

Exploring the effectiveness of hotel management's responses to negative online comments

Abstract

The present study aims to identify the linguistic strategies and resources that characterize the review response genre, hotel management's responses addressing negative comments posted by dissatisfied customers on travel websites. It has been established that hotel management should proactively manage the hotel's online reputation by monitoring the online comments and by giving each of the negative ones an effective response. While the majority of the research has primarily explored the effectiveness of the genre from the analysts' perspective, the present study approaches the issue from the customers' perspective by collecting the dissatisfied customers' views upon their reading of the hotel management's responses. The data comprises these responses downloaded directly from TripAdvisor and responses of a questionnaire survey administered to frequent travelers. Results suggest that effective responses and less effective responses differ in the use of moves and metadiscourse, the two linguistic resources hotel management uses in their attempt at achieving respectively rapport management and persuasion.

Keywords: Metadiscourse; Moves; Persuasion; Rapport management; Review response genre

1. Introduction

Amid the unstoppable colonization of the various domains of people's daily life by the Internet, one can hardly deny human's ever increasing reliance on computer technology for completing everyday or work-related tasks. These tasks include, for example, simply paying for a meal at a neighborhood restaurant with Apple Pay or Android Pay, communicating with colleagues in the workplace with email or Whatsapp, and booking a hotel room for vacation or business via travel websites like TripAdvisor. The high popularity of TripAdvisor -- the total number of reviews and opinions it received in 2018 was 661 million (DMR, 2018) -- can be attributed to at least two factors. First, Internet technology affords convenience and speed, reducing hugely the time and effort one will need to search for and decide on the purchase of accommodation services. Second, the intangible nature of hotel accommodation services makes it not possible for potential customers to evaluate the services before consumption (Mazzarol et al., 2007). They need to rely on word-of-mouth, that is, the comments left on TripAdvisor by those who have actually purchased and used the services. The valence of these online comments, especially when it is negative, can have a serious impact on the reputation and business of the hotels concerned as negative comments usually attract more scrutiny from viewers (Vásquez, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). It is therefore necessary for hotel management to address negative comments in a timely

and effective manner (Chan and Guillet, 2011; Zheng et al., 2009). In fact, TripAdvisor is not only popular among (potential) travelers, but also hotel practitioners, especially those who are responsible for replying to online comments, criticisms and complaints. It provides a channel for them to achieve a wide range of aims such as expressing gratitude or regret, making clarifications or detailing rectification, and admitting inadequacies or denying accusations, all in an attempt to restore customers' confidence and achieve service recovery (Ho, 2017a, b; Litvin and Hoffman, 2012; Sparks and Bradley, 2017). The TripAdvisor platform, together with the hotel management's responses, termed the review response genre (Ho, 2017a, b), can therefore be tremendously valuable resources for three parties: (1) dissatisfied customers -- they can criticize and complain in order to express their frustration and to inform visitors of the website of the weaknesses of the hotels concerned; (2) potential customers -- they can read about the first-hand experience of those who have purchased and used the accommodation services provided by the hotels concerned, allowing them to make informed decisions; and (3) hotel management -- they can proactively manage their reputation by giving an effective response to each of the negative comments.

In view of its tremendous value, it is not surprising that the review response genre has been extensively researched by scholars from both the linguistics and non-linguistics fields in recent decades. Purpose-wide, this research can be divided into two categories. Category I aims to identify the moves (or components/features as they are referred to in non-linguistics oriented studies) present in the genre. These studies have identified a number of moves serving a wide range of purposes. Levy et al. (2013) in their study of 225 management responses given by 86 Washington, D.C. hotels found that first, the responses contained eight moves, namely Apology, Appreciation, Explanation, Please Come Back, Passive Follow-up, Correction, Active Follow-up, and Compensation. Second, responses given by highly rated hotels often contained the first three moves.¹ Sparks and Bradley (2017:723) proposed an innovative "Triple A" typology after consulting relevant literature and soliciting hotel practitioners' professional opinions. The moves included in the management responses were subsumed under three categories: The Acknowledgement category contains Thank, Appreciate, Apologize, Recognize, Admit, Accept, and Dismiss; the Account category contains Excuse, Justify, Reframe, Penitential, and Denial; and finally the Action category contains Investigate, Referral, Rectify, Policy, Training, Direct Contact, and Compensate. The typology was tested on 150 responses given by hotels in Sydney, Australia, with 75 from top-ranked hotels and the other 75 bottom-ranked ones. While most of the responses were found to contain moves that belonged to each of the three categories, differences existed between those given by hotels of different rankings. Responses given by top-ranked hotels more often recognized the occurrence of an event and appreciated customer's comment; whereas those given by bottom-ranked hotels were characterized by the inclusion of denial of the event or its consequence, a claim that the event had been investigated, and the absence of rectification. Zhang and Vásquez (2014), drawing upon the notion of move structures (Swales, 1981, 2004), conducted a systematic linguistic analysis of 80 management responses to negative comments written by 4- and 5-star hotels in four Chinese destinations (Xian, Hangzhou, Chongqing, and Nanjing). A total of 10 moves were found: Express Gratitude, Apologize for Sources of Problem, Invitation for a Second Visit, Opening Pleasantries, Proof of Action, Acknowledge Complaints/Feedback, Refer to Customer Reviews, Closing Pleasantries, Avoidance of Recurring Problems, and Solicit Response.

The present study extends the Category I research by first including hotels based in a wider geographical region (each of the studies reported only included hotels based in one or four cities), and second analyzing a significantly larger number of hotel responses -- a total of 4256 responses were analyzed (please refer to Section 3 for details).

Category II aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the moves in service recovery (Sparks et al., 2016; Sparks and Fredline, 2007; Yavas et al., 2004). Yavas et al. (2004) investigated the potential influence of the organizational responses on customers' satisfaction and repurchase intention. A questionnaire survey was administered to a total of 376 guests who had stayed in 4- or 5-star hotels in Northern Cyprus during Spring 2002 and experienced a service failure. The characteristic features of the organizational responses included "promptness, apology, redress, explanation, and attentiveness" (2004:33). The study revealed that promptness, redress, explanation, and attentiveness had a significant influence on customer satisfaction. And interestingly, customer satisfaction, together with promptness, explanation, and attentiveness had significant impacts on repurchase intentions. Apology, rather surprisingly, was not found to have any significant effect on neither satisfaction nor repurchase intention. Sparks and Fredline (2007), adopting a between-subjects experimental design, investigated how the two types of explanations -- justification accounts and referential accounts -- would impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Questionnaires containing 12 scenarios differing in outcome severity, type of account, and thoroughness of account were administered to 5000 community members who had experience staying in luxury hotels in Australia. It was found that referential accounts were the more efficacious type of explanations in all the 12 scenarios, probably because a referential account would signal to the respondents information about their being a valued hotel customer. Also in an Australian context, Sparks et al. (2016) sought to explore which aspects of the review response genre would affect potential customers' impressions. By inviting a total of 820 individuals who had travelled in the past 12 months to respond to simulation materials -- 25 simulated webpages -- containing responses differing from each other in source of response, voice of response, speed of response, and action frame, it was found that a human voice and timely response would yield favorable customer inferences.

The Category II research studies reported above, despite their important findings, still left an important issue unexplored -- what characterizes an effective response to negative online reviews from the perspective of those who wrote the reviews. The present study, being a part of an ongoing large-scale project which aims to achieve a thorough understanding of the review response genre, attempts to tap into customers' perception of the effectiveness of the genre. It specifically seeks to find out customers' perception of the effectiveness of the rapport management and persuasive strategies used in the review response genre.

The present study is designed in such a way that it will address the inadequacy of the Category I studies by analyzing a considerably larger amount of data collected from hotels dispersed in a larger geographical region. It will also address the inadequacy of the Category II studies by studying the effectiveness of the hotel responses from the reviewers' perspective.

Rapport management strategies are conceptualized in this paper as the moves present in the review response genre, and persuasive strategies are conceptualized as the making of appeals to rationality, credibility, and emotion with metadiscourse (Please see Section 2 for details). It attempts to answer two research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristic rapport management strategies, realized through moves, of effective responses to negative online reviews?
- (2) What are the characteristic persuasive strategies, realized through metadiscourse, of effective responses to negative online review?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Rapport and rapport management*

Probably one of the most influential theories in the field of pragmatics is Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The theory, derived from the Goffman's (1967) notion of face, proposes face as the main driving force for politeness. Face, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), has two related aspects -- positive face and negative face, and this applies to all rational individuals regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Positive face concerns an individual's desire to be approved of and appreciated; while negative face concerns an individual's desire to have his/her territory intact, and to be free from any imposition. Despite the widespread recognition the theory has enjoyed, its limitations surfaced when attempts were made to account for interactional dynamics in non-Western context. For example, the importance attached to one's own territory, that is, one's negative face (wants), was not observed in Japanese or Chinese context which valued group harmony or acceptance (Gu, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988), rendering the theory incapable of accounting adequately the politeness phenomenon observed in non-Western cultures. The over-emphasis on individual's freedom and autonomy, and thus the resulting inadequate emphasis on the interactional and relational nature of the notion of face has led to the proposal of alternative interpretations of face (Arundale, 2006; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 2006; Matsumoto, 1988). Arundale (2006:201), emphasizing the interactional and relational nature of face, contended that "face is an emergent property of relationships, and therefore a relational phenomenon . . . framing face as relational rests directly on framing it as interactional . . . face is a meaning or action, or more generally an interpreting, . . .". Also highlighting the interactional and relational component, Ho (2017c: 36) proposed to interpret face as "relational and interactional, developed and resulting from a relationship formed during the course of interaction, and as an interpreting of an interactant's attributes". Despite these alternative and probably more encompassing interpretations, interactional dynamics may still not be fully accounted for and understood as interactants need to attend not only to face concerns, but also other wants as well. The construct of rapport which refers to "people's subjective perceptions of (dis)harmony or smoothness-turbulence in interpersonal relations" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:335), together with rapport management which refers to "the management of harmony-disharmony among people" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:13), is able to address the aspects not yet covered by the notion of face and its associated facework.

Rapport has three inter-related bases, namely face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. The face in this rapport construct differs from the one construed previously in that it is taken to be "closely related to a person's sense of identity or self-concept" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:14). Managing this basis of rapport would involve the acknowledgement of the positive or negative attributes of one's interlocutors, with these attributes being "affectively sensitive" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:14). Sociality rights (which can be further divided into equity rights and

association rights) and obligations concern the rights and obligations that people perceive they are respectively entitled to and expected of during an interaction. Managing this basis of rapport would involve the fulfilment of people's behavioral expectations developed in relation to these perceived rights and obligations. Interactional goals concern the specific goals -- transactional or relational -- that people have when they interact with others. Managing this basis of rapport would involve the achievement of these goals.

Previous studies analyzing interaction in various settings (business, professional and academic) in different modes (spoken or written) have demonstrated how rapport can be managed by a range of means. In a business context, it has been shown that rapport could be enhanced by managing sociality rights during face-to-face interactions with linguistic resources like an extended sequence of mutual affiliative assessments, or 'safe talk' and the pronouns 'we' and 'you' (Clark et al., 2003; Planken, 2005). An instance of damage of rapport during a face-to-face business interaction was reported clearly in Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) in which some Chinese business delegate felt that they had lost face as a result of the seating arrangement of a meeting planned by their British counterparts -- they were seated in a way which suggested that they were the inferior party. Apart from businessmen, practitioners of various professions including information technology, counselling, and education have also been reported to be actively managing rapport. In Fletcher (2014), enhancing rapport through managing sociality rights was observed between I.T. professionals during face-to-face encounters. They resorted to small talk to signal their willingness to be associated with each other, thereby managing each other's association rights. They also resorted to downplaying the power and status difference between them, thereby managing each other's equity rights. In the counselling profession, the management of association rights was observed (Gordon and Luke, 2012). Counsellors of different ranks and experiences, through the asynchronous email channel, managed each other's association rights through the use of the pronoun 'we' and repeating each other's key phrases. In an academic setting, Ädel (2011) analyzed the discourse of a discussion forum whose contributors were students working on a group project. It was found that effort was made by the students to enhance rapport with each other through apologizing and mitigating criticisms (managing face wants), aligning within group and complimenting (managing association rights), and thanking and offering encouragement (managing interactional goals). Ho (2001) analyzed workplace request emails exchanged between teachers who were native-speakers of English. It was found that one of the main interactional goals of the teachers was to provide mutual support, psychologically and professionally, to members. This explained why such otherwise professionally- and institutionally-oriented workplace emails contained a considerable amount of personal discourse (e.g. expressing of feelings and emotions, and use of humor).

Two recent relevant studies showed that hotel managers, through the strategic use and inclusion of moves, could achieve service recovery (Ho, 2017a) and protect the hotel's reputation by tactfully offending the writers of the negative online reviews and then enhancing the rapport thus damaged (Ho, 2017b). As demonstrated in these two studies, the moves found in the hotel responses indeed serve to enhance rapport with the reviewers. For example, the move Show Appreciation could manage their face wants, the moves Express Feeling and Minimize Imposition could manage their sociality rights, and the move Apologize and Rectify Problem could manage their interactional goals (Ho, 2017b: 7--9). One common issue shared by the studies reported above is probably the adoption of an interpretive approach, that is, the analysts interpreted the meaning of the discourse

and the intention of the discourse producers from their own perspective. They did not ask the discourse producers what meaning they were actually trying to make and convey and what they intended to achieve through the discourse. To tackle this methodological issue, the present paper will investigate the effectiveness of the hotel management's responses as perceived not by the author himself, but by the dissatisfied hotel customers -- those who have shared their unpleasant experience staying in the hotels concerned on the TripAdvisor platform.

2.2. Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse has been defined and interpreted in a number of ways (e.g. Ädel, 2006; Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990; Hyland, 2005; Hyland and Tse, 2004) from which four key generally agreed upon features have emerged. First, metadiscourse is an intrinsic component of a text whose meaning would not remain the same if metadiscourse is removed. Second, metadiscourse only concerns the world of discourse or text-internal relations. Third, recognizing and emphasizing the key characteristic of human language that distinguishes itself from other animals' -- reflexivity, metadiscourse refers to the text about text, helping the writer to make explicit the structure of the text in which it is used, guiding the reader through the text. Fourth, apart from this organizing function, it also helps the writer to interact with thereader.

Apart from, and as a result of, offering help to the reader for ease of navigation through the text and achieving writer- reader interaction (as the third and fourth features of metadiscourse describe above), metadiscourse allows the writer to make persuasive attempts through the three means of persuasion -- logos, ethos, and pathos (Hyland, 2005). In other words, while the success of a persuasive attempt rests heavily on the content of the arguments, the logic between the components of an argument (logos), the character and credibility of the person presenting the argument (ethos), and the extent to which the reader is emotionally moved (pathos) also have a key role to play in persuasion.

However, discrepancy in the interpretation of the reference or boundary of the text in which metadiscourse is used seems to be in existence, as the two prevalent models of metadiscourse suggest. Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model sees the text as the evolving text itself as well as any other text which is linked to it, whereas the reflexive model proposed by Mauranen (1993) and Ädel (2006, 2010) restricts it to the evolving text only.

Hyland's (2005) model divides metadiscourse into two main categories, interactive and interactional. It emphasizes the interpersonal nature of metadiscourse, arguing that the writer can make rhetorical appeals to the reader by taking into account the latter's knowledge, textual experiences and processing needs, and is presented below (Hyland, 2005:49):

Interactive metadiscourse

<u>Sub-categories</u>	<u>Functions</u>	<u>Extracts</u>
Transitions	express relations between main clauses	in addition; but
Frame Markers	refer to discourse acts, sequences or stages	finally; to conclude
Endophoric Markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	noted above; see Fig.
Evidentials	refer to information from other texts	X argues; Z states
Code Glosses	elaborate propositional meanings	namely; e.g.; such as

Interactional metadiscourse

Hedges	withhold commitment and open dialogue	might; perhaps;
Boosters	emphasize certainty or close dialogue	in fact; definitely
Attitude Markers	express writer's attitude to proposition	unfortunately; I agree
Self Mentions	explicit reference to author(s)	I; me; we (exclusive)
Engagement Markers	explicitly build relationship with reader	consider; you

The reflexive model includes two types of metadiscourse, Metatext and Writer-reader Interaction, and is shown below (Ädel, 2010:83):

Metatext

Metalinguistic comments	Repairing, Reformulating, Commenting on Linguistic Form/Meaning, Clarifying, Managing Terminology
Discourse organization -- topic management	Introducing Topic, Delimiting Topic, Adding to Topic, Concluding Topic, Marking Asides, Enumerating
Discourse organization -- phorics management	Endophoric Marking, Previewing, Reviewing, Contextualizing
Speech act labels	Arguing, Exemplifying, Other Speech Act Labelling

Audience Interaction

References to the audience	Managing Comprehension/Channel, Managing Audience Discipline, Anticipating the Audience's Response, Managing the Message, Imagining Scenarios
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The notion of different text reference or boundary results in the exclusion from the more restrictive reflexive model of Evidentials, Hedges, Boosters, and Attitude Markers which are all taken to be metadiscursive in the interpersonal model. Evidentials is excluded as it explicitly refers to information from other texts; the other three are excluded because, according to Ädel (2006:39), they express the writer's feelings, judgements or attitudes as an “opinionated persona in the ‘real world’”.

These two models have been used extensively in research interrogating the way the writer guides, interacts, and persuades the reader in such various fields as academic, business, journalism, and politics. The reflexive model has been drawn upon mainly in the study of English discourse produced by L2 learners (Ädel, 2006; Noble, 2010) and of research articles of different disciplines (Salas, 2015). The interpersonal model, unlike the reflexive model, has seen its application to a wider range of genres including academic genres (Bruce, 2010; Gillaerts and Van de Velde, 2010; Hong and Cao, 2014; Lee and Deakin, 2016), business genres (Hyland, 1998), journalistic genres (Dafouz-Milne, 2008), and political genres (Guillem, 2009).

The above studies have undoubtedly made significant contributions to the various fields and professions by allowing their members not only to understand more thoroughly the discourse they need to work with/on frequently and regularly, but also to produce such discourse in a more effective manner. The application of the knowledge discovered or advanced by these studies, however, is not unproblematic. One may find it difficult in making meaningful comparison between the findings obtained using the two different models. It is common to see studies adopting the interpersonal model report the use of a considerably larger number of metadiscourse markers than those using the reflexive model. For example, the number of occurrence per 1000 words reported was between 19.4 and 49.1 in Hyland (1998) and between 2.6 and 7.5 in Ädel (2006). Such a

large difference is probably a natural consequence of the different ways adopted by these two models in delimiting the concept of metadiscourse. The reflexive model is a more restrictive one including only those categories that strictly concern the evolving text, whereas the interpersonal model is comparatively less restrictive and includes categories which refer to information in another text (Evidentials) and express the writer's stance (Hedges, Boosters, and Attitude Markers).

The present study adopts a position which basically aligns with either model in that it emphasizes language reflexivity so metadiscourse is taken to concern only text-internal relations on one hand, and is interpersonal in nature on the other. It therefore uses a model of metadiscourse by making slight adaptation to the two prevalent ones -- it models upon mainly Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse except that it excludes Evidentials which is unarguably text external. The stance markers are included as the writer could indeed initiate interaction with the reader who, when presented with the stance, will naturally be in a position to respond to it as they may find the expressed judgements sound or unsound, and the attitudes reasonable or unreasonable. They may also be aroused emotionally by the feelings expressed.

3. Methodology

3.1. *The data*

There were two types of data in the study: responses posted on TripAdvisor and opinions of reviewers (i.e. the dissatisfied customers who left the negative comments on TripAdvisor) about the effectiveness of the hotel management's response.

On the TripAdvisor website, we can see five groups of popular tourist destinations: (1) China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau; (2) Japan and Korea; (3) Southeast Asia; (4) European cities; and (5) Top destinations. The present paper only discusses the responses given by hotels in the first three groups.² The responses were collected via the following procedures:

1. The first 10 destinations of each of the three regions were chosen, giving a total of 30 destinations;
2. From each of these 30 cities, four hotels -- the first one listed under each of the star ratings used by TripAdvisor, i.e. from 2-star to 5-star, were chosen, giving a total of 120 hotels;
3. The 15 latest reviews of each of the Terrible, Poor, and Average reviews were collected (these three categories of reviews were collected as they usually contain negative comments, as observed by Ho (2017a, b)). The number of responses to be examined for each hotel should then be $15 \times 3 = 45$, giving a total of 5400 responses;
4. However, not every review received a response from the hotel management and the actual number of valid responses collected was 4256.

The reviewers' opinions about the effectiveness of the management's response were collected via the following procedures:

1. The customers who left the 4256 negative reviews were contacted and sent a questionnaire via

- the link located at the end of the review -- “Ask XX about YY Hotel Beijing”, a new feature provided by TripAdvisor, as shown in Fig. 1;
- The questionnaire consisted of four parts: (a) instructions; (b) the actual comment posted on TripAdvisor; (c) the actual response given by the management of the hotel concerned, and (d) questions (9 altogether). The questions required the participants to respond by first indicating their opinion on a 5-point Likert Scale and second providing further comment (except the last one which only requires written comment), if any;
 - Only five reviewers expressed interest in participating in the research; however, none of them had returned the questionnaire;

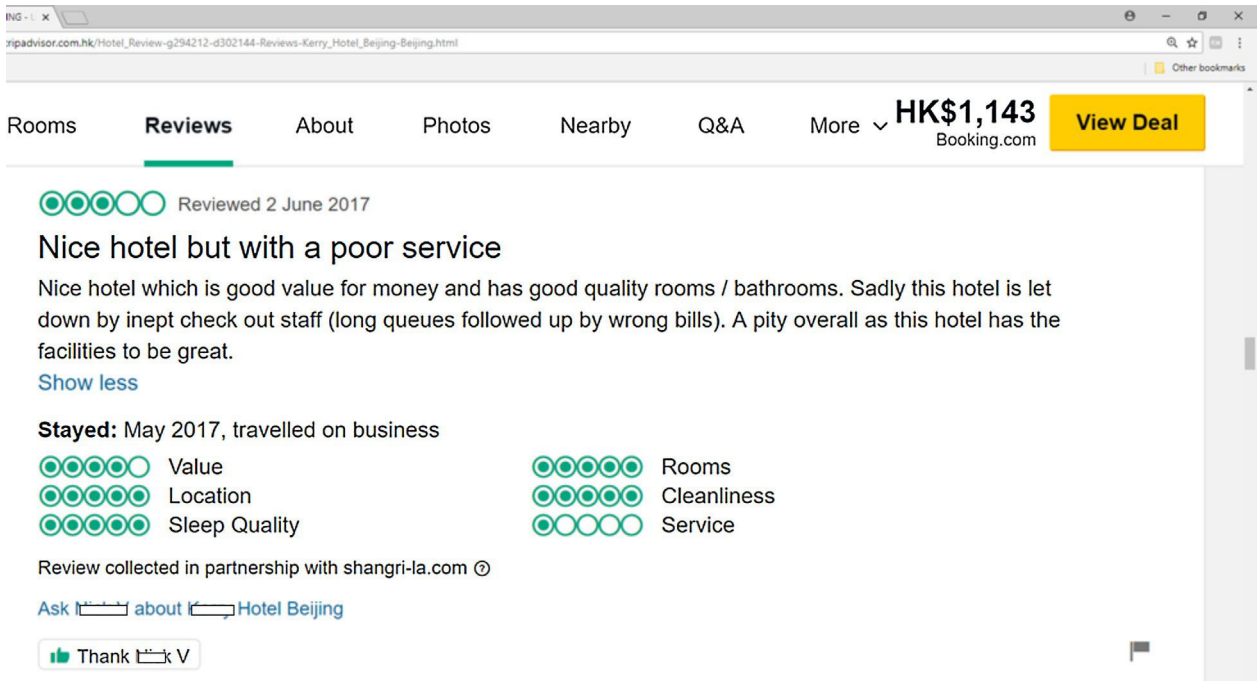


Fig. 1. Screenshot of a TripAdvisor review.

- Respondents were then recruited via convenience, purposive sampling -- individuals with whom the author was well acquainted with, had rich travel experience (at least 5 trips in the past 5 years) and some experience looking for accommodation services using travel websites (at least 10 times in the past 5 years) were approached and requested to participate in the research;
- A total of 156 individuals were approached and simulating the original research design, each of them was sent a unique questionnaire -- one contained a unique review-response pair;
- The questionnaire was modified slightly in that the following clause was added and highlighted -- Imagine you were the dissatisfied customer who wrote the review (a sample questionnaire is attached in Appendix A);
- To compensate for the lack of input from the actual reviewers who could readily understand the reviews and responses, and naturally find themselves in a position to evaluate the responses, the researcher briefed each of the 156 individuals on the objectives of the research, their role in the

- research, and the importance of their contribution via telephone conversation, face-to-face discussion, or email;
8. The number of returned questionnaires was 132, and 108 of them were properly completed and therefore valid;
 9. The 108 valid questionnaires were divided into three groups:
 - (a) Clearly Effective (CE): contained 30 questionnaires whose questions only received either a “4” or “5” numerical response on the Likert Scale;
 - (b) Clearly Ineffective (CI): contained 38 questionnaires whose questions only received either a “1” or “2” numerical response on the Likert Scale; and
 - (c) Undetermined Effectiveness (UE): contained the remaining 40 questionnaires whose questions received various numerical responses on the Likert Scale.

3.2. *Data analysis*

As the main aim of this paper is to interrogate the effectiveness of the management's responses in terms of rapport management and persuasiveness from the reviewers' perspective by analyzing their opinions and reactions upon reading the responses, strictly speaking, only the responses contained in the valid CE and CI questionnaires were relevant. To answer the two research questions -- to identify the characteristic strategies of rapport management and persuasion of effective responses, the responses of an equal number of questionnaires taken from CE and CI were analyzed. As the numbers of questionnaires in CE and CI were respectively 30 and 38, it was decided that a total of 60 questionnaires would be analyzed -- 30 from each group. Eight of the CI questionnaires were then randomly taken away and excluded from the study. The number of words of 30 responses of the CE group was 4773, giving an average of 159 words per response; and respective figures of the CI group were 4555 and 152. Both groups contained responses written by hotels of all the four star ratings, that is, from 2-star to 5-star.

The hotel management's responses were analyzed using Nvivo12, a powerful software for conducting qualitative analysis, in order to reveal the move structures and pattern of use of metadiscourse of the genre. Steps were taken to maximize the efficiency and accuracy of the identification of the moves and tokens of metadiscourse. First, the analysis adopted a top-down approach based on the move structures in Ho (2017a, b) and the list of potential metadiscourse tokens suggested by Hyland (2005:218--224). Second, the analysis also used a bottom-up approach -- the responses were read carefully to identify any move that had not yet been accounted for or any metadiscourse tokens that were not included in the list. Third, inter-rater reliability was achieved by having two raters (one being the author himself and the other a master's degree holder in linguistics) analyze 10% of the responses selected randomly in order to work out and agree upon a set of criteria for identifying moves and metadiscourse tokens. The two raters then analyzed the rest of the data independently and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

The analysis of the questionnaire responses belonging to CE and CI served to find out what dissatisfied customers preferred the hotel management to do or what they thought the hotel management should do through the response on the one hand, and what they thought the hotel management should not do on the other. The responses were content analyzed to identify the recurrent themes emerged by both raters.

4. The move structure of the review response genre

4.1. *The moves identified*

A total of eight moves were identified from a move analysis of the 60 responses.³ The rhetorical functions and rapport management orientation (enhancing or damaging) of these moves are shown below (an extract from the data is also provided to illustrate the linguistic realization of each of the moves; a complete response showing its component moves is shown in Appendix B):

Move 1: Acknowledging Problem

It acknowledges the existence of the problem the reviewer has described in the comment, and comprises 7 sub-moves

-- Admit or Indicate Awareness of Problem, Apologize, Apologize Conditionally, Ask for Forgiveness, Empathize, Explain Cause of Problem, and Rectify. These sub-moves can enhance rapport as they can fulfil the reviewer's interactional goals that probably include, among others, receiving an apology, getting an explanation for the occurrence of the problem, and being informed of the action taken to address the issue raised.

Extract 1

Regarding the internet problem, the hotel has realized as well.

Move 2: Continuing Relationship

It invites the reviewer to maintain correspondence with the hotel management or return to the hotel in future. It enhances rapport by managing the sociality rights -- association rights in this case -- of the reviewer.

Extract 2

It would be great if I can get in touch with you in person ...

Move 3: Denying Problem

It functions to deny explicitly or implicitly the existence of the problem described in the reviewer's comment, and comprises 7 sub-moves: Attribute Responsibility to 3rd Party, Challenge Reviewer's Decision/Judgment, Disagree with Reviewer, Emphasize Hotel's Practices/Mission/Facilities/Services/Plans, Frame Problem as Isolated Incident, Rebut, and Suggest/Recommend.⁴ The move is rapport damaging as it ignores the reviewer's interactional goals (as listed under Move 2) and threatens his/her face.

Extract 3

I would like to assure you that this was certainly not the case.

Move 4: Expressing Feelings

It expresses the hotel manager's positive/negative feelings or wishes. It is rapport enhancing as expressing one's feelings and emotions can show one's willingness to disclose oneself and to be close to one's interlocutor. In other words, the reviewer's sociality rights -- association rights -- is managed.

Extract 4

I'm very happy to hear you enjoyed ...

Move 5: Greeting

It addresses and greets the reviewer directly, drawing him/her into the discourse and closer to the hotel manager. The reviewer's sociality rights -- association rights -- is managed and hence rapport can be enhanced.

Extract 5

Dear XXX/Greetings from ...

Move 6: Recognizing Reviewer's/Comment's Value

It shows the reviewer that the hotel values him/her as a customer or his/her comments. It acknowledges openly the reviewer's importance/status/opinions, fulfilling his/her face wants and is therefore rapport enhancing.

Extract 6

Thank you for your valuable comment

Move 7: Self Promoting

It serves to promote the services, facilities or image of the hotel. Similar to Denying Problem, it completely ignores the reviewer's interactional goals but just focuses on the management's -- to use the occasion as a platform for marketing the hotel. It is thus rapport-damaging.

Extract 7

Our property is perfect match not only for family but also for couples ...

Move 8: Thanking Reviewer

It shows the hotel's gratitude and appreciation for the comments the reviewer has written or the reviewer's decision to stay in the hotel. It is rapport enhancing as it manages the reviewer's face by acknowledging his/her effort and contribution, or by appreciating the reviewer's decisions.

The following serves to illustrate the differences between 3 of the 7 sub-moves of Denying Problem:

a) Challenge Reviewer's Decision/Judgement

Function: This sub-move serves to point out that the reviewer had not done what s/he should have. Example: In this case, if you had contacted our reservation team in advance, definitely we will find out solution that is best fit for you and for us, but for this situation we heard of nothing at all.

Note: The hotel manager was challenging the reviewer's decision/judgement which was not to contact the reservation team in advance.

b) Disagree with Reviewer

Function: It serves simply to express disagreement or denial in a straightforward manner and no evidence was provided to back up the disagreement or denial.

Example: The one asked you was our F&B staff. He was not lazy actually.

Note: The hotel manager was simply saying that the food and beverage staff member was not lazy without giving any evidence.

c) Rebut

Function: To deny the allegation with evidence. Example: We surely did have the information of your bookings that are made through 2 different online agencies. First booking is made for stay during the night of 5--7 January, and the second booking is made with the other agency on 7--8 January for total 3 nights stay. Note: The manager was denying the allegation that the hotel had failed to process the reviewer's booking properly by providing evidence -- the actual dates and number of nights the reviewer had booked accommodation for.

Extract 8

Thank you for sharing with us your comments.

Similar studies investigating hotel management's responses to negative reviews have recorded different results in terms of the number of moves identified. Eight of the 10 moves identified in Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) study of Chinese hotels' responses were directly comparable to five of the those identified in the present study, as shown below:

Moves in Zhang and Vásquez (2014)	Moves (sub-moves) in the present study
1. Express Gratitude	1. Thanking Reviewer
2. Opening Pleasantries	2. Greeting
3. Avoidance of Recurring Problems Incident)	3. Denying Problem (Frame Problem as Isolated
4. Invitation for a Second Visit	4. Continuing Relationship
5. Solicit Response	
6. Apologize for Sources of Problem	5. Acknowledging Problem
7. Acknowledge Complaints/Feedback	(Apologize)
8. Proof of Action	(Admit or Indicate Awareness of Problem)(Rectify)

The differences observed could be attributed to two aspects of the assignment of discourse units to moves. One aspect concerned the level of delicacy of the assignment. While the present study subsumed discourse units performing a similar rhetorical function (the sub-moves) under a broader umbrella category (the move), Zhang and Vásquez (2014) let these sub-moves stand alone as integral moves by themselves. The other aspect concerned the criteria for the assignment. Two moves in Zhang and Vásquez (2014) were not regarded as directly comparable to those in the present study: Refer to Customer Reviews and Closing Pleasantries. The first one, depending on its context, was regarded as Acknowledging Problem, Denying Problem, or Self Promoting in the present study. The second one was either not regarded as a move when it was mechanically realized as formulaic expressions like “Best/Best wishes/Best regards”, or regarded as Expressing Feelings (wishes).

4.2. Reviewers' preferences

A content analysis of the reviewers' responses to the open-ended questions phrased as "Further comment" in the questionnaire allowed us to see the reviewers' preferences -- what actions performed by the hotel management in the responses pleased or displeased them. Table 1 summarizes the reviewers' preferences and shows how they are related to the three bases of rapport.

Table 2 shows a summary of the moves identified together with the corresponding actions performed by the management (only the numbers are shown, e.g. P1/DP2), their rapport management orientation (enhancing or damaging), and their abundance in CE and CI in terms of the percentage of responses containing these moves. It also shows whether these moves were preferred by the reviewers or not.

We can see that the actions that pleased or displeased the reviewers (as translated into the corresponding rapport-enhancing or rapport-damaging moves), rather interestingly, were not confined to either groups (CE or CI) of responses.

Table 1
Reviewers'
preferences.

Bases of rapport	What reviewers preferred	What reviewers dispreferred
Face	P1. Showed gratitude P2. Showed empathy/understanding P3. Valued reviewer and/or his/her comment	DP1. Blamed reviewer for (in)directly causing the problem
Sociality rights and obligations	P4. Built relationship with reviewer P5. Sounded sincere and genuine	
Interactional goals	P6. Apologized for the unpleasant experience P7. Explained why the problem occurred P8. Rectified the problem or promised to do so	DP2. Did not apologize DP3. Did not rectify the problem DP4. Denied the problem DP5. Sounded defensive DP6. Promoted the hotel

Table 2
Move structures of hotel management's responses.

Moves	Corresponding actions	Rapport orientation	Preferred (√) or not (×)	Abundance	
				CE	CI
Acknowledging Problem	P2, 6, 7 & 8	Enhancing	√	78%	63%
Continuing Relationship	P4	Enhancing	√	27%	40%
Denying Problem	DP 4 & 5	Damaging	×	78%	97%
Expressing Feelings	P5	Enhancing	√	100%	97%
Greeting	P5	Enhancing	√	7%	0%
Recognizing Reviewer's/Comment's Value	P3	Enhancing	√	33%	23%
Self Promoting	DP6	Damaging	×	30%	30%
Thanking Reviewer	P1	Enhancing	√	80%	87%

Reviewers also rated those responses containing preferred actions (i.e. rapport enhancing moves) as ineffective -- P2, 6, 7 and 8 (realized as Acknowledging Problem), P4 (realized as Continuing Relationship), P5 (realized as either Expressing Feelings or Greeting), P3 (realized as Recognizing Reviewer's/Comment's Value), and P1 (realized as Thanking Reviewer). Similarly, they also rated those responses containing dispreferred actions (i.e. rapport damaging moves) as effective -- DP 4 and 5 (realized as Denying Problem), and DP6 (realized as Self Promoting). Notwithstanding this seemingly inconsistent or even contradictory evaluation by the reviewers, what seemed to be the distinguishing factor between CE and CI responses was probably the relative frequencies of use of moves. Effective responses contained a higher frequency (15% higher) of use of Acknowledging Problem -- a rapport enhancing move realizing the most preferred actions (four in total). Previous studies have identified similar moves -- Explanation, Redress, Justification -- as components of effective responses (Sparks and Fredline, 2007; Yavas et al., 2004). Ineffective responses, on the other hand, contained a higher frequency (21% higher) of use of Denying Problem -- a rapport damaging move realizing the most dispreferred actions (two in total). Rather surprisingly, denial has not yet been associated with the effectiveness of the management response in previous studies. It has, however, only been reported to be a characteristic of responses written by low-ranked hotels (Sparks and Bradley, 2017).

The observed inconsistency and contradiction could also be attributed to the mutual dilution or even offsetting of the desirable effects of rapport enhancing moves and the undesirable effects of rapport damaging moves used in the same response. That is, the undesirable effects of Denying Problem may have diluted or even offset completely the desirable effects of Continuing Relationship, prompting the reviewer to rate the response as ineffective (every one of the 12 ineffective responses that contained Continuing Relationship also contained Denying Problem). Similarly, the desirable effect of Acknowledging Problem may have diluted or even offset completely the undesirable effect of Denying Problem, prompting the reviewer to rate the response as effective (18 of the 23 effective responses that contained Denying Problem also contained at least one count of Acknowledging Problem; the remaining five contained multiple counts of other rapport enhancing moves).

Another interesting observation that deserves further attention is the heavy presence of probably the most dispreferred move Denying Problem in both effective and ineffective responses -- denial was mentioned by the largest number of questionnaire respondents as an unsatisfactory hotel management's action. The move recorded a frequency of occurrence as high as 78% even in the CE responses. This remarkable abundance provided support to the claim that Denying Problem was necessary as it could serve to (1) clarify misunderstandings that the dissatisfied customers

might have when the denial was done explicitly with the sub-move Rebut or Disagree with Reviewer, and (2) promote the hotel when the denial was done implicitly with the sub-move Emphasize Hotel's Practices/Mission/Facilities/Services/Plans (Ho, 2017b).

The fact that only 30 per cent of the responses in either the CE or CI category contained Self Promoting should also warrant our further attention. In view of the importance of a hotel's online reputation, one may expect its management to include the move highlighting the niche and specialty of its services and facilities more often in its responses to online reviews. The unexpectedly low frequency of use of the move could be attributed to the novelty of the genre. The review response genre has a short history -- its emergence only followed naturally and logically the travelers' increasing reliance on TripAdvisor (and other travel websites) which was caused and catalyzed by the recent rapid advance in and effective penetration of information technology. The genre -- its communicative purposes, move structure, and discourse -- is probably still undergoing the process of maturation and conventionalization. This yet-to-be mature and conventionalized feature of the genre has also been observed in studies which reported the inclusion of different rhetorical moves in the genre (Levy et al., 2013; Sparks and Bradley, 2017; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014). It is therefore a natural consequence for the hotel management not being fully aware of the potential functions and purposes the genre could serve and thus not having made the best use of the genre in promoting its hotels by including Self Promoting in its responses to negative comments.

Table 3
Frequency of use of metadiscourse.

	CE	CI
Interactive metadiscourse		
Transitions	68/24/2.8	31/17/1.8
Frame Markers	13/7/1.9	19/6/3.2
Endophoric Markers	0	0
Code Glosses	7/6/1.2	2/2/1
Interactional metadiscourse		
Hedges	39/17/2.3	43/19/2.3
Boosters	48/20/2.4	34/16/2.1
Attitude Markers	11/8/1.4	9/9/1
Self Mentions	121/30/4	100/28/3.6
Engagement Markers	101/30/3.4	76/29/2.6

5. Pattern of use of metadiscourse in review response genre

The frequencies of use of the different categories of metadiscourse are shown in Table 3. The raw frequency of each category is presented along with its collective abundance (the number of responses containing that category) and separate abundance (the number of such category per response) as in: raw frequency/collective abundance/separate abundance.

Four observations need further discussion: (1) the higher frequency of use of six metadiscourse categories in CE (Transitions, Code Glosses, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mentions, and Engagement Markers); (2) the higher frequency of use of only one category -- Frame Markers -- in CI; (3) the similar frequency of use of Hedges in both CE and CI; and (4) the absence of Endophoric Markers in both CE and CI.

5.1. Metadiscourse use pattern in CE responses

Two sets of figures in Table 3 suggest that the perceived effectiveness of a response was associated with the collective abundance and separate abundance. Seven metadiscourse categories recorded a difference of at least 10 percent in either set of figures between the effective and ineffective responses, with six of them recording a higher frequency in CE and one in CI. Transitions, Code Glosses, and Boosters appeared considerably more frequently in CE in terms of both collective and separate abundance -- 24 vs 17 & 2.8 vs 1.8 for Transitions; 6 vs 2 & 1.2 vs 1 for Code Glosses; and 20 vs 16 & 2.4 vs 2.1 for Boosters. Attitude Markers, Self Mentions and Engagement Markers appeared considerably more frequently in CE in terms of separate abundance only -- 1.4 vs 1 for Attitude Markers; 4 vs 3.6 for Self Mentions; 3.4 vs 2.6 for Engagement Markers.

Transitions, reported as a highly preferred metadiscourse device in argumentative or persuasive writings (e.g. Li and Wharton, 2012; Hyland and Tse, 2004), showed the reviewers explicitly the logic of the discourse development in the managers' responses; and Code Glosses facilitated the reviewers' understanding by taking into account their needs, understandings, and existing knowledge (Hyland, 2007). Thus, both took away the burden of interpretation from the reviewers, maximizing their appreciation for the rationality of the managers and/or the responses. Extracts 9 and 10 below show the use of these two metadiscourse categories (the metadiscourse tokens are highlighted in these two extracts and all the others that follow).

Extract 9 illustrates the manager's use of the Transitions token, *however*, in his attempt to emphasize the hotel's effort to rectify the issue raised by the reviewer.

Extract 9

You'll find that this information is indeed stated on our Hotel website and all our on line travel business partners are aware of the policy, however will definitely review the content as it might not explicit enough to guests booking.

The manager in the first sentence attempted to defend by mentioning that some relevant information was indeed available to the reviewer. He then dropped the defensive orientation and switched to one which should be more desirable and pleasant to the reviewer -- the rectification that the hotel would perform. The switch was signaled clearly by the Transition token, *however*.

With a token of Code Glosses, the manager in Extract 10 was introducing the hotel's services that the reviewer could have used during the stay.

Extract 10

We offer a more private outlet -- Club Lounge on our 26th floor, which is a perfect place for leisure customers and where you can also enjoy different privileges such as five meal presentations, in-room check-in, etc.

Boosters helped the managers to exude certainty to establish/reinforce authority, allowing them to make credibility appeals. Attitude Markers expressed the managers' attitude and feelings to events/objects explicitly, allowing them to make appeals to the reviewers' emotion. Extracts 11

and 12 show how these metadiscourse could make credibility and affective appeals.

Extract 11

For the issue of taxi hiring, please be informed that taxi can NOT be booked in Macau . . .

In response to the reviewer's complaint about the hotel's inability to make any taxi booking for him/her, the manager emphasized his knowledge of the taxi hiring system in Macau and thus his authority in the tourism industry with a capitalized *NOT*.

In Extract 12, the manager was responding to a complaint about the hotel restaurant's inability to provide vegetarian cuisine even though prior request had been made.

Extract 12

It is unfortunate that the organizer had inadvertently left your name off the list even though you had, in fact, conveyed your request for vegetarian meals when you registered for the conference.

The manager shows empathy by expressing his own feelings with the Attitude Marker *unfortunate* towards the situation in which the reviewer was in.

Self Mentions reminded reviewers of the presence of the manager in the text, together with the use of Boosters or Attitude Markers, the credibility and emotional appeals could be strengthened. Engagement Markers drew the reviewers directly into the text, making them participants of the discourse and thus allowing the managers to interact with them as “readers qua readers” (Ädel, 2006:19). The frequent use of Self Mentions and Engagement Markers could lead to a high degree of “writer/reader visibility” (Hong and Cao, 2014:217) which could amplify the affective appeals made. Extracts 13 and 14 illustrate the use of Self Mentions and Engagement Markers.

Extract 13 (Self Mention emboldened, Attitude Marker underlined)

I am very happy to hear you enjoyed your stay and value for money concept.

The use of the Self Mention *I* emphasized the manager's feeling expressed with the Attitude Marker -- very happy. The feeling could have been expressed in a more objective manner without the subjective presence of the manager as in “It is very pleasing to hear you . . .”

Extract 14 shows that after apologizing for the unacceptable situation the reviewer had experienced, the manager at the end of the response expressed eagerness to welcome the reviewer back and to meet with him/her personally during his/her future stay in the hotel.

Extract 14 (Engagement Marker emboldened, Self Mention underlined)

We look forward to restoring your confidence -- without exception -- during that stay and if you have time I would very much like to meet you personally.

The reviewer was drawn into the discourse three times in a row in this short extract, strengthening considerably first the manager's eagerness to right the wrong and to meet with the reviewer, and second the affective appeals thus made. In view of the desirable effect that these six metadiscourse categories could have on strengthening the appeals to rationality, credibility, and emotion, it is not surprising to see a considerably higher frequency of use of them in the CE responses.

5.2. Metadiscourse use pattern in CI responses

What characterizes the CI responses most distinctly is probably Frame Markers -- it was the only metadiscourse category that recorded a higher separate abundance in CI than CE, 3.2 vs 1.9. This high abundance suggests a strong association between Frame Markers and ineffective responses. Our analysis shows that three sub-types of Frame Markers were used: Sequence, Announce Goal, and Goal. Sequence functioned to present information on a list to explain why the complaints were not justified; Announce Goal functioned to let the reviewer know the manager was going to perform an act that the former might regard as undesirable; and Goal followed immediately Announce Goal functioning to make explicit what the undesirable act was. Extracts 15 and 16 illustrate the use of these three types of Frame Markers. Extract 15 shows the use of Sequence in listing the two options the hotel had given the reviewer during his/her stay.

Extract 15 (Frame Markers -- Sequence) We regretted your request and considering your unpleasant experience; we have offered you two options: (1) Continue staying with Hotel A Guangzhou with the price agreed upon check-in. (2) Offer you the first night room rate complimentary and arrange hotel limousine deliver you to any hotel in Guangzhou you desire.

You have accepted our option 1 but four hours later you came back and altered to option 2, and we were still generous enough and exempted your room rate for 1.5 days and free of charge limousine service to another hotel in Guangzhou.

The manager in Extract 16 was denying the problem by clarifying that the blood stain as reported by the reviewer was in fact a rusty stain.

Extract 16 (Frame Markers -- Announce Goal [emboldened] & Goal [italicized]) Regarding the bedsheet, one stain in an invisible corner and has been inserted into the bed mattress was found by you, I would like to *clarify* that it was a rusty stain and not blood stain with only 0.2 mm in dimension.

While metadiscourse research has established that Frame Markers usually perform desirable acts in a text such as helping the writer to signal shifts in discussion topics to the reader (e.g. Ho and Li, 2018; Hyland, 2004; Bruce, 2010), the present study, however, found that Frame Markers in the hotel management's responses typically served to perform an act which the readers did not desire at all -- denial. This typical association between Frame Markers and the discursive act of denying might be a reason why those responses containing this metadiscourse category were rated as ineffective. This highlights the importance of the actual pragmatic function metadiscourse serves rather than simply the quantity of metadiscourse use -- using the device to signal or even highlight a potentially undesirable act may undermine the persuasive effort made by the writer.

5.3. The use of Hedges and Endophoric Markers

The category Hedges showed almost no difference in abundance between CE and CI, suggesting that the managers showed a high consistency in their tendency to show reservation about their judgements and assessments. This should not be surprising as the managers' decision to withhold commitment or to signal to the reviewers' their willingness to entertain alternative viewpoints is

a way to establish their credibility and character (Hyland, 2005). Using Hedges for persuasion purposes has been observed frequently in both academic context (e.g. Hong and Cao, 2014; Lee and Deakin, 2016) and non-academic context (e.g. Ho, 2016; Fu, 2012). Extracts 17 and 18 illustrate how the managers used Hedges to withhold commitment or show willingness to entertain alternative viewpoints. The manager in Extract 17 refrained from committing himself or the hotel fully to arranging a room change for the customer, and the one in Extract 18 was sensitive enough that the reviewer might not have the awareness mentioned.

Extract 17 (taken from CE)

To ensure a comfortable and cozy stay for all our guests, we would be happy to arrange room change on high floor and face away from the construction site to minimize the noise level.

Extract 18 (taken from CI)

As you might also be aware Butterfly on Wellington as a contemporary select-service hotel. Hotels like us even in other part of the world, some are also offered without a proper restaurant and bar.

Endophoric Markers were not used in either group of responses, indicating that the managers did not find it necessary to guide the readers by referring to information in other parts of the responses. This could be attributed to the relatively short average length of the responses -- 159 for CE and 152 for CI, presenting little or no problem to the readers to locate the necessary information in the text themselves even when such a need arose. A very low frequency of use of Endophoric Markers has been reported in studies of academic writing (Ho and Li, 2018; Li and Wharton, 2012).

6. Conclusion

The present study, being a part of an ongoing large-scale project which aims to achieve a thorough understanding of the review response genre, has attempted to tap into customers' perception of the effectiveness of the rapport management and persuasive strategies used in the review response genre. Rapport management strategies were conceptualized as the moves present in the responses and persuasive strategies as the making of appeals to rationality, credibility, and emotion with metadiscourse.

The findings showed there were some similarities between effective and ineffective responses in the aspects of move structure and metadiscourse use pattern. These two groups of responses, however, also exhibited distinguishable characteristics in both aspects. In terms of move structure, effective responses were characterized by a higher frequency of use of the rapport enhancing move Acknowledging Problem. Previous research has also reported heavy reliance on this move by hotels in their effective service recovery attempts (Sparks and Fredline, 2007; Yavas et al., 2004). This move corresponded to the respondents' desired actions and allowed the managers to enhance rapport by managing the respondents' face wants (through showing empathy/understanding) or fulfilling the respondents' interactional goals (through apologizing for the unpleasant experience, explaining why the problem occurred, and rectifying the problem

orpromising to do so).

In terms of metadiscourse use pattern, effective responses contained more Transitions, Code Glosses, Boosters, Attitude Markers, Self Mentions, and Engagement Markers. The higher frequency of use of these metadiscourse categories contributed to the making of appeals to rationality, emotion, and credibility and character, which subsequently made the response more persuasive. Previous research studying metadiscourse use in such genres as academic writing, advertisements, and policy documents have generally found a positive correlation between the use of metadiscourse and the persuasiveness of the text (e.g. Afros and Schryer, 2009; Fu, 2012; Guillem, 2009; Intaraprawat and Steffensen, 1995).

The ineffective responses were characterized by a higher frequency of use of the rapport damaging move Denying Problem and the metadiscourse category Frame Markers. The move Denying Problem corresponded to the actions not desired by the respondents, leading to the damaging of rapport by threatening the respondents' face (as the truth value of the respondents' comments was undermined openly) or ignoring their interactional goals (as the respondents did not get what they wanted, like an apology or explanation). Notwithstanding the rapport damaging effect of Denying Problem, earlier studies of hotel management's responses have also recorded a high frequency of use of Denying Problem (Ho, 2017a, b; Sparks and Bradley, 2017), suggesting that this move could indeed strengthen the responses by clarifying misunderstandings and even promoting the hotels especially when the move was realized implicitly.

The higher abundance of Frame Markers in each of the ineffective responses containing this metadiscourse category had the effect of highlighting the undesirable actions, thus maximizing the dissatisfaction the reviewers might experience. The importance of looking beyond the quantity of metadiscourse use has also been emphasized in a metadiscourse study of first-year university students' academic writing (Ho and Li, 2018).

The present study has made methodological and practical contributions. Methodologically, it has added a new dimension to the research in the effectiveness of hotel management's responses (e.g. Sparks et al., 2016; Sparks and Fredline, 2007; Yavas et al., 2004) by approaching the problem from the customers' perspective using two types of authentic data that complemented each other. Practically, through analyzing the move structure and metadiscourse use of the review response genre, it has identified the characteristic rapport management and persuasive strategies of effective hotel management responses. The study can therefore benefit practitioners of the hospitality industry as they can draw upon these linguistic resources and strategies when drafting responses to online comments.

The study, despite its methodological insights, still needs to address three issues concerning its data. First, only five of the more than 4000 reviewers had expressed willingness to complete the questionnaire used in the study and none of these five had returned the questionnaire. One possible reason for this unsatisfactory situation could be the time lag between the posting of the response and the making of the contact. The time lag recorded in the study ranged from three weeks to the longest half a year. The reviewers might no longer be keen to be involved. The second issue concerns the sample size. The study has only analyzed the questionnaire responses given by 60 individuals only, with 30 of them rated the response as clearly effective, and the other 30 clearly ineffective. While such a sample size was adequate for a comprehensive qualitative analysis, it did not allow the researcher to conduct a quantitative analysis which could yield statistical results indicating the significance of the differences observed between the two groups of responses. The third issue concerns the choice of hotels. As the star-rating of a hotel may be associated with the clientele the hotel is designed for, the negative comments made by the dissatisfied customers and

thus the responses to such comments may exhibit some features that were characteristic of the star-rating of the hotels concerned. The present paper analyzed the responses without categorizing them according to the rating of the hotels which produced them, thus rendering it not possible to detect any such characteristic features of hotels of different star-ratings. Future research could therefore can contact the reviewer as soon as the response is posted, enlarge the sample size to such an extent that meaningful statistical analyses could be carried out, and collect responses produced by a larger number of hotels of different star- ratings, and categorize them according to the star-ratings of the hotels for analysis.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Vincy Zhang for the assistance provided at different stages of this paper. This work was supported by the General Research Fund (Grant number: 1560066/17H) provided by the Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2018.10.004>.

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