Drew and Walker, 2009; for a construction of escalation through a candidate

complainable, see Extract 4). By providing her advice and its pursuit, Laura displays her relational entitlement, which is not uncommon in familial (conflict) discourse (Boxer and Radice, 2018). While her suggestion aligns with and upgrades the complainability constructed by John, thus displaying face support towards her boyfriend, he does not immediately orient to it. Instead, in lines 23–25, he continues his turn from line 19 and indexes his epistemic primacy not only over the complainable matter but regarding his expertise in relation to glasses (“I had some certain hypotheses about what had actually happened”). The reason for the lack of John’s co-construction of the complaint escalation becomes visible in lines 28–31 where he, through the turn-initial “mkay” and hesitation, downgrades his complaint from “screwed them up” to “they weren’t totally messed up” and indicates that he “fixed” the glasses himself. Through this, John blocks the validity of a further pursuit of any formal complaint action towards the shop, which is accompanied by the turn-final “okay” tag that latches onto accounts and informings (Couper-Kuhlen, 2021) and signals that Laura does not have the right to question the knowledge to which she has no first-hand access. John’s epistemic authority regarding the complainable matter is once more highlighted, with him primarily orienting to his independent epistemic positioning and less to the relational category shared with Laura. The sequence is closed after the shift from her unknowing to more knowledgeable position in relation to the resolution of the source of complaint and, thus, the whole matter, indicated by “oh” in line 33 (Heritage, 1984) (see the use of “ah” in Extract 4) and the response to her confirmation seeking turn in line 34.

The same phenomenon where a recipient legitimises complainability from a K- position can be seen in the Spanish data in Extract 4, taken from a conversation between Joel and his aunt, Raquel. Their close relational status is visible within seconds from the beginning of the call as Joel displays epistemic access to Raquel’s divorce news, a topic that is abandoned as Raquel introduces the news of her being miraculously alive after an accident that nearly killed her earlier that day. To legitimise the seriousness of the accident, Raquel has just reported the mechanic’s professional assessment and now proceeds with her own observations.

(4) [CF:SP:6959 1.39–2.11]

57 RAQ: me dieron por atrás,
I got hit from behind

58 JOE: °alabado.°
oh lord

59 RAQ: pero lo desajustaron todo. Hh
but they broke it all down

- 60 (0.9)
- 61 RAQ: está: bueno no puedo abrir el maletero, no puedo abrir
 62 la puertecita de:: de la: de la gasoli:na,=
it's. Well I can't open the boot, I can't open the fuel door
- 63 JOE: =°que le chocaron el carro°= (reporting to RAQ's niece next to him)
she got her car crashed
- 64 =pero estaba borracho el ti:po o qué?
but was the guy drunk or what?
- 65 RAQ: no no no no no no. No estaba borracho. La culpa fue mí:a.
no, no, he was not drunk. It was my fault.
- 66 (0.4)
- 67 JOE: a:h °fue suya,°
oh it was yours?
- 68 RAQ: sí: porque yo fui a doblar izquie:rda, (0.6) y lo vi venir a
 69 dista:ncia, pensé que me daba tiempo, pero es que no calculé
 70 lo metido que venía él. porque él venía soplado.
*yes because I was going to turn left, and I saw him coming in
 the distance, I thought I had enough time, but I didn't calculate
 how fast he was coming, because he was speeding up.*
- 71 (1.0)
- 72 RAQ: ya me dio: en el farol de atrás:s.
they hit me on the rear light.
- 73 (0.6)
- 74 RAQ: tú entie:ndes,
you know?
- 75 JOE: [sí.
yes
- 76 RAQ: [.hh y me d- hizo- me dio: y me lanzó: y di la vuelta comple:ta,
 77 y me viré pal- (0.6) de nuevo pa- para la carretera.
*and I was knocked over and the car spun out of control,
 and I veered again back into the road*
- 78 JOE: sí?
yes?

In line 57, Raquel begins the situation-oriented complaint syntactically constructing herself as the direct object affected by the car that crashed into hers “me dieron por atrás” (“I got hit from behind”), thereby potentially attributing fault to the other driver and emphasising their poor driving skills. In line 58, Joel provides affiliation through the prosodically softer response cry (Goffman, 1978) “alabado” (“oh Lord”), displaying some level of engagement and encouraging Raquel's continuation of this situation-oriented complaint in line 59 (Rodríguez, 2022a, b). The syntax of her next utterance places emphasis on the complainable matter, that is the damaged car “lo desajustaron todo”

(“they broke it all down”). However, the agent (i.e., they), implicitly marked by the verb conjugation “desajustaron”, potentially makes line 59 hearable as an implied third-party-oriented complaint. As demonstrated by previous research, complainants sometimes hint at a complainable matter instead of directly complaining as a strategy to mobilise the recipient’s co-construction of the delicate action (Schegloff, 2005; Drew and Walker, 2009; see also Extract 3). Nonetheless, co-construction may be problematic when the elements provided in the interaction do not allow enough epistemic access to the unknowing recipient, who may also expect sufficient evidence to make appropriate inferences (but see Rodriguez, 2022a). This is visible in how Raquel orients to the 0.9s silence in line 60, which, despite being a transition relevant place where Joel could have fulfilled the expectation of further affiliation relevant to the “nephew-aunt” category, she treats as a request for additional details.

Raquel first provides first-hand visual evidence of the crash consequences, including not being able to open the boot or the fuel door in lines 61–62. Although Raquel’s potential complaint-implicative action has been mainly constructed as situation-oriented up to this point in interaction, the syntactic hints at the agents who hit her car and the emphasis on the negative consequences for her may further signal a third-party-oriented complaint, which has not been made explicit yet. Therefore, in an attempt to articulate the ‘unsaid’ (Bolden, 2010; see Extracts 1 and 6), in line 64, Joel suggests the candidate complainable in relation to the third-party “pero estaba borracho el tipo? o qué?” (“but was the man drunk or what?”). By formulating this complainable as an interrogative followed by the open-ended question “or what?” Joel displays his epistemic access to what could be socially/morally complainable (i.e., drunk driving) (Schegloff, 2005) and at the same time indexes his K- status regarding his aunt’s situation to whom he attributes the K+ status. At the level of the social action, the candidate complainable is affiliative (see Boxer, 1993) as it escalates the complaint (Drew and Walker, 2009), thereby deflecting the blame away from Raquel and orienting to saving her face. Nonetheless, similar to Extract 3, Raquel rejects the escalation as she admits fault over the accident, thereby framing her intended social action as a situation-oriented complaint in line 65. Raquel’s response is treated by Joel as unexpected with a delayed *ah*-prefaced response (see “oh” in Extract 3) that marks the change-of-state after receiving new information (Montes, 1999; see also Heritage, 1984) and the confirmation with slightly rising intonation “fue suya” (“it was yours?”) in line 67. From here on, Raquel continues her account claiming shared responsibility “no calculé lo metido que venía él” (“I didn’t calculate how fast he was coming”). By shifting the other driver’s accountability from drunk-driving to speeding, she directs Joel’s attention to the seriousness of the accident itself.

Joel, then, orients to Raquel's turns as troubles-telling providing minimal continuers "sí" ("yes") when necessary.

As observed in Extracts 3 and 4, the recipients share no relationship with the people their family members complain about (complainees), so their moral and relational responsibility of providing affiliation is not constrained as in Section 4.1. Consequently, recipients treat escalation on the complainant's behalf not only as relevant (Drew and Walker, 2009) but also as 'safe' given that their co-members are likely to co-construct the complaint escalation (Sacks, 1992). Here, recipients orient to their epistemic access to what is socially complainable (e.g., poor customer service in Extract 3 or drunk driving in Extract 4) to provide affiliation (Schegloff, 2005) before gaining enough epistemic access to the specific situation. In doing this, recipients orient to the social action as a third-party-oriented complaint rather than a situation-oriented complaint as constructed by the complainants. This, however, is contested by the complainants who prioritise their independent epistemic position. Therefore, they either downgrade the initial negative assessment of the situation (Extract 3), or reframe the complainable to direct attention and potential affiliation to other specific elements (i.e., the seriousness of the accident rather than the responsible party [Extract 4]).

4.3 *Partially Disattending Complaints through the Recipient's K-*

As seen in the previous section, the complaint recipient's K- position can lead them to escalate or co-construct the complaints, thus engaging in affiliative practices in their responses to indirect complaints. The analyses in this section will show how, in our Spanish and English dataset, epistemic imbalances can prevent the complaint recipient in a K- position from orienting to the social action in prior turns as complaining, even though the complainant pursues his/her interactional agenda.

Extract 5 is a phone conversation between Dan and Hillary, a brother and a sister, who live in the USA and the UK, respectively. Prior to this extract, Hillary asked Dan about a new president in his workplace. Dan started to tell her that the president seems to be "full of energy" since, even before starting the position, his secretary-to-be has contacted Dan regarding a meeting, which he mentions in detail below:

(5) [CH:EN:4184; 18:30–19:09]

- 1 DAN: = >he'd like to ha-< mee:t with me:; .hh this co:ming
- 2 We:dnnesday;=we (wre) already ha:ve >at least one or two other
- 3 meetings already scheduled anyway, but this ws on< ano:ther
- 4 su:bject,(0.2) .hhh and >she said he'd like to meet with you

- 5 at< seven o'clock; (0.5) and I said (.) >seven o'clock< at
 6 ni:ght; .hhh because I- I actually ha:ve u:m; (0.5) a- a- a
 7 thi:ng to do for freshman orienta:tion at se:ven o'clock at
 8 ni:ght, .hhh
 9 HIL: Mmhh;
 10 DAN: A:nd she sai:d; u:m; (1.0) pt no: seven o'clock in the
 11 mo:(h)rni(h)ng heheheheheh
 12 (0.3)
 13 HIL: O:[::h;
 14 DAN: [heh ↑.hh .hh So he's just f:u::ll (.) of e:nergy.
 15 (0.5)
 16 HIL: I: see. But so are you:.
 17 DAN: .hh Well ri:ght; but what I mea:n is that; you #know ya:::h;#
 18 he- he's also the sort of pe::rson; who .hh prob:ably would not
 19 take no:::; for an <a:nswe::r> hh heheheh
 20 HIL: M[h:m;
 21 DAN: [heheheheheheheh .hhh=like >you know< you cou:(h)ldn't say I'm
 22 so:rry but fseven o'clo(h)ck is a little inco(h)nve:(hh)niant
 23 fo(h)r me=hehe[heh,
 24 HIL: [Yea::h;
 25 DAN: heheheh #.hhh [.hh# .hhh
 26 HIL: [pt
 27 .hhh hhhh Poor Da:n's gotta get up so ea:rl[y:.
 28 DAN: [Oh >well no I< do
 29 that a:nyway; >I mean this is< [not an um uh a cho:re for me::;
 30 HIL: [A:h;

In lines 1–8, Dan is re-telling his conversation with the president's secretary-to-be, something to which only Dan has epistemic access. Given that the president has not officially started his position yet, Dan's turn might be hearable as troubles-telling, as he constructs the whole situation as problematic and possibly excessive. In this regard, in lines 2–3, Dan specifies that the meeting in question is not the only one that has already been scheduled, and then, in line 5, he moves to the focal point of his turn, i.e., the meeting being scheduled “at seven o'clock”. Assuming that “seven o'clock” referred to “at night”, Dan provides a pre-emptive account for needing to decline the meeting invitation. This is done through hesitations and silences, features that mark the initiation of the dispreferred action, that mitigate an otherwise rather oppositional stance signalled by the placement of “actually” close to a turn-initial position (Clift, 2001). After Hillary's minimal response with an acknowledgment token in line 9, in lines 10–11, Dan constructs his turn as a punchline with a 1s silence between the quotative “she said” and what was said, namely, that the scheduling was for “seven o'clock in the morning”. How Dan presents this new information – through laughter particles in “morning” and turn-final

laughter – constructs the complainable matter as rather incredible and, thus, laughable (Holt, 2010).

While Dan has indexed the complainable matter – meetings scheduled prior to the official commencement and the additional meeting request at seven o'clock in the morning, Hillary, who lacks any first-hand knowledge on the situation, does not treat it as a complainable and she does not provide any affiliative response. Instead, in line 13, she orients to the prior epistemic asymmetry between the two, now indicating the shift from her K- to K+ position (Heritage, 1984). Here, Hillary produces the stand-alone “oh” (as opposed to a turn-initial *oh* followed by additional turn components) through elongation and a slight falling intonation at the end, which indexes a receipt of the new information (Local, 1996), but not an expression of affective stance or assessment in relation to the complainable matter (cf. “really?” in Extract 3). Partly in overlap, Dan produces further laughter particles and concludes through the return (via “so”, Bolden [2009]) to the incipient – complainable – matter mentioned in the beginning of this sequence (data not shown) that the president is “full of energy”. Using “just”, Dan continues to slightly mitigate the complainable, here third-party-oriented complaint, but simultaneously stresses “full” and “energy” through elongation, thus, once again, directing the attention to what the complainable matter is (Ogden, 2010). This can be seen as a pursuit of affiliation as a preferred response to complaining as well as appropriate for the members in the “brother-sister” relational category (Mandelbaum, 1991).

Hillary, however, similar to her response in line 13, orients to it as informing (for the same action ascription pattern, see Extract 6), indexing the acknowledgement of the receipt of the new information through the epistemic response token “I see”. In its third position and with a falling intonation, it can function as sequence-closing third (Heritage, 2012b), however, Hillary decides to continue and her non-orientation to complainability can be further observed. In her turn, she positively assesses her brother with the president’s quality of being full of energy (through “but so are you”), thus supporting Dan’s face in his professional context. Here Hillary clearly indicates her epistemic access as pertinent to the “brother-sister” relational category, displaying her epistemic independence (see Heritage and Raymond, 2005) (see “claro” [“of course”] in Extract 6). Crucially, Dan’s turn in lines 17–19 displays the difference between action formation and its ascription (Levinson, 2013; Depperman and Haugh, 2022). While he agrees with Hillary’s assessment of himself (“right”), therefore, aligning with her epistemic positioning as his sister having the right to assess her brother and confirming her K+ in this domain, he prefaces this alignment with “well” and follows with “but what I mean is”. Using “I mean”, Dan relaunches his interactional project – the third-party-oriented

complaint – and explicates how the prior action in the sequence should be understood, thus defending the content of the complaint (see Maynard, 2013). In doing so, Dan brings up an attribute of the category of people who are “full of energy” (and, arguably, holding high positions), namely not “tak[ing] no for an answer” and, thus, him not being able to indicate that “seven o’clock is a little inconvenient for [him]”. While having made it clear that the situation with the president is a complainable matter, at the end of his turn, Dan, once again, produces laughter particles in order to mitigate the complainability of complaining (Maynard, 2013) and not to be placed in the vulnerable category of ‘being a moaner’ (Edwards, 2005) (but see Extract 6 for a different pattern in relation to the “moaner” category).

Dan’s turn does not elicit reciprocal laughter particles, which, particularly at this stage, can project a disaffiliative stance and be perceived as face-threatening (e.g., Haugh and Weinglass, 2018). Instead, in line 24, Hillary produces a rather flat “yeah” in overlap and then, in line 27, with the same flat prosody and falling intonation at the end, constructs her subsequent turn. While “poor Dan’s gotta get up so early”³ presents a case of selective affiliative (Rodriguez, 2022a) – affiliating as appropriate to the relational category rather than the social action – and face-saving since it displays sympathy with her brother’s situation (see “pobre mija” [“poor darling”] in Extract 6), this quite remarkably clashes with how Dan was trying to position himself in the prior turns. As a result, such interpretation is immediately resisted by him in lines 28–29 with the turn-initial “oh”, which signals his sudden realisation of what Hillary means (Heritage, 1984) and a move to the *well*-prefaced correction of her prior claim. Even though coming in overlap, Dan’s turn design, including “I mean” and hesitation, shows his orientation to mitigating the threat to Hillary’s face that a direct disagreement would cause (see Lerner, 1996). This once again signals that his interactional project is related to the third-party-oriented complaint and not about him finding it difficult to “get up” early, as he “do[es] that anyway” and does not treat it as a “chore”. Dan’s turn also clearly indexes the epistemic imbalances between what Hillary knows about his daily routine and his own epistemic primacy. Even though Dan’s extended complaint and pursuits of affiliation have been disattended by his sister, some minimal epistemic equilibrium has been achieved (through Hillary’s “ah” in line 30), which closes the sequence (Heritage, 2012b).

3 In a different interactional context and with different prosodic elements, this utterance could be hearable as sarcasm. Here, the way it is constructed, it does not seem to be the case and, crucially, neither Dan or Hillary orient to it as such.

Extract 6 also illustrates how complaints are partially disattended in an interaction between Cheli and her mother, Teresa. The fragment takes place halfway through the call, and prior to this Cheli has excitedly mentioned (with a smile voice) that she is always looking after children, which her mother has treated as news, displaying her epistemic inferiority. Now a sudden change of affectivity becomes salient.

(6) [CH:ES:0910 8.34–9.17]

- 195 CHE: estoy tsu:per atareada pero también eso me da unos pe:sos, mamá
 196 y- y- los necesita:mos ↓pues.
*I am super busy but it also gives me some money, mum, and
 and we need it so*
- 197 (0.7)
- 198 CHE: así que no[: así que no:-
so I can't, so I can't
- 199 MUM: [°pu°es cla:ro. Cla:ro. lo comprendo.
of course, I understand
- 200 CHE: así que- a- en eso me lo pa:so, cuidando los niños y (0.5)
 201 y bue:no, y como paso tan so:la todo el tie:mpo,
 202 porque mira (.)h Orlando no está tnu:nca, y Myriam, me:nos.
*so I spend time looking after the children and well since
 I'm so lonely most of the time because look, Orlando is never
 around and even less so is Myriam.*
- 203 (0.4)
- 204 CHE: a Myriam no la ve[o nu:nca, pues.=
Myriam, I never see her, ((discourse marker))
- 205 MUM: [°cla::ro°
 206 =no, así que flos niños te sirven de compañía y de-
 207 [y entretenció:n.
right. No, so the children keep you company and entertain you.
- 208 CHE: [así que,
 209 cuando- cuando se van los ni:ños, o los días que no vie:nen
 210 y qué sé yo, (0.6) me lo paso tre- tre- treme:ndamente sola.
 211 mmm?
*so when the kids are gone, or on days when they do not come,
 and what do I know, I feel absolutely lonely. Huh?*
- 212 (1.0)
- 213 MUM: [cla:ro (.) °pobre mija.°
right, poor Darling
- 214 CHE: [así que es terri:ble eso, estar so:lo, pue:s.
so this is terrible, being lonely ((discourse marker)).
- 215 MUM: °hha°
 216 (1.2)
- 217 CHE: así que ahí me entretengo cosie:ndo, qué sé yo.
so I entertain myself sewing, I don't know.

The extract starts with Cheli's situation-oriented complaint "estoy super atareada" ("I am super busy"). Despite her negative affective stance with respect to the hectic times, she formulates the account that being busy provides her with a much-needed source of income, thereby mitigating the complaint in lines 195–196. The following 0.7s silence indexes Cheli's unfulfilled expectation of affiliation, which she starts downgrading with "así que no" ("so I can't") in line 198 and abandons due to overlap with Teresa's turn. In line 199, Teresa appears to orient to the factual information rather than the prosodically marked negative affective stance conveyed in Cheli's prior turn. Through the truth-attesting device "claro" ("of course"), Teresa displays shared common ground and collective salience of the situation Cheli describes (i.e., working to earn money) as part of her inferential reasoning, thereby treating Cheli's point as obvious (González, 2014). Hence, she not only positions herself at a similar epistemic level, but also responds to Cheli's mitigation disregarding complainability. While the discourse marker on its own could be treated as affiliative, Teresa's continuation of the utterance "lo comprendo" ("I understand it") illustrates her orientation to the situation through the clitic "lo" ("it"), rather than to Cheli's affective stance (e.g., "te entiendo" ["I get you"]). Similar to Extract 5, the response does not appear to be treated as sufficient to fulfil the expectation of affiliation as relevant not only to the social action of complaining but also to the "mother-daughter" relational category.

Consequently, Cheli launches a further pursuit in line 201 with a slightly different but related complaint about feeling lonely most of the time "y bueno como paso tan sola todo el tiempo" ("and well since I'm so lonely all the time"). The prosodic emphasis on "tan sola" ("so lonely") and "todo el tiempo" ("all the time") as an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) in this utterance clearly marks her negative affective stance, which she then accounts for arguing that Orlando (her husband) and Myriam (her daughter) are never around (line 202). The syntax of Cheli's turn in line 201, which starts with "y como" ("and since"), suggests that a course of action was suspended to prioritise her account for feeling lonely, thereby leading to what can be hearable as an implied third-party-oriented complaint targeting Myriam and Orlando. Since they are incumbents in the relational categories "daughter-mother" and "husband-wife", her feeling lonely despite living in the same house can be seen as complainable. In line 204, Cheli constructs the breach of the relational responsibility as appropriate for the "daughter-mother" category by emphasising Myriam and "nunca" ("never") in "a Myriam no la veo nunca, pues" ("Myriam I never see her"). She also upgrades her negative stance through the discourse marker "pues" that in a turn-final position intensifies it (for other uses of "pues" see Vázquez Carranza, 2013), thereby hinting at

the complainable matter. This, however, is missed by Teresa in lines 205–207, where she orients to the resumption of the abandoned course of action articulating the ‘unsaid’ (Bolden, 2010) through a *claro*-prefaced turn. Here, “claro” (unlike in line 199) works very similar to “right” in that it shows epistemic dependency and a change-in-understanding of how independent elements previously introduced by Cheli can be linked to advance the understanding of the broader activity (Gardner, 2007), in this case complaining about a situation that involves people. As Teresa resumes the course of action that Cheli suspended in her prior turn, she displays her inferred understanding of what was unsaid “así que los niños te sirven de compañía y de entretenición” (“so the kids keep you company and entertain you”), thereby claiming a K+ stance. Teresa’s turn in lines 206–207 is constructed with a smile voice, which projects an opposite affective stance to the one Cheli has been constructing (see Holt, 2012). This way, as in Extract 5, Teresa ascribes the action of informing to Cheli’s turn but, unlike in Extract 5, where the complainant distances himself from the “moaner” category, here it is the complaint recipient who avoids placing her “daughter” in this category (Edwards, 2005), thereby saving her face.

As observed in Extract 5, the action Teresa ascribes also presents a case of selective affiliation (Rodríguez, 2022a), providing a positive assessment that aligns with Cheli’s affective stance in relation to the children prior to her complaint (data not shown) but not to the ongoing social action. By doing this, Teresa displays her orientation to being supportive as relevant to the relational category “mother-daughter” and not to the pursuit of affiliation, thus partially disattending the complaint. This epistemic and affective incongruity is elucidated in lines 209–210, where Cheli uses the prosodically marked extreme case formulation “estoy tremendamente sola” (“I feel absolutely lonely”) to emphasise how she feels not only when the children are not around, but also in other situations implied by the expression “y qué sé yo” (“and what do I know”). Although the source of Cheli’s negative affective stance has been made explicit, what exactly is complainable in relation to the third-party remains implicit (i.e., her family not making time for her) given the lack of explicit blame attribution. Teresa’s affiliation “pobre hija” (“poor darling”) is delayed by a 1s silence, which may indicate that Cheli’s response was unexpected to her and has restructured her epistemic position. Teresa is seen orienting to the expectations associated with the relational category “mother-daughter” that binds them together (Jayyusi, 1984). The delay triggers a new pursuit from Cheli indexed by “así que” (“so”, see Bolden, 2009). In overlap, she constructs a more explicit complaint where the negative affective stance “es terrible eso” (“this is terrible”), referring to the situation “being lonely”, is prosodically marked through elongation in

line 214. This complaint proposes sequence closure. While 'X-complaints' tend to be relatively quiet (Ogden, 2010), in this case, it remains prosodically louder as it might indicate that the expected level of affiliation has not been met. This is further evidenced by the topic shift in line 217 where Cheli herself abandons the complaint after receiving only a minimal and quieter affiliative sigh from her mother in line 215.

In these two extracts, the complainants' multiple pursuits of affiliation are partially disattended (Mandelbaum, 1991) by the unknowing recipients who orient to the contextual details of the complaint as informings. In both cases, the lack of epistemic access to the context where the complainable emerges causes recipients to ascribe a different social action that is then resisted by the complainant. These two examples illustrate cases of selective affiliation (Rodriguez, 2022a), where, while the responses (i.e., positive assessments) show a K+ stance that is partially affiliative with respect to the ascribed action and relational epistemics, they do not necessarily display reciprocity (but see the end of Extract 6) of the salient negative affective stance the complainants have constructed, coming across as disaffiliative.

6 Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have illustrated the crucial role that the (relational) management of knowledge plays in how indirect complaints are co-constructed in Spanish and English family interactions where expectations of affiliation are particularly salient. Drawing on interactional pragmatics and membership categorisation analysis, we have explored how (dis)affiliative responses to indirect (i.e., third-party-oriented and situation-oriented) complaints are contingent on (relational) epistemic imbalances. More precisely, we have focused on three types of responses: (1) disaffiliation with complaints, (2) legitimising complainability and (3) partially disattending complaints. The analysis shows that affiliation may fail when the recipient (1) has independent epistemic access to the complaine, displaying a K+ position (Section 4.1), (2) lacks epistemic access to the specific complainable but uses general knowledge to escalate the complaint (Section 4.2), and (3) partially disattends the complaint through wrong action ascription, thereby indexing limited epistemic access to the complainable (Section 4.3). Overall, in each of these cases the responsibility of providing affiliation is constrained by the epistemics of social relations. Tables 1–3 summarise how, similarly and/or differently, indirect complaints are constructed and responded to in our Spanish and English extracts.

TABLE 1 Disaffiliating with complaint through recipient's K+: Features in Spanish and English data

Disaffiliating with complaint through recipient's K+		
	English	Spanish
Complainant		
Turn design	Category-deviance linked to <i>moral</i> ^a expectations Seeking/pursuing affiliation through 'you know'	Category-deviance linked to <i>relational</i> expectations Seeking/pursuing affiliation through 'tú me entiendes'
Epistemic access	K+ in relation to complainable As a response to complaint recipient's disaffiliation, K- to K+ in relation to the <i>complainee</i> through 'oh'	K+ in relation to complainable As a response to complaint recipient's disaffiliation, K+ remains but <i>personal accountability</i> is treated as irrelevant through '¡já pero'
Relational aspect	Orienting to "boyfriend-girlfriend" category, <i>not</i> "friend" category	Orienting to "grandma-granddaughter" category <i>and also</i> "father-daughter" category
Complaint recipient		
Turn design	Disaffiliation through silences, challenge 'oh come on', account and the polar question ' <i>have you ever actually talked to him about it?</i> '	Disaffiliation through silences, challenge, account on his behalf ' <i>porque tú sabes lo que le pasa a él?</i> '
Epistemic access	K + in relation to the complainee	K+ in relation to the complainee
Relational aspect	Orienting to "friend" category (defending the complainee) and not "boyfriend-girlfriend" category (no affiliation)	Orienting to "mother" category (defending the complainee) and not "grandma-granddaughter" category (no affiliation)

a Italics in tables indicate cross-linguistic variability.

In cases where the recipient has independent access to the complainees (see Table 1), they orient to relational epistemics in devaluing complainability as they defend the complainees, thereby saving their face. This results in extended multi-turn constructions of disaffiliation, including providing accounts for their complainable behaviour grounded in their first-hand access to complainees (Extracts 1 and 2). The recipients' relational K+ position is indexed at a point where affiliation is relevant through questions that challenge the complainants' epistemic status, thereby delegitimising complainability or redirecting accountability from what is relational to what is personal (see Extract 2). While absent in English (see Extract 1), in Spanish this challenge is constructed through both direct visual evidence “*está gordo*” and indirect hearsay “*me dijo*”.

TABLE 2 Legitimising complainability through recipient's K-: Features in Spanish and English data

Legitimising complainability through recipient's K-		
	English	Spanish
Complainant		
Turn design	Negative assessment through <i>lexical</i> items and mitigated affective stance as situational + <i>explicit</i> third-party complaint Escalation resistance through ‘no, well’ and <i>complaint downgrade</i> ‘they weren’t totally messed up’	Negative assessment, <i>syntactic</i> emphasis on complainable as situational + <i>implicit</i> hint at complainable as third-party Escalation resistance through emphatic ‘no’ and <i>fault admission</i> ‘la culpa fue mía’
Epistemic access	K+ in relation to the complainable matter	K+ in relation to the complainable matter
Relational aspect	No orientation to “boyfriend-girlfriend” category	No orientation to “aunt-nephew” category
Complaint recipient		
Turn design	Affiliation through ‘ <i>really?</i> ’, <i>negative assessment</i> , <i>advice giving</i> Escalation from situation- to third-party-oriented complaint	Affiliation through ‘ <i>alabado</i> ’+ candidate third-party-related complainability Escalation from situation to third-party social/ <i>moral breach</i>

TABLE 2 Legitimising complainability through recipient's K- (*cont.*)

Legitimising complainability through recipient's K-		
	English	Spanish
Epistemic access	K- in relation to complainable	K- in relation to complainable
	K+ in relation to complainability	K+ in relation to complainability
	K- to K+ in relation to complainable through 'oh'	K- to K+ in relation to complainable through 'ah'
Relational aspect	Affiliation as relevant to "boy-friend-girlfriend" category	Affiliation as relevant to "aunt-nephew" category

A different pattern emerges when complaint recipients lack epistemic access to the complainable matter, but still have K+ in relation to the general idea of complainability (see Table 2). In those cases, the complaint recipients' K- position can be indexed through their displays of surprise ("really?"), affiliative assessments ("alabado") or requests for elaboration. It has been observed that, in situation-oriented complaints treated as third-party-oriented complaints, the unknowing recipient can legitimise the complaint through providing advice in relation to the complainable matter (as in English in Extract 3) or suggesting a candidate complainable (as in Spanish in Extract 4), thus escalating the validity of complainability and providing face support to the complainant. In both cases, however, the complaints are downgraded by the complainants who thereby claim their independent epistemic primacy in the complainable matter, which is signalled by the recipients' delayed turns initiated with a change-of-state token (*oh* in English or *ah* in Spanish).

Finally, the recipients' K- position can also explain why complaints are partially disattended, i.e., when selective affiliation is provided (see Table 3). While the recipients show affiliation as relevant to their category with the complainant and construct K+ orienting to relational epistemics, they treat complaints as informings, thereby displaying epistemic inferiority in relation to the ongoing action. This is visible in their acknowledgement of the new information through "oh" or "I see" (Extract 5) or claims to own epistemic independence through "claro" (Extract 6). In such cases, the complainants tend to resist the action ascription, defending the complainable and returning to their interactional projects. As a result, without having received affiliative responses from their family members as relevant to complainability, the complainants in both languages engage in pursuit of affiliation through additional details regarding the complainable matter (e.g., through "I mean" in English

TABLE 3 Partially disattending complaints through recipient’s K-: Features in Spanish and English data

Partially disattending complaints through recipient’s K-		
	English	Spanish
Complainant		
Turn design	Starts as <i>troubles-telling</i> mitigated through <i>laughter particles</i> Affiliation pursuit through <i>lexical and prosodic</i> features	Starts as a <i>situation-oriented</i> complaint mitigated through an <i>account</i> Affiliation pursuit through <i>third-party-oriented complaint</i>
Epistemic access	K+ in relation to complainable	K+ in relation to complainable
Relational aspect	Pursuit of affiliation in relation to “brother-sister” category	Pursuit of affiliation in relation to “mother-daughter” category
Complaint recipient		
Turn design	Orients to it as informing <i>No reciprocal laughter</i> Disaffiliation	Orients to it as informing <i>Smile voice</i> displaying opposite affective stance Disaffiliation
Epistemic access	K- in relation to complainable <i>K+ in relation to complainant</i> K- to K+ through ‘ <i>oh</i> ’, ‘ <i>I see</i> ’ and ‘ <i>ah</i> ’	K- in relation to complainable <i>K+ in relation to complainability</i> K- to K+ through ‘ <i>claro</i> ’
Relational aspect	Selective affiliation in relation to “brother-sister” category (through positive assessment), not complaint	Selective affiliation in relation to “mother-daughter” category (through understanding), not complaint

or “así que” in Spanish), which leads to the extended complaint sequences that mostly lack affiliation.

By exploring how asymmetries of knowledge manifest in complaints in ordinary Spanish and English conversations, this paper contributes to the more nuanced understanding of how troubles and the epistemics of social relationships are managed in interaction.

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