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**“*Maleducados/Ill-mannered*” during the #A28 political campaign on Twitter:**

**A metapragmatic study of impoliteness labels and comments in Spanish**

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**Abstract**

This paper approaches the study of conflict through an examination of Spanish metapragmatic labels and comments of impoliteness on Twitter. The aim is twofold. It first aims to confirm the attributed importance of the label *maleducado*/ill-mannered in the specific context of Twitter and the general context of digital discourse, on quantitative and comparative grounds; then, it investigates this label, and the metapragmatic comments where it occurred, in a contextualized corpus of tweets compiled during the political campaign of Spain’s General Elections of April 28, 2019. The study draws from five *ad hoc* corpora specifically compiled from Twitter, and a general corpus of Spanish digital discourse provided by Sketch Engine. The analysis adopts a corpus-based metapramatic approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Findings revealed that *maleducado* was the most frequent metapragmatic label under scrutiny in the Twitter corpora and justified the subsequent study of lay conceptualizations of this term.

**Key words:** Conflict, Metapragmatics, Impoliteness, Spanish, Twitter

**A corpus-based metapragmatic study of impoliteness in Spanish digital discourse:  
“*Maleducados/Ill-mannered*” during the #A28 political campaign on Twitter**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper approaches the study of conflict through an examination of Spanish metapragmatic labels and comments of impoliteness on Twitter. The study is premised on the belief that gaining insight into the use of impoliteness metalanguage is essential for a better understanding of lay conceptualizations of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2009, p. 67) and, more broadly, of the construction of conflict in interaction (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014). The study adopts a corpus-based approach to metapragmatics (Culpeper, 2011; Haugh, 2018). Although corpus-based metapragmatics is a flourishing area of research, it has received scant attention within Spanish impoliteness scholarship. In Spanish pragmatics, the second-order (Eelen, 2001) term of choice for impoliteness is *descortesía*, although other terms like *grosería*/rudeness or *mala educación* /ill manners have emerged in the few first-order studies carried out to date (Bernal, 2007, 2008; Blas Arroyo, 2013, 2014; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Bou-Franch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2010; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013), thus suggesting the need to look into the use of other terms.

The present paper addresses this need through an examination of the use and functionality of the metapragmatic label *maleducado*/ill-mannered (adjective). The objective of this study is twofold. It first aims to confirm the attributed importance of

the label *maleducado* in the specific context of Twitter and the general context of digital discourse, on quantitative and comparative grounds, and then it investigates this label and the metapragmatic comments where it occurred in a contextualized corpus of tweets. The study draws from five *ad hoc* corpora specifically compiled from Twitter, and a general corpus of Spanish digital discourse provided by Sketch Engine. The analysis combines quantitative analysis with qualitative inquiry, that is, it adopts a ‘corpus-based metapramatic’ approach (Haugh, 2018, p. 624).

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on conflict, impoliteness and metapragmatics with special attention to Spanish pragmatics. Section 3 contains methodological explanations of the design of the study, i.e., the corpora used in each case, the analytical frameworks and the procedure. Next comes a quantitative and comparative analysis of impoliteness metapragmatic labels on Twitter and in the general corpus of digital data (section 4). Section 5 qualitatively analyses the uses and functionality of the metapragmatic label *maleducado* and the comments in which it occurs, in order to draw a picture of lay understandings of this metalanguage. The paper comes to an end with concluding remarks addressing the two research inquiries (section 6).

## **2. Background**

This paper addresses the study of conflict through an examination of impoliteness-related metapragmatic labels and comments in Spanish digital discourse. Conflict is here broadly understood as an interpreting and as “emergent and co-constructed in interaction, and closely tied to the norms of a given social practice” (Bou-Franch &

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 2). The study of conflict thus conceived will be approached using insights from impoliteness research, even though conflictual interactions are not necessarily impolite, and the term conflict is broader in scope than the more limiting term impoliteness (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2018). The definition of conflict above is consonant with Eelen's (2001) view of (im)politeness as hearer's interpretations of behaviour rather than as the result of the speaker's production of it. The emphasis, therefore, lies on hearer evaluations of (im)politeness since, in Eelen's words, evaluation is "the basic, primordial mode of being of (im)politeness (p. 109). Following this claim, first-order approaches to (im)politeness, centred on participants' ordinary talk about (im)politeness and what counts as (in)appropriate (Watts et al., 1992), gained centre stage (Locher & Watts, 2005; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003) and many voices have emphasised the need to incorporate lay conceptualizations of (im)politeness into theoretical models (Culpeper, 2009; Culpeper, O'Driscoll, & Hardaker, 2019; Haugh, 2013, 2019; Sifianou 2015; Sifianou & Bella, 2019). Incidentally, the focus on (im)politeness as a form of evaluation (Eelen, 2001, p. 109) is in contrast with the view that this notion "has itself remained remarkably under-theorised" (Haugh, 2013, p. 53). Evaluation is a highly complex concept which is understood in this work as conveying a "speaker's viewpoint, attitude, or stance toward or feelings about what somebody else has said or done" (Sifianou & Tzanne, 2010, p. 664, see also Zappavigna, 2017a).

The study of evaluations of this sort fall within the area of metapragmatics, which examines "reflexive awareness on the part of participants in interactions, and observers of interactions, about the language that is being used in those interactions" (Haugh, 2018: 619. See also Kádár & Haugh, 2013,). Culpeper (2009) pioneered the investigation of evaluations and conceptualizations of impoliteness "by examining terms referring to it" (2011, p. 71) and using lexicographical means, i.e. corpus-based

methods. In so doing, he distinguished metapragmatic comments – which reveal an opinion, an evaluation that certain behaviour counts broadly as impolite or conflictual – from metapragmatic labels, which refer to the linguistic resources available to a speech community to express such evaluations. Culpeper sees evaluations as connected to social norms or “oughts” – rather than to experiential norms or habits. Social norms are, in turn, related to standards of morality or “the moral order of societies” (p. 104). Indeed, Kádár & Haugh (2013, p. 183) place an emphasis on investigating the moral order “through which evaluations of politeness are constituted, as an object of study in its own right”. Studies of metapragmatic labels and comments have underlined their role in lay performances of social actions that shape the interaction in a particular way (Culpeper, 2011) and, therefore, contribute to enact identities and ideologies (Verschueren, 2000) and articulate specific views of the social world (Culpeper, O’Driscoll, & Hardaker, 2019; Haugh, 2018).

Metapragmatics has turned into “an increasingly prominent line of research (Ogierman & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2019, p. 5), especially, I would add, within corpus pragmatics, which provides a specific methodology to carry out sophisticated analyses of language in context (Culpeper & Hardacker, 2016). In addition to Culpeper’s (2009, 2011) corpus-based metapragmatic studies, other contributions in this area have taken diachronic, variational and contrastive approaches<sup>1</sup>. As noted by Haugh (2018, p. 625), however, corpus-based metapragmatic studies have largely explored English (but see, e.g., Sifianou, 2015 and Sifianou & Bella, 2019). This paper addresses this gap by carrying out a corpus-based metapragmatic study of impoliteness and conflict in Spanish.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Culpeper, O’Driscoll and Hardaker (2019), Haugh (2019), Jucker, Taavitsainen, and Schneider (2012), Nevalainen and Tissari (2010), Taylor (2015), and Waters (2012).

Within Spanish pragmatics, first-order studies have employed a range of methodologies. A few have looked at (im)politeness drawing from participant observation methods and interviews alongside interactional data (Mugford, 2018; Placencia, 2001; 2008), while a larger set of studies have employed questionnaires to investigate, mainly, understandings of politeness. A line of questionnaire-based research looked at differences between produced and interpreted politeness (Briz, 2004). This was initiated by Hernández Flores (2002), who viewed questionnaires as “another resource to obtain information on sociocultural contexts” that would assist academic interpretations of interactional data (Bernal, 2007, p. 9, *my translation*). This approach, which brings closer lay and analyst interpretations of data (Eelen, 2001), was adopted in studies on politeness in different varieties of Spanish (e.g. Boretti, 2003; Bolívar, 2008; Contreras, 2004; Murillo, 2006).

First-order studies of Spanish impoliteness are of special interest. These have drawn from various methodologies. Mugford (2014), for instance, combined questionnaires and interviews to explore practices of positive impoliteness as identified by lay speakers of Mexican Spanish. Bernal (2007, 2008) carried out an analysis of impoliteness in ordinary conversations in Peninsular Spanish and used questionnaires to obtain information on general conceptualisations of impoliteness and on specific contextualised perceptions relative to samples from her data. In mediated settings, Lorenzo-Dus, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Bou-Franch (2011) carried out a study of impoliteness production and reception in a bilingual corpus of YouTube comments, and developed a multimodal questionnaire to tap into impoliteness assessments. A similar methodology was employed by Blas Arroyo (2013, 2014), who focused on the production and interpretation of impoliteness in reality television programmes in Spain. For her part, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2013) adopted a first-order classificatory

approach to the examination of impoliteness in a corpus of YouTube comments triggered in response to a conflictual video-clip from reality television.

The present first-order investigation of Spanish impoliteness draws from the studies mentioned above, and especially from Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al.'s (2010) pioneering study of metapragmatic labels and lay assessments of contextualised conflictual sequences from a reality television show. To my knowledge, this is the only study that specifically examined metapragmatic labels of Spanish impoliteness and looked at their frequency of occurrence using corpus linguistics tools. After shortlisting non-polysemous synonyms of the Spanish term for impoliteness, the study found that, of these, the three most frequent metapragmatic labels used in the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual/Corpus of Reference of Contemporary Spanish (CREA)* were *descortés/impolite*, *grosero/rude*, and *impertinente/impertinent*. Metapragmatic assessments using these labels were then scrutinized in data obtained from multi-modal questionnaires and focus groups. Incidentally, *maleducado/ill-mannered* was among the five most frequent terms and, although it did not receive further attention in this study, this metapragmatic label has often come up in other first-order studies of impoliteness (Bernal, 2007; 2008; Blas-Arroyo 2013; 2014) and, in one particular study, lay uses of ill-mannered to classify conflictual behaviour were found to be pervasive (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013, p. 183).

Additionally, *maleducado* has also been employed as a second-order notion. Although the term of choice in Spanish is *descortesía* – derived from its antonym *cortesía/politeness* -, other notions have also been proposed. For instance, Fuentes Rodríguez (2009) chose three different terms to refer to increasing degrees of intensity of face-threatening behaviours, namely, *descortesía/impoliteness*, *agresividad/aggression* and *violencia verbal/verbal violence*. And, for her part,

Hernández Flores (2008) preferred to use the term *maleducado* for impoliteness and *grosería*/rudeness for *descortesía extrema*/extreme impoliteness (p. 661).

In view of the above, I contend that more first-order analyses are needed within Spanish pragmatics that will look at the metalanguage of conflict and impoliteness. The present study addresses this need by examining the use and functionality of the metapragmatics of *maleducado* on Twitter. Two research questions guided the present study:

RQ1. Is the lemma *maleducado* quantitatively important in the digital context, and specifically on Twitter, as compared to other previously researched metapragmatic labels of impoliteness in Spanish?

RQ2. What are the uses and functions of *maleducado* in a locally situated Twitter corpus?

This research question was further subdivided into three:

RQ2.1. What social actions are performed when using *maleducado*?

RQ2.2. What are the linguistic patterns of use of this label?

RQ2.3. What are the grounds for evaluating behaviour as *maleducado*?

### **3. Methodology**

In order to carry out the metapragmatic analysis of *maleducado*, two studies were designed that drew from five *ad hoc* corpora specifically compiled by the author from Twitter, and a general corpus of Spanish digital discourse provided by Sketch Engine. The first study aimed to answer RQ1 and centred on confirming the attributed importance of such a label on comparative and quantitative grounds. To this end,



occurrences of tweets with the lemmatised form *maleducado* were compared with occurrences of tweets with the synonymous lemmas *descortés/impolite*, *grosero/rude*, and *impertinente/impertinent* (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2010). To investigate the frequency of use of the four selected metapragmatic labels on Twitter, the *ad hoc* corpus LABELS (n = 63,886 tweets, 1.650,968 words) was compiled. The LABELS corpus contains four subcorpora derived from four different searches, one for each of the terms previously chosen, which were compiled independently during the same period of time, fourteen weeks, from December 7, 2018 to March 15, 2019. The four lemmatised forms allowed for the search of tweets containing the terms with masculine, feminine, singular, and plural suffixes. To compile Twitter data, Google Sheet's add-on *Twitter Archiver* (Agarwal, n.d) was used. Twitter Archiver allows for the compilation of geolocalized tweets, so the searches were restricted to the geographical area of Spain. This produced four Twitter subcorpora of impoliteness labels posted from Spain. Additionally, the frequency of occurrence of these lemmas was also examined in two data sets: the general esTenTen corpus and the locally situated #A28 corpus. The general corpus of Spanish digital discourse known as the Spanish Web 2018 or esTenTen18<sup>2</sup> corpus (n = 17,553,075,259 words) is provided by Sketch Engine. The esTenTen corpus, like other corpora in the TenTen family, was compiled from texts collected from the internet. In this case, it includes texts from the European Spanish Web, American Spanish Web and the whole Spanish Wikipedia. Previous research in the metapragmatics of (im)politeness has deployed Sketch Engine and TenTen corpora in order to examine (im)politeness-related labels using the different tools it provides (Culpeper, 2009, 2011; Culpeper, O'Driscoll & Hardaker, 2019; Haugh, 2019). While the TenTen corpora allow for a general examination of lay uses of metapragmatic

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.Sketch Engine.eu/estenten-spanish-corpus/>

labels, they provide, nonetheless, largely decontextualized contexts which make it necessary to also “consider more locally situated understandings” (Haugh, 2019, p. 210).

Thus, a contextualized corpus of tweets was compiled, using Twitter Archiver, and analysed. This was named the #A28 corpus (n = 74,160 tweets / 2,125,437 words). It contains geolocalized tweets, posted from Spain, during the first 2019 political campaign for Spain’s general elections (April 2019, 8-27)<sup>3</sup>. All the tweets in the corpus contained the hashtag #A28, the day of the elections, or were responses to tweets that used such thematic hashtag. Retweets were automatically filtered out to avoid repetition. Hashtags are a characteristic feature of Twitter, even though they are now used on other social networking sites. Hashtags are multifunctional and serve informational and interpersonal purposes. On the informational level, they organize and coordinate activities around interests and topics shared by users and, in doing so, they play a further crucial interpersonal role in performing identities, orienting to social relationships and building communities (Zappavigna, 2017b). Rather than stable communities, social bonding on Twitter is “impermanent”, and revolves around “topics of interest” (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 801); thus, users that discuss a hashtag-delimited topic or interest share ambient affiliation (Zappavigna, 2011). The use of the hashtag #A28 allowed for the compilation of a contextualized Twitter corpus during which users commented on issues related to the electoral campaign: politicians’ declarations, political meetings, interviews or debates. During one of the electoral debates on national television featuring the leaders of the four main parties<sup>4</sup>, a left-wing politician, Pablo

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<sup>3</sup> Elections took place on April 28 but since government formation failed, General Elections were held for a second time on November 10 of the same year, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> From right to left-wing, the four political parties and leaders (in brackets) mentioned in the data are: *Partido Popular* / Popular Party (Pablo Casado); *Ciudadanos* / Citizens (Albert Rivera); *PSOE* / Spanish Socialist Party (Pedro Sánchez) and *Podemos* / We Can (Pablo Iglesias).

Iglesias, called one of his opponents, Albert Rivera, *maleducado* for his continuous interruptions and what he saw as a lack of respect for viewers. The fortuitous use of *maleducado* during the debate triggered a subset of discussions around this sort of behaviour on Twitter and made the data ideal for the study of lay evaluations and, specifically, what counts as *maleducado* for Twitter users in this context.

Twitter is not an uncommon source of data within Spanish pragmatics, especially in relation to the analysis of political discourse (e.g. Coesemans & De Cock, 2017; Gallardo-Pauls & Enguix Oliver, 2016; Mancera, 2014; Mancera & Pano, 2013; Pano Alamán, 2015). However, to my knowledge, Twitter has not been employed as a source of data in first-order (im)politeness research in Spanish, and only seldom in other languages (Culpeper, O’Driscoll & Hardaker, 2019; Sifianou, 2015; Sifianou & Bella, 2019).

The analytical framework employed in the analysis was corpus-based metapragmatics (Haugh, 2018, p. 624), which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative methods are characteristic of corpus linguistics (Baker, 2010) and were carried out using Sketch Engine, a corpus linguistics software developed by Lexical Computing<sup>5</sup>.

The analyses proceeded in two stages. During the first stage, the amount of tweets generated in the LABELS subcorpora was compared. Then, using the Frequencies tool provided by Sketch Engine, the frequency of use of these labels was analysed in the esTenTen18 and the #A28 data sets. The second stage involved the qualitative study of contextualized understandings of *maleducado* in the #A28 corpus. This focused on the functions or social actions of the metapragmatic comments (Culpeper, 2011; Haugh,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.Sketch Engine.eu/>

2019), the linguistic patterns of use of the metapragmatic label, and the grounds for evaluations of behaviour as *maleducado*. Therefore, the heuristics underlying the qualitative analysis involved attending to the what (function), how (patterns) and why (grounds) of the metapragmatic label under analysis (Bax, 2011).

#### 4. Impoliteness metapragmatic labels

This section explores the quantitative weight of the lemma *maleducado* in comparison with the lemmas *grosero/rude*, *impertinente/impertinent* and *descortés/impolite* in the LABELS corpus. As was mentioned above, the LABELS corpus contains four subcorpora elicited independently for each of the impoliteness metapragmatic labels.

The quantitative importance of the lemmas was established by the number of tweets that each lemma (as search term) generated during the compilation period, which was the same for all four data sets.

LABELS (Lemmatized forms)	Number of tweets (n = 63,886)	%
<i>Maleducado</i> /ill-mannered	62,979	98.6
<i>Grosero</i> /rude	663	1.03
<i>Impertinente</i> /impertinent	214	0.33
<i>Descortés</i> / impolite	30	0.05

Table 1. Number of tweets per data set

The findings revealed that the search term *maleducado* generated a considerably higher number of tweets than all the other terms; in fact, most of the tweets in the corpus

(98.6%) contained this label. Interestingly, the search term *descortés*, traditionally employed in second order models of Spanish *descortesía*, was the least frequently used metapragmatic label (0.05%). For every tweet with *descortés*, over 2,000 tweets with *maleducado* were used. For their part, the lemmatized search terms *grosero* and *impertinente* were very infrequently used on Twitter.

The quantitative disparity in terms of frequency of lay use between the term of choice in second-order impoliteness studies, *descortés*, and the synonymous *maleducado* was such that it underscored the need to further examine *maleducado*. Therefore, using the Word Frequency tool, the occurrence of all four labels was further scrutinized in the general corpus of Spanish digital discourse esTenTen18 and the locally situated Twitter corpus #A28:

	esTenTen18 (n = 17.553.075.259)	#A28 (n = 2.125.437w)
<i>Maleducado</i> /ill-mannered	0.09	3.01
<i>Grosero</i> /rude	0.36	0.00
<i>Impertinente</i> /impertinent	0.09	1.32
<i>Descortés</i> / impolite	0.04	0.00

Table 2. Frequency of occurrence of impoliteness metapragmatic labels, normalised to 100,000

As can be seen in Table 2, *maleducado* was, by far, the most frequent lemma in the locally situated Twitter corpus. In contrast, the label *grosero* was much more frequent than *maleducado* in the esTenTen18 corpus. However, although *grosero* was the most

frequent lemma in the macro corpus esTenTen18, it did not occur at all in the contextualized Twitter corpus. This may be due to the size and textual diversity of the esTenTen18 corpus, which is in contrast with the relative situatedness of the #A28 data. Additionally, tweets in the #A28 data often referred to on-going political debates. As mentioned above, a politician employed the term *maleducado* in the course of one of the debates and this could have had an impact in the more frequent use of this label. This, however, does not explain why *maleducado* was by far the most frequent term in the LABELS data (Table 1). *Descortés*, for its part, was the least frequent metalanguage in the esTenTen data and did not occur at all in the Twitter corpus, thus confirming claims that the second-order term of choice for impoliteness in Spanish does not reflect users' preferred metalanguage (Bernal 2007, 2008; Blas-Arroyo, 2013, 2014; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2010). This was indeed the case in the naturally occurring technology-mediated data sets examined. The finding relative to the very scarce currency of the use of *descortés* in the corpora is very similar to Culpeper's (2011: 80) findings that the occurrence of the term *impolite* in his academic and non-academic data was very small. For Culpeper, lack of lay use makes the term *impolite* ideal to be employed as a second-order, "blanket-term" to refer to the semantics of the various impoliteness-related terms. In this sense, lack of first-order use of *descortés* also makes it an ideal term to be used as a second-order construct within Spanish impoliteness. Finally, *impertinente* was as frequent as *maleducado* in the esTenTen18 corpus and three times less frequent in the specific #A28 data. Although the reasons for using the different terms in the data sets are difficult to explain, the above results underline the quantitative and comparative weight of the lemmatised form *maleducado*, especially in the context of Twitter, and justify further investigation of this Spanish metapragmatic label, so far neglected. Since the findings of the situated corpus clearly show a preference for one label in contrast

with the other three, the results also suggest the importance of exploring both large corpora and contextualized data in examinations of metapragmatic labels.

## 5. Locally situated understandings of *maleducado* on Twitter

This section looks at the contextualized use and functionality of the metapragmatic comments containing the label *maleducado* in the #A28 corpus. The analysis began by gleaning semantic information on this term from the dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish, henceforth, the *RAE* Dictionary, in its online version<sup>6</sup>, as this would contribute to a better understanding of its general use. Two definitions for *maleducado* are provided:

1. *adj. Dicho de un niño: Muy mimado y consentido* / Adj. Of a child: very spoilt and pampered
2. *adj. Descortés, irrespetuoso, incivil* / Adj. Impolite, disrespectful, uncivil

Regarding the #A28 corpus, a total of 75 tweets contained this label. After discarding a few repetitions and tweets which were not written in Spanish, 67 tweets were subjected to qualitative scrutiny. This involved (i) looking at the functions or social actions (Haugh, 2019) performed by the utterances that contained the label, i.e. the metapragmatic comments (Culpeper, 2011), (ii) analysing the linguistic patterns of use of the metapragmatic label; and (iii) examining metapragmatic comments in order to identify the grounds for evaluating behaviour as *maleducado*.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rae.es/>

### 5.1. Social actions

The two main functions of the metapragmatic comments containing the label *maleducado* were expressing verbal attacks (60) and reporting (7). In this section the reporting function will be briefly examined before exploring in greater depth the verbal attacks, which were far more frequent.

The tweets containing the label *maleducado* with the function of reporting have in common that they resort to some form of quoting (Bublitz, 2015) and report on the same event. Most reports came from newspapers or journalists, thus supporting the claim that quoting is a “basic journalistic practice” (Johansson, 2019, p. 141). As to the content of the quotes, they mostly referred to the political leader Pablo Iglesias calling his opponent Albert Rivera *maleducado* for his interruptions, an action he saw as lack of respect for the viewers of the electoral debate. Part of this ‘golden moment’ of the debate was reproduced by the left-of-centre newspaper *El País*, alongside Rivera’s reply that Iglesias should become the new chair of the debate:

(1) T31. @el\_pais: *Iglesias: "No hay que interrumpir todo el rato, señor Rivera. Se puede ser educado. Es usted muy **maleducado**. Hay que respetar a la gente que nos oye". Rivera: "Pues haga usted de moderador"*

Iglesias “No need to interrupt all the time, Mr Rivera. One can be good mannered.

You are very **ill-mannered**. We must respect those who are listening to us”

Rivera: “Then you act as chair”

In example (1), *El País* uses inverted commas to mark the quotation and does not add any commentary, thus establishing distance and attempting to avoid evaluation and



opinion (Johansson, 2019). In contrast, the right-of-centre newspaper *El Mundo* interprets Iglesias' behaviour as 'being annoyed' at Rivera, before quoting the words of the former that include the name calling (Culpeper, 2005):

(2) T51 @elmundoes: *Pablo Iglesias, molesto con Rivera: "Se puede ser educado en un debate, Esta táctica de interrumpir todo el rato es propia de maleducados". #ElDebateDecisivo*

Pablo Iglesias, annoyed with Rivera: "One can be good mannered in a debate, This tactic of interrupting all the time is typical of the ill-mannered".  
#TheDecisiveDebate

Also interesting were two tweets with a reporting function that documented what they saw as the 'insults' of the debate, and even of the whole political campaign; this is the case of the tweet posted by "@insultometro" (3), which is linked to a website that documented all the insults, the name-callers and targets of the insults sorted by political party:

(3) T12 @insultometro: @juanludepaolis @ernesturtasun *Nos dejó un insulto maravilloso: "Maleducado" (aunque flojito, eso sí) Todos los insultos del #28A en enlace*

@<namefamousjournalist> @<nameofpolitician> We were left with a wonderful insult: "Ill-mannered" (but weak, really). All the insults of #28A at <link>

The tweet in (3) reports on the insult, with no reference to its sender or receiver, through a humorous metalinguistic comment that ironically qualifies the term *maleducado* as wonderful but light. It then takes the opportunity to direct the reader's attention to their website. The use of insults was not unexpected as some newspapers later argued that,

during the campaign, politicians were obsessed with each other and had privileged expressing their scorn and contempt towards their opponents over attending voters' needs (Amón, 2019).

Turning now our attention to verbal attacks, this was the most frequent function of the utterances with the metapragmatic label under scrutiny. The targets of the attacks or negative evaluations were computed, and findings revealed that all but one criticism contained *ad personam* attacks against politicians belonging to the then four main political parties. Twitter users mostly attacked Albert Rivera (n = 43/60), in relation to the 'golden moment' of the debate mentioned above, and to his general (verbal) behaviour during the debate.

(4) T57. *Alguien tenía que decirlo, @Pablo\_Iglesias\_: "su táctica de interrumpir todo el rato es propia de maleducados" (a Albert Rivera).*

👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏 #ElDebateDecisivo #28A

Someone had to say so, Pablo\_Iglesias\_: "your tactic of interrupting all the time is typical of the ill-mannered" (to Albert Rivera). 👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏👏

#ElDebateDecisivo #28A

In (4), this Twitter user scornfully criticizes Rivera by supporting the name calling and reproducing part of Iglesias' reprimand. Being scornful is a traditional impoliteness strategy (Culpeper, 2005) of frequent use in the political genre of electoral debates in Spain (Blas Arroyo, 2001: 29). Users, too, deployed all forms of (direct, indirect, partial) quoting thus proving that it is "scarcely possible to contribute to blogs, tweets or message boards without quoting" (Bublitz, 2015, p. 2).

The remaining personal attacks were directed at other politicians from all parties. Only one metapragmatic comment did not target a politician and criticized, instead, the public Valencian television channel and the governing parties in that region, included in the @ mentions in the example below, because the use of Catalan (an official language in the region) during interviews was considered to be ill-mannered. In the following example, therefore, the commenter associates the TV Channel with negatively perceived actions (Culpeper, 2005):

(5) T74 .... *En Valencia, @apunt\_media, la TV de @compromis y @PSOEValencia no hace esas concesiones, solo habla en catalán a sus entrevistados. Pancatalanistas Maleducados. #HablamosEspañol #LibertadElecciónLengua #SinBarrerasLingüísticas #28A*

...In Valencia, @apunt\_media, the TV of @compromis and PSOEValencia, does not make such concessions, they only address their interviewees in Catalan. Ill-mannered pan-Catalanists. #WeSpeakSpanish #FreedomChoosingLanguage #NoLinguisticBarriers #28A

Independently of the target of the attacks, all criticisms reflected discursive processes of political (dis)affiliation. Going beyond the social action containing the metapragmatic label and looking at the whole tweet revealed that negative evaluations and disaffiliating with one political group were often realised alongside praising/positive evaluations and political affiliation with another group (Pano Alamán, 2015; Van Dijk, 1998). For example, T28 in (6) describes positively the two left-wing political leaders and provides a negative representation of the two right-wing leaders:

(6) T28 *#DebateDecisivo -Pablo Iglesias se ha llevado los dos debates SIN DUDA. -Sánchez ha salido ileso, pero teniendo que sobrevivir -Rivera ha hecho el*

*myorridiculo de su vida, le encanta el teatro y ser un **maleducado**. -Y Casado... sólo mintió #Opinion #28A #ElDebateDefinitivo*

T28 #DecisiveDebate -Pablo Iglesias has won the two debates WITHOUT A DOUBT. -Sánchez ended unscathed but having to survive -Rivera has made the greatest fool of himself, he loves drama and being **ill-mannered**. -And Casado... just lied #Opinion #28A #TheDefinitiveDebate

This text reveals that the negative presentation of politicians involves several impoliteness strategies identified by Blas Arroyo (2001) in his study of Spanish political debates, also found in other studies of conflict in English. These include making comparisons (Moulinou, 2014), pointing out lack of credibility, belittling the other (Culpeper, 2005), accusing a politician of deception and lying (Fernández García, 2016).

## 5.2. Linguistic patterns

In this section, three frequent patterns of use of this metapragmatic label are discussed. These include the use of *maleducado* in coordination with other adjectives of negative evaluation (11 occurrences), the use of this label with markers of intensification (9 occurrences), and the use of *maleducado* as part of a hashtag (14 tweets). Interestingly, all these patterns have an intensifying pragmatic function that can strengthen the negative assessment (Albelda Marco, 2007; Blas-Arroyo, 2010; Briz, 2017) and, therefore, the discursive representation of conflict. Indeed, Culpeper (2011: 154) also observed that intensified expressions generally lead to more offence being taken.

The first linguistic pattern consisted in coupling the use of *maleducado* with another adjective. The adjectives employed in paired patterns were *irrespetuoso/disrespectful*, *mentiroso/liar*, *inmaduro/childish*, *prepotente/overbearing*, *falso/false*, and *impertinente/impertinent*; these metapragmatic labels are not uncommon in the literature on Spanish impoliteness and relate to the definitions provided by the *RAE* Dictionary, which include *childish* and *disrespectful*. The use of the term *maleducado* embedded in a string of three or more adjectives was also common, especially when associating a politician with negative aspects through name-calling (Culpeper, 2005). This creates a cumulative meaning of negative evaluation which intensifies the offence (Albelda Marco, 2007; Briz, 2017; Culpeper, 2011). In addition to the rather marked effect of the use of multiple epithets, this technique is characteristic of specific genres (Downing & Lock, 2006, p. 438) and, in particular, of the genre of Spanish political debates (Blas Arroyo, 2001, p. 31). However, the extent to which it is characteristic of the launching of personal attacks in political discussions on Twitter deserves further research. In example (7), the user insults a politician through six adjectives of negative evaluation (personalized negative vocatives, Culpeper, 2011, p. 135), and further expresses a metalinguistic awareness of the listing technique being used which is, in turn, employed to belittle the target:

(7) T1. *Antipática, prepotente, matona, **maleducada**, retorcida, y como tengo cosas más importantes que hacer **no puedo terminar la lista***

Unfriendly, overbearing, bully, **ill-mannered**, twisted, and well I have more important things to do that **I cannot finish the list**

The second common pattern used *maleducado* with different intensifiers and thus expressed pointed criticism and exaggeration (Culpeper, 2011). The most frequent was *muy maleducado/very ill-mannered*. Other adverbial intensifiers (example 8) added

conceptual meaning, as in the use of the modifier “unbearably”. Finally, superlative forms and other devices of high intensification (Downing & Locke, 2006, p. 488) were also frequent, as in (T36) and (T67), respectively:

(8) T21. ... *un maleducado insoportable* .... / an unbearably ill-mannered (person)

T36. ... *Óscar al más maleducado* ... / Oscar to the most ill-mannered...

T67. ... *tan putamente maleducado* / so fucking ill-mannered

The third frequent pattern used the metapragmatic label within hashtags. This was especially interesting for our Twitter data which contained fourteen tweets with this use. The hashtags were mostly used against the leaders of the two right-wing political parties with the function of criticising. The most frequently used hashtag was a personal attack on Rivera related to his behaviour during the ‘golden minute’ of the electoral debate mentioned above. This took the form of *#RiveraMaleducado*, as in example (9), although the label was also used as an insulting hashtag of itself, *#maleducado*, as in (10):

(9) T19. *El gesto patético de #Rivera #RiveraMaleducado que hunde su credibilidad en el #DebateAtresmedia #DebateDecisivo #28A @app3dba @JaviSilvaP @Pepo\_Marquez #RiveraCagalera*

The pathetic gesture of #Rivera **#RiveraMaleducado** that sinks his credibility in the #DebateAtresmedia #DecisiveDebate #28A @app3dba @JaviSilvaP @Pepo\_Marquez #RiveraShithead

(10) T42. *Oyen eso? Es el silencio....noooo, no es el silencio por qué Rivera no se calla mientras hablan los demás. #maleducado #ElDebateDecisivo #DebateAtresmedia #28A*

Can you hear that? It is the silence ...nooo, it's not the silence because Rivera won't shut up while the others speak. **#maleducado** #TheDecisiveDebate #DebateAtresmedia #28A

In example (9), the user charges at Rivera by categorising his actions as pathetic, assessing him as ill-mannered in the hashtag, and commenting on his loss of credibility during the political debate (Blas Arroyo, 2001; Culpeper, 2011; Fernández García, 2016). This comment is followed by other debate-related hashtags, some mentions and another creative insult-in-hashtag: #RiveraShithead. For its part, in (10), the user criticizes Rivera who is ridiculed for his incessant talk which overlaps with and interrupts the speaking turn of other candidates in the debate. Ridiculing (Culpeper, 2005; Blas Arroyo, 2001) is performed by beginning the tweet with the same words with which Rivera began his last contribution to one of the debates: “Can you hear it? It's the silence ...”. This rhetorical strategy allowed the political leader to associate the silence of Spaniards with what he saw as a series of ills affecting and muting Spanish society. In this case, the Twitter user belittles Rivera since “the silence” cannot be heard due to his negatively assessed verbal behaviour.

The hashtag #RiveraMaleducado became widespread and its use and form evolved in different and creative ways (De Cock & Pizarro Pedraza, 2018). For instance, in (11), below, the user criticizes that Rivera made a spectacle of his participation in the debate by comparing it to the throwing of a party (Culpeper, 2011; Gallardo Pauls & Enguix Oliver, 2016). This critique is followed by hashtags referring to debates and the general

election, and three hashtags with the name of the politician: the already known #RiveraIllMannered, the newly created #riverashutup, with an unmitigated silencer (Culpeper 2005, 2011, p. 136), and a third hashtag with just the politician's last name. On formal grounds, thus, the pattern evolves from <#name + negative label> to <#name + verb> and to <#name>. The force of the initial criticism, made through the presentation of a hypothetical scenario (Moulinou, 2014), and the lack of political alignment with this politician are further intensified by the use of the three disaffiliating hashtags in the same tweet. The intensification through the use of a series of three elements (Culpeper, 2011) is more effective, in this case, as they constitute what in rhetoric is known as triplet or list of three (Bax, 2011):

(11) T20. *Si ayer le ponen a Rivera una pastilla de jabón el la mano monta la fiesta de la espuma en 1 minuto. #ElDebateDecisivo #DebateAtresmedia #DebateDecisivo #28A #RiveraMaleducado #riveracallate #Rivera*

If Rivera is given soap yesterday he organizes a foam party in a minute

#TheDecisiveDebate #DebateAtresmedia #DecisiveDebate #28A

**#RiveraIllMannered #riverashutup #Rivera**

The hashtag #RiveraMaleducado was used even when the target of the tweet was another politician. In this case, the political leader Casado eventually became the object of a similar hashtag calling him ill-mannered. In example (12), the user associates Casado's views on education and health with the connections and privileges of the wealthy (Blas Arroyo, 2001). The tweet ends with insults within hashtags that call him protégé, liar and ill-mannered; in this case, the pattern <#last name + negative qualifier> was repeated in a triplet:



(12) T71. *Habrá que preguntarle a @pablocasado\_ si su idea de la Educación y la Sanidad públicas es la del enchufe y el privilegio de niño pijo, como es en su caso*  
**#CasadoEnchufado #CasadoMentiroso #Casadomaleducado #DebateAtresmedia**  
**#28A #ElDebateDecisivo**

We'll have to ask @pablocasado\_ if his idea of Education and public Health is about connections and posh-kid privilege, as is in his case **#CasadoProtégé**  
**#CasadoLiar #Casadoillmannered #DebateAtresmedia #28A**  
**#TheDecisiveDebate**

A more creative use of hashtags was seen in the tweet in (13), in which the user, after expressing disaffiliative views with the Spanish right wing, completes his tweet with three hashtags that communicate specific messages. The first one contains a cultural reference to an old television commercial that repeated the phrase “pezqueñines<sup>7</sup> no, gracias” (not the tiny fish, thank you) to discourage consumption of small fish. In this case, the user employs #NotTheIllManneredThankYou, a phrase that resonates for many Spanish voters. The next two hashtags are combined with dismissals (Culpeper, 2011), expressed in English, towards the two political leaders of the right. The intensifying effect of the use of the three hashtags underline this user's rejection of these politicians with a dose of humour.

(13) T23. ... **#MaleducadosNoGracias #ByeByeRivera #ByeByeCasado**  
**#NotTheIllmanneredThankYou #ByeByeRivera #ByeByeCasado**

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<sup>7</sup> This term blends the Spanish word for fish (*pez*) with the diminutive tiny (*pequeñines*)

Finally, Twitter users also commented reflexively on the use of this hashtag, thus making explicit their metapragmatic awareness (Kádár & Haugh, 2013) of its use and function. This is the case of example (14), where the user expresses how much s/he loves the hashtag, and then mentions how s/he cannot bear the man and ends making use of the *Riveramaleducado* hashtag, among others.

(14) T66. *Me encanta este hashtag. No soporto a este tío: #Riveramaleducado ...*

**I love this hashtag.** I can't stand this dude: **#RiveraIllMannered ...**

### 5.3. *Grounds for evaluation*

The last stage of the analysis examined metapragmatic comments in order to tease out the grounds for users' evaluations (Kádár & Haugh, 2013) of a specific behaviour as *maleducado*. As mentioned above (section 2), evaluations are connected to social norms and reveal lay understandings of impoliteness and conflict.

The most frequently repeated comments mentioned in the context of *maleducado* in the data were language-related (example 15) and referred to failing to respect speaking turns (T36) and, in particular, interrupting (T34), not letting others speak (T55), and speaking excessively (T42, in section 6.2). These are common impoliteness strategies in political debates (Fernández García, 2016), which are here commented reflexively. Lack of arguments was also mentioned in this respect (T14).

(15) T36. ...*No ha callado para respetar el turno de @Pablo\_Iglesias\_ ni por casualidad* <angry emoji> / He didn't shut up even to respect the turn of @Pablo\_Iglesias at all <angry emoji>

T34. ...*Ya era hora de que le pararan los pies a Rivera ante sus faltas de respeto, interrumpiendo constantemente...* / It was high time that someone stopped Rivera and his lack of respect, interrupting constantly ...

T55. ...*No deja hablar a nadie. Qué maleducado!!* / He won't let others speak.  
How ill-mannered!!

T14 ... *no aportó nada ...* / he didn't contribute anything

Another set of tweets associated *maleducado* with childish and immature behaviour, like in the tweet below. The representation of immaturity is so negatively viewed in example (16) that it is then used in an exhortative sentence (Blas Arroyo, 2001) to encourage others to vote on Election Day:

(16) T40. ... *si no queremos un gobierno de tipo **niñatos maleducados** como lo que han representado hoy Casado y Rivera: TODAS A VOTAR EL 28A !!!!!*

...if we don't want a government of **ill-mannered spoilt children** like Casado and Rivera: YOU ALL GO VOTE ON 28A!!!!!

Also related to lack of maturity and seriousness, several Twitter users associated being *maleducado* with melodrama and spectacle in the context of an electoral debate, as in (17), in which the poster thinks that the politician assessed as *maleducado* was an embarrassment who loves drama:

(17) T28. *Rivera ha hecho el myorridiculo de su vida, **le encanta el teatro** y ser un **maleducado***

Rivera was the greatest embarrassment, he loves drama and being ill-mannered

Particularly interesting was the following tweet (example 18), which discussed the (in)appropriateness of *maleducado* behaviours in electoral debates and reality programmes, and thus showed explicit awareness of social norms – like “do not interrupt others” - within specific television genres (Blas Arroyo, 2010):

(18) T59. *Efectivamente, interrumpir continuamente es una actitud propia de maleducados y de esos programas llamados #RealityShow Es muy serio lo que está en juego el #28A para que Rivera se tome esto como si fuera un concursante de #LaVoz #ElDebateDecisivo*

Absolutely, continuously interrupting others is typical of the **ill-mannered** and of the programmes called #RealityShow. What is at stake on #28A is too serious for Rivera to take this as if he was a contestant in #TheVoice  
#TheDecisiveDebate

Less frequently, users also related being *maleducado* with being nervous, mean, dishonest (see example in 6.2, above), and even a bad person, and they expressed concern that someone with such a behaviour should become the President of a country.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate conflict through a corpus-based metapragmatic analysis of lay uses of *maleducado* on Twitter. The analysis was guided by two research questions. RQ1 investigated the quantitative relevance of the lemma *maleducado* in the context of digital discourse and specifically on Twitter, as compared to other labels used in previous studies of Spanish impoliteness. The analysis confirmed that the

metapragmatic term *maleducado* was the most frequent label under scrutiny in all the Twitter data used in this study, i.e. in the LABELS corpus and in the locally situated #A28 corpus, compiled during the first 2019 General Elections in Spain. *Maleducado* also emerged as the second most frequently used term in the general corpus of digital data esTenTen18. The analysis further revealed that *descortés*, the term of choice in second-order models of impoliteness, was infrequent in all data sets. It was argued, following Culpeper (2011, p. 80), that lack of lay use of this term makes it ‘neutral’, as it were, and therefore ideal for use as a theoretical construct. In all, the quantitative analysis confirmed the disparity between the scientific and lay impoliteness metalanguage in Spanish (Bernal, 2007, 2008; Blas Arroyo, 2013, 2014; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2010) and motivated the subsequent study of the metapragmatics of *maleducado*, which emerged as the first-order label of choice.

RQ2 dealt with contextualized understandings of *maleducado* on Twitter. To address this research question, the contextualized #A28 corpus was qualitatively investigated on three levels. On the first level (RQ2.1), two social actions of the metapragmatic comments (Culpeper, 2011; Haugh, 2019) with *maleducado* were identified, namely, reports and verbal attacks. Reporting was accomplished mainly through quoting (Bublitz, 2015) by newspapers and journalists. Verbal attacks exhibited discursive patterns of conflict connected with behaviours previously identified in the second-order impoliteness literature (Culpeper, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011), as impoliteness triggers or conventional formulae (Culpeper, 2011) and in studies of conflict and morality (Moulinou, 2014). Verbal attacks included criticism, accusations of incompetence and lying, and scornful comments that ridiculed the target. These behaviours, referred to as conceptual or functional impoliteness strategies (Blas Arroyo,

2001; Fernández García, 2016) were realised through discursive and rhetorical resources like name-calling, impositive clauses, unfavourable comparisons or sarcasm. Previous research in political discussions has found similar resources in the realisation of representative and expressive actions on political discussions on Twitter (Gallardo-Paúls & Enguiz-Oliver, 2016, p. 116). Further, negative evaluations or verbal attacks were often preceded or followed by praising comments for other political leaders or parties within the same tweet. Thus, through these functions Twitter users engaged in ideological work; in particular, in processes of group affiliation and disaffiliation (Gallardo-Paúls & Enguiz-Oliver, 2016; Mancera & Pano, 2013; Van Dijk, 1998). On another level, RQ2.2, three frequent patterns of use of this metapragmatic label were identified. The first pattern included the use of *maleducado* with another adjective or within a string of adjectives of negative evaluation. A second common pattern used *maleducado* with different adverbial intensifiers, and the last pattern made use of *maleducado* embedded in hashtags. The latter, characteristic of Twitter, was frequently employed in *ad personam* attacks, initially following the pattern <#Name + *maleducado*>. As the use of this formula increased, it evolved in creative ways (De Cock & Pizarro Pedraza, 2018; Mancera & Pano, 2013) with different targets and/or alongside hashtags that included other impoliteness metapragmatic labels. In fact, the three patterns – use of multiple negative qualifiers, adverbials and hashtags – intensified users' negative assessments and, therefore, the force of their criticisms (Albelda Marco, 2007; Blas-Arroyo, 2001; Briz, 2017) and the chances of causing offence (Culpeper, 2011).

The last level of analysis, RQ2.3, focused on metapragmatic comments to examine the grounds for users' evaluations of behaviour as *maleducado*. The most frequently repeated comments mentioned lack of respect in relation to the breach of turn-taking

norms and topic management within the genre of electoral debates. In this respect, users showed awareness of language and genre-related expectations, and associated being *maleducado* with behaviours that breach social norms and moral values (Culpeper, 2011; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich et al., 2010; Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Kaul de Marganleon, 2005; Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2011). This is in line with Bernal's (2007) first-order study of Spanish impoliteness in casual conversations, which found that questionnaire respondents mostly related impoliteness with a breach of social norms, and associated disrupting turn-taking expectations with being *maleducado*. The present analysis also revealed another set of comments that connected *maleducado* behaviours with acting in childish and immature ways that failed to enact the seriousness expected of political leaders in the context of a political debate (Blas Arroyo, 2001; Fernández García, 2016). Therefore, the semantic meanings provided by the *RAE* Dictionary that defined *maleducado* in relation to child-like and disrespectful behaviours emerged on the Twitter discussion under analysis. In this specific context, the meanings of disrespectfulness and childishness were narrowed down as they were mostly associated with breaches in appropriate behaviour regarding turn-taking and topic management, and social expectations associated with the role of political leaders, in relation to the genre of political debates.

This study has gained insight into lay understandings of conflict and impoliteness in a specific context. In particular, it has provided evidence for the disparity between the first-order preferred metapragmatic label on Twitter and the second-order term of choice in Spanish impoliteness; and it has further investigated the metapragmatics of *maleducado* in a Twitter corpus compiled during the first 2019 political campaign in Spain. The study thus contributes to our knowledge of first-order impoliteness by investigating an under researched term within Spanish impoliteness; in doing so, it also

contributes to moving “forward out of a pragmatics that has been dominated to date by the scientific metalanguage of English” (Haugh, 2018, p. 623).

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