
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pragmatic Functions of Move Structures in Online Chinese Hotel Complaint Responses

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ABSTRACT

The paper employs genre analysis to investigate the pragmatic functions of complaint responses of five-star hotels in China. The study first summarizes the move structures of complaint responses at the macro level and then explores the realization process of the main moves on the communicative purpose. Based on previous studies and data analysis, there are four moves and fourteen sub-moves in complaint responses. Grounding the theoretical framework of rapport management, the study identifies the relation-oriented, task-oriented, and promotion-oriented functions of moves in Chinese hotel complaint responses. Besides, this paper compares the differences between various functions to summarize the response strategies suitable for Chinese hotels. Overall, the present study sets up a more comprehensive move framework of online business complaint responses, which can help to strengthen the interpretation of consumer complaints and provide references for enhancing customer satisfaction and maintaining a harmonious relationship with customers.

KEYWORDS

Complaint responses; genre analysis; moves; rapport management; pragmatic functions

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1. Introduction

The prevalence of online reviews provides an opportunity for interaction between customers and companies. This openness magnifies the effect of customers' feedback (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015). However, for the development of hotels, negative online reviews will also lead companies to fall into an image crisis (Ho, 2018), affecting users' consumption decisions. Therefore, how to construct the discourse structure of complaint responses and organize the content has gradually become a worthwhile topic. In the hotel industry, influenced by the characteristics of production with consumption and many service procedures (Zhang, 2005), hotels are more likely to face customer complaints than other kinds of enterprises. According to the national star hotels survey in the third quarter of 2022, nearly half of the hotels in China failed to pass the review by the Provincial Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Ministry of Culture And Tourism of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Thus, the hotel's responses to customer complaints face many challenges.

Under the fierce competition and strict requirements of the hotel industry, service quality has become one of the core competencies on which the hotel depends (Xing *et al.*, 2022). Complaint handling is the basis of quality service (Hart *et al.*, 1990), and service-oriented enterprises need to fully understand the importance of customer complaints, making the management work systematic and standardized in order to take the initiative in the fierce competition (Fan, 2002). Scholars conduct research on complaint handling from different perspectives, such as applying multiple regression analysis and testing the factors that affect customers' satisfaction during the complaint-handling process (Wang, 2013). Combining moves in the hotel complaint response, the regulation and response to online comments are found to have a positive impact on service quality and customer confidence (Levy *et al.*, 2013). However, there is still a lack of research on the type of complaint responses, especially for Chinese hotels, which

is not conducive to the cultural background of Chinese hotels, so as to further optimize the process of maintaining a harmonious relationship with their customers.

The present study takes the rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) as the theoretical foundation. It combines the analysis of frequency and functional classification as well. At the same time, based on specific corpus and different response strategies, such as denial strategies (Ho, 2021) and empathy strategies (Herck *et al.*, 2021), further explore the response countermeasures suitable for Chinese hotels. This research provides a wide perspective and contributes to inter-cultural business communication in complaint response genres. Also, it helps Chinese hotels to formulate specific suggestions for handling complaints in the field of discourse analysis to improve the efficiency and effect of hotels in complaint responses and provide some clever direction for improving service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Genre Analysis and Move Structure

Genre is a type of communicative event for a specific purpose (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2004). Genres are divided into different discourse categories by the characteristics of "schema structure" (Cui & Wang, 2004), which serves specific speech groups (Swales, 1990). Therefore, the core of analyzing a specific genre is to identify the moves in the text based on the conventions set by the speech group (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). The move is the basic unit describing the genre structure of the text (Swales, 1981), which has a specific communicative purpose and function. At the same time, moves are composed of a combination of multiple elements (Bhatia, 2004). In addition, genres are also dynamic. Due to the creativity of speech groups, genres are not invariable. Under the influence of a group's social behavior, genres are constantly being redefined and constituted new forms (Devitt, 2004). Specially given network media, a rapidly changing and rich field, genre analysis has a specific adaptation.

Genre analysis is widely used in academic research (Bhatia, 2004). However, as the Internet has exerted a profound impact on people's consumption behavior, the genre of business and online media has also attracted the attention of scholars. Related research in this field highlights genres' linguistic characteristics and application strategies in different market environments or media channels (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Herck *et al.* (2022) sort out the moves of e-mail replies to distinguish the typicality of moves and the characteristics of different platforms. Genre analysis also builds the framework of the linguistic characteristics of the field of complaint responses. It further helps to explore the consumers' advice and formation reasons for specific discourse to promote enterprises to creatively and flexibly adjust the response strategies in combination with the discourse groups.

Focusing on the research of hotel complaint responses, researchers often combine genre analysis with a cross-cultural perspective. Zhu *et al.* (2019) explore the differences caused by different cultural backgrounds in customers' online comments. They pointed out that Chinese comments highlighted the intimate relationship between guests and guests, while English comments emphasized the importance of space and privacy. Besides, Cenni & Goethals (2020) build an overall response framework through language-move analysis at the macro level and analyze the relationship between the corpus and face management. However, existing research on hotel complaint responses is rarely conducted on Chinese hotels, which is not in favor of considering the cultural factors on complaint responses. Therefore, this paper touches on Chinese hotels based on the genre analysis. It aims to explore the moves and structure of complaint responses so as to help Chinese hotels improve the efficiency and effect of responses.

2.2 Business Complaints and Responses

Complaints are "dissatisfaction arising to attract people's attention to the organization's misconduct and achieve their goals" (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015). Direct complaints bridge enterprises and customers and make targeted improvements (Zhang *et al.*, 2005). For direct complaints from hotel customers, the service department explains and provides solutions to the problem (Ho, 2019). Van Noort & Willemsen (2012) show that when companies respond to complaints, consumers are more optimistic than that when companies remain silent. On the other hand, the responses of enterprises to doubts and dissatisfaction also provide references for potential consumers to make decisions and effectively improve their corporate image (Xing *et al.*, 2022). Overall, complaint responses play an essential role in consumer maintenance and development.

In a business environment, complaint responses and handling have rich strategies. At present, many scholars have conducted relevant research from the perspective of management and linguistics. Research from the management perspective mainly revolves around handling complaints. For example, Xing *et al.* (2022) explored the application degree of emotional intelligence in hotel complaint handling and highlighted the role of employees' empathic ability. From the perspective of service recovery, scholars also point out that in the case of hotel mistakes, the consumer satisfaction brought by psychological compensation is higher than that of monetary compensation (Fu *et al.*, 2014). Also, the research in the management field focuses on optimizing and improving the complaint-handling process. It helps enterprises to deal with customer complaints with a series of standardized operations to improve the efficiency of complaint handling and customer satisfaction.

Most research in linguistics focuses on the discourse structure and characteristics of moves. Based on genre analysis, scholars have summarized the text rules applicable to complaint responses, allowing enterprises to improve the response effect on various websites. For the overall structure of moves, Zhang & Vasquez (2014) find that the complaint responses are formulaic, in which *gratitude* and *apology* are the most common (Feng & Ren, 2019). Analyzing responses to different star hotels worldwide shows that *denial* is conducive to helping enterprises repair their trust and corporate image when they deal with a crisis or making a defense (Ho, 2021). However, existing research on hotel complaint responses is mainly conducted in the context of European and American countries. Those based on Chinese hotels mainly focus on optimizing the complaint-handling process from the management perspective, which leaves room for more research from the linguistic perspective. Therefore, the research uses genre analysis and move structures to analyze the complaint corpus of Chinese hotels further and enrich the responses' discourse characteristics.

2.3. Rapport Management Theory

To interpret the moves of hotel complaint responses at the micro level, this study uses rapport management theory as the framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Rapport management theory refers to people's subjective perception of harmony or disharmony, stability, or turbulence in interpersonal relationships (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). The focus is on the pragmatic functions of language, through which it promotes, maintains, or threatens social relations. The face is the core of social relations, in which the individual face focuses on the expectation that individuals want to be viewed positively. The social face appears in a social role and hopes to be treated courteously (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In the scene of hotel service, if customers think that they are not received and served as customers, for example, he is treated negatively by the service staff or the room booked does not meet the promise of the hotel, their social face may be damaged (Ho, 2017), further leading to negative comments.

The rapport management theory guides enterprises to deal with complaints and the relationship with consumers correctly. For respondents, negative comments hit the confidence they want to get praise and affirmation (Chen *et al.*, 2011), causing personal and collective face loss (Cenni & Goethals, 2020). It harms the maintenance of social relations between the two parties. Therefore, the hotel should entirely choose the response strategy based on the goal of face management to repair or maintain the original relationship with the complainants (Herck *et al.*, 2022). According to the move structure, Ho (2017a) finds that while *denial* is common, it would threaten the face of complainants and ignore their interactive needs to seek solutions. So, enterprises need to use the denial strategy carefully. For discourse style, rapport management theory is mainly around the perspective of interpersonal relationships, so enterprises are supposed to complete the goal of face management at the linguistic level. Besides, they should also pay attention to the situational discourse (Feng & Ren, 2019), which means avoiding excessive formulaic and standardization (Herck *et al.*, 2022) because of the lack of personalization and sincerity.

In hotel complaint responses, previous research has developed and summarized strategies to guide companies to handle complaints correctly and avoid the damage. Therefore, it is crucial to provide complaint-handling solutions for more hotel enterprises. Although scholars have conducted multi-perspective research on hotel complaint responses, they rarely focus on analyzing transnational hotel complaint responses in the Chinese context. Based on the vacancy of this research, the research sheds light on complaint responses of hotels in China. The moves of hotel response combine with the rapport management theory and their practical functions are also analyzed. It can provide some insights into the improvement of the relationship between the hotel and its customers.

2.4 Research Questions

In complaint responses, most existing studies mainly discuss how to optimize the complaint-handling process and lack genre analysis and pragmatic functions based on Chinese hotels. Therefore, from the perspective of genre analysis, this study focuses on the pragmatic functions of complaint responses and how they accomplish communicative purposes, aiming to answer the following three questions:

- a) What are the main moves in responding to online Chinese hotel complaints?
- b) What pragmatic functions do business complaint-responding moves embody?
- c) What discourse strategies do business complaint-responding moves mainly adopt?

To address these questions better, this paper collects data through *Tripadvisor* and invites coders to encode and interpret the data. More details will be provided in the following sections.

3. Data Collection and Coding Procedures

There is increasing international trade in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which is one of the regions with the highest degree of openness and the strongest economic vitality in China. Hence, this study focuses on the hotels in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. At the same time, as the management of five-star hotels is relatively mature and affords lessons that merit attention, the English complaint responses of the ten most popular five-star hotels in the region are

selected as samples. In order to make the sampling more reasonable and scientific, the research selects 12 complaint responses per hotel, so the total corpus is 120. The complaint corpus selected mainly follows the following standards:

- a) Responses to reviews written in English
- b) Responses to reviews of negative polarity (“1” for “horrible” or “2” for “poor” bullets out of “5”)

This paper uses Houyi Data Acquisition Collector to intelligently crawl data from the review pages of these ten hotels on Tripadvisor. The collection started as the requirements were set, and unnecessary words were deleted because Houyi Data Acquisition Collector simulated request web pages to obtain the complaint response corpus of sample hotels. After the collection was completed, the corpus data was derived. To maintain authenticity and accuracy, the data was collated and encoded without any text translation. Two coders used NVivo to encode, and the coding data was confirmed and discussed for multiple rounds. When 30% of the corpus was coded, it was found that the consistency was 81%. To improve reliability, coders fine tuned coding grids. After the agreement reached 93.2%, a comprehensive list of all moves was derived, including the definition of each move, which was then checked by a third coder. With more than a 90% consistency rate among the three coders, the recognition and classification of the moves are reliable. As a result, the subsequent moves can be carried out, and SPSS is used to calculate the frequency of moves.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Based on the result of coding and statistics, four main moves are identified in this study: *Opening*, *Acknowledging complaints*, *Handling complaints*, and *Concluding remarks*. Each move follows its own submoves, up to fourteen submoves (see Table 1). In addition to counting the frequency of each move, this study penetrates the pragmatic functions of moves based on the research of Van Herck *et al.* (2022). Three pragmatic functions are identified respectively relationship-oriented function, task-oriented function and promotion-oriented function.

In the business context, the ultimate purpose and functions of complaint responses are always centered on earning the company's reputation and flourishing business. To accomplish the goals, it is inevitable to build rapport with customers first, then help them address specific problems, and finally improve the company's image. In this way, companies foster customers' loyalty and attract potential customers. Therefore, these three functions are closely linked to the purpose of service recovery. In addition, since a move may contain multiple functions at the same time, it is usually difficult to identify an expression as a specific function (Brown & Yule, 1983), so this study only considers and identifies its main function and does not list other secondary functions. The following is a detailed analysis of the move and its pragmatic function.

Table 1. Frequencies and functions of different moves and submoves

Move/Submove	Percentage (N=120)	Function
1 Opening		Relation-oriented
(a) Greeting	80.00% (96)	
(b) Gratitude	86.67% (104)	
2 Acknowledging complaints		Relation-oriented
(a) Pleasure	13.33% (16)	
(b) Regret/Concerning	43.33%(52)	
(c) Apology	73.34% (88)	
3 Handling complaints		Task-oriented
(a) Request for further detail	10.00% (12)	
(b) Interchange within departments	43.33% (52)	
(c) Clarification of company position	50.00% (60)	
(d) Rectification of the situation	30.00% (36)	
(e) Promise of relevant actions	20.00% (24)	
(f) Emphasis of gratitude/apology	60.00% (72)	
4 Concluding remarks		Promotion-oriented
(a) Recommendation	6.67% (8)	

(b) Invitation	60.00% (72)
(c) Expectation	40.00% (48)

4.1 Relation-oriented Functions

The priority of online complaint responses is to maintain or repair the relationship with reviewers (Herck *et al.*, 2022). The usage of emotional moves may be capable of moving off the distance between hotels and reviewers. Moves like *Apology* and *Gratitude* all indicate a hotel's effort to establish a friendly relationship with its guests (Van Mulken & Van der Meer, 2005), and these moves also seem to enhance rapport to some extent (Ho, 2017a). Therefore, this study classifies the main function of *Opening*, *Acknowledging complaints* and *Closing* as "relation-oriented function", reflecting the hotel's expectation to establish or consolidate a harmonious relationship with reviewers.

4.1.1 Opening Moves

Hotels often adopt the *Greeting* submove when creating an initial relationship with a customer. There are two ways of greeting: one is personalization (e.g. Dear Mr. Zdravkovets), and the other is generalization (e.g. Dear Valued Guest). Coincidentally, the frequency of these two types is exactly the same (Table 2), which is different from the conclusion of Herck *et al.* (2021). In their study, the last name, first name or full name of customers are most commonly used, and the general term is rarely used. The main reason for this difference may be the different selection of samples. The target of this study is Chinese hotels, while Herck *et al.* (2021) take British hotels as samples. According to the report of *TravelDaily* about the development of the Asia (China) hotel industry, by 2021, the Asia Pacific region has gained the highest share of the global hotel market at 42%, followed by North America at 28%. As one of the important countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the volume of hotel receptions in China is undoubtedly very large, and the number of reviews received increases accordingly, which makes it impossible for hotels to personalize all complaints. However, for hotel management, greetings can better save the company's reputation through personalized address (Crijins *et al.*, 2017) and build a stronger relationship with customers (Van Mulken & Van der Meer, 2005). Using this personal address creates an atmosphere for the customers to feel respected and taken seriously, which satisfies the customer's personal face. For hotels that use the general term to greet, although it is less likely to establish closer relationships with customers, it can improve the efficiency of handling complaints, which is conducive to timely monitor complaints and prevent more complaints from spreading.

Table 2. Frequencies of two types of greeting

Types	Percentage(N=96)
Personalized address	50%(48)
General address	50%(48)

Gratitude is the highest use at 86.67% (Table 1), which is similar to previous studies (Ho, 2017a; Zhang & Vasquez, 2014; Fen & Ren, 2019): *Gratitude* appears frequently. Making a complaint is often considered a face-loss act, and in some cases, the complainer considers saving his/her own face more important than saving the face of the person complained against (Decock & Spiessens, 2017). Therefore, to build rapport with complaining customers, the hotel has to consider face sensitive issues such as the customer's dignity and the customer's expectation to be viewed positively. In *Gratitude*, most responses use the mode *thank you + for...* (1-2), such as thanks for comments or help the hotel to pay attention to the problems. Expressing specific thanks with the reason effectively conveys the message of the hotel's genuine thanks and concerns so as to improve the complaining customer's service experience.

- (1) *Thank you for* your review and providing us with your feedback.
- (2) We *thank you for* bringing this to our attention.
- (3) Thank you *very much* for taking your time and sharing your detailed review with the Tripadvisor community.

Some replies also use adverbs of degree for emphasizing sincere gratitude (3). By affirming the customer's comments, the customer's dignity is maintained, and the customer's psychological desire to be treated with respect is satisfied so as to maintain the customer's personal face and social face and further realize the harmonious dialogue. Therefore, *Gratitude* plays a crucial role in promoting customers' subjective perception of warmth in interpersonal relationships.

4.1.2 Acknowledging Complaints Moves

4.1.2.1 Submove: Pleasure

It is found that *Pleasure* always followed *Gratitude* (4). After expressing gratitude to the customers, the hotel also conveys the pleasure and honor to receive comments, realizing Web care.

(4) Thank you for choosing to stay with us and for sharing your experience with us through Tripadvisor. I was pleased to read that you had a great stay overall.

The frequency of *Pleasure* occurring is much lower than *Gratitude*, at 13.3 percent. To some extent, *Pleasure* and *Gratitude* similarly express a positive emotion, appreciating the customer’s experience at the hotel and their comments about it, although the review does damage the hotel’s image. Owing to *Gratitude*, which already plays a role in maintaining face to a certain extent, *Pleasure* becomes an optional submove. From the perspective of RMT, the choice of gratitude amplifies the customer’s positive emotional perception. But if not, it isn’t detrimental to the established interpersonal relationship.

4.1.2.2 Submove: Regret/Concerning

On a consumer-generated platform, expressing *Regret/Concern* is an unmarked or invisible apology. It is a basic communication strategy in Web care (Cenni & Goethais, 2020), which helps to further online communication with complaining customers. The hotel responds by expressing negative emotions to convey empathy to the customers and soothe their frustration or dissatisfaction. When expressing regret, hotels tend to use the pronoun “we” rather than “I” (5-6). This may be influenced by culture. China emphasizes “collective culture”. In the reply, the usage of “we” not only represents the overall attitude of the hotel but also reflects the understanding of the situation described by the reviewer, making the reviewer feel that his/her comments are being taken seriously and handled carefully by the hotel. Meanwhile, we also detect that the expression Regret/Concerning is rather formatted, that is, regret + cause (e.g. 5-6). The reasons are often vague and generally express “regret that the hotel did not meet customer’s expectations or standards.”

- (5) We sincerely regret that our hotel did not live up to your expectations.
- (6) It is to our regret to learn, that part of our service during your stay was not up to standard.

For the hotel, expressing *Regret/Concern* is an implicit negative expression and an informal apology. It mainly implies the hotel lowers the posture and rectifies the unsatisfactory service. As a result, the given reason should not be too specific and obvious. Otherwise, it will greatly pull down the status of the hotel, which is not conducive to service recovery. Therefore, the ambiguity of responses will reduce the negative impact on the hotel’s reputation and improve the efficiency of response processing.

4.1.2.3 Submove: Apology

In the context of business communication, an *Apology* is a way for the organization to acknowledge the complaint and publicly express regret by reducing the status and face of the complainee and compensating the complainer psychologically. Compared with *Regret/Concerning*, this is a straightforward and explicit public statement. Its wording is more obvious and simple, using the informal word “sorry” (7) or the more formal word “apology” and its variant “apologize” (8).

- (7) We are sorry that you had a disappointing experience during your stay with us.
- (8) We are very disappointed to receive this feedback and sincerely apologize for the unpleasant experience you had.

Statistically, sorry is used less frequently (Table 3). An *Apology* is serious and vital to the face of both the complainant and the person complained against. For the complainants, if they do not feel the sincerity of the apology, they will lose personal and social face. For the hotels complained against, if they do not take the apology seriously, they may suffer a new wave of complaints and attacks on online platforms, resulting in a collective loss of face. In addition, on the basis of the formal apology, the sincere(ly) is added in the response for emphasis (9-10) to ensure that the apology is clear and strong enough to allow the customer to re-establish trust in the hotel and obtain more genuine emotional compensation.

- (9) I would like to extend again a sincere apology for the inconveniences this has caused you during your stay.
- (10) Please accept our sincere apologies for the inconveniences experienced during your stay.

Table 3. Frequencies of two types of apologies

Expression	Percentage(N=88)
Sorry	36.36%(32)
Apology/Apologize	63.64%(56)

The core of acknowledging complaints is to express *Apology* properly. As a result, the hotel employs the rather former word and adverbs of the degree to console customers with sincere sympathy and apology.

4.2 Task-oriented Functions

After establishing an initial interpersonal relationship with the complaining customer, the hotel responds by focusing on the task of solving the specific problem. As for the complaining customers, they not only hope that their negative emotions can be appeased but also expect that the hotel can give specific solutions to their complaints. For the hotel, giving specific solutions in the reply can save its image because when existing or potential customers perceive that the hotel has improved service or overcome weaknesses, they may be willing to retain their trust in the hotel again and expect the hotel to do better to avoid the recurrence of the complaint. Therefore, the hotel needs to reply through the following series of moves gradually, to give solutions and satisfy the customers.

4.2.1 Submove: Request for Further Detail

After sincerely apologizing to customers, the hotel's response gradually focuses on specific issues. In order to well understand the problem, the hotel tends to ask customers to provide more relevant information. It's terrible for the customers on the defensive, so this move usually employs the general question rather than the declarative sentence (11) and uses more euphemistic modal words, such as *could*, to protect the facial sensitivity of the other party and prevent the other party from feeling ordered or inferior.

(11) *Could* you please indicate that which room you stay and we will fix the water leaking problem first.

However, the frequency of this strategy is not high, only 10% (Table 1). Requesting additional information is an ineffective strategy for Web care, while it can encourage customers to interact with the hotel (Page, 2014). Responses from complainants indicate a low acceptance of this strategy (Enwiller & Steilen, 2015).

4.2.2 Submove: Interchange Within Departments

In addition to getting more information from customers, the hotel also investigates and verifies complaints through internal information exchanges. Compared with asking customers, the submove *Interchange within departments* appears much more frequently, more than 43% (Table 1). With this move, the hotel shows the complainant that they have made an effort to verify problems and address them fairly so that they do not act arbitrarily or jump to conclusions. Moreover, the hotel conveys a message to the potential customers on the platform that the hotel is both professional and formal, having a special department to investigate and timely deal with problems encountered by customers. Imperceptibly, it cultivates the trust of customers. The tense of this move is typical that is usually the simple future tense or the present perfect tense (12-14).

(12) We *are going to* transmit your remark to our concern departments to find a problem and to fix it.

(13) Please rest assured that our team *will* meet to share this feedback quickly in order to make improvement.

(14) Your comments on initial response *have been* shared with the associates concerned.

The future tense implies an underlying promise that something will be done about the problem to ease complaining customers and prevent the relationship from becoming rigid. When taking the present perfect tense, it demonstrates to the complainant that the hotel has put effort into the investigation, which shows the hotel's efficiency and friendly attitude toward serving customers.

4.2.3 Submove: Clarification of Company Position

Half of the responses mention the company's positioning or goal pursuit (Table 1). It clarifies that customer problems do not reflect the company's service standards. To avoid the existence of complaints to make customers doubt and distrust the hotel, this move, following the previous move to show customer-oriented service, further positively shapes the image of the hotel. This positive explanation is essential to protect the company's reputation. *Clarify/Explain company position* demonstrates that although complaints have occurred, this is not the level of service provided by the company (15).

(15) Please rest assured that the issue you experienced does not reflect *our usual levels of service*.

It aims to restore the collective face of the hotel as well. As in the previous discussion of the RMT, when complaints are made about the hotel as a whole rather than a single employee, complaints damage the collective face. Feng and Ren (2019) also find that, in addition to solving customer problems, companies also focus on repairing their own image in relationship management strategies, so *Clarification of company position* becomes a more frequent move and common strategy.

4.2.4 Submove: Rectification of the Situation

Rectification of the situation means the hotel's modification, remedy, or improvement of the complained conduct that has occurred. In terms of the selection of corrective strategies, the mainstream strategies detected in this study are staff training and service improvement, among which staff training is mentioned in more than 50% (Table 4).

Table 4. Frequencies of different types of rectification measures

Measures	Percentage(N=36)
Staff training	55.56%(20)
Service improving	22.22%(8)
Others	22.22%(8)

We find that when customers mention specific employees in their complaints, the probability of mentioning employee training in their replies increases accordingly (16). When customers specifically express their personal dissatisfaction with the staff, it is necessary for the hotel to take corresponding and specific measures to remedy the problem rather than talking about other seemingly unrelated solutions.

(16) I asked for the general manager the next day and they instead provided an intermediate manager to block the problem Mr. Carson Tam. The general manager Summer Cho actively hid from the problem.

----Please let me ensure to complete proper service education.

It is worth mentioning that although previous studies have found that compensation is an effective strategy to solve customer dissatisfaction (Levy *et al.*, 2013), this strategy has not been detected in this study. The possible reason is that this strategy has "inducement risk", which will induce other customers to make a "fake complaint" that threatens the company's reputation to obtain a series of economic benefits such as compensation.

4.2.5 Submove: Promise of Relevant Actions

Although the hotel's reply mentioned a series of corrective measures, it may only be a public relations strategy, a verbal remedy to appease the complaining customers. For large five-star hotels, the number of complaints received will increase with the number of guests received. If a real commitment is made to correct every customer who complains, the cost and effort to deal with them will grow greatly. Based on it, most prefer "form correction", but do not rule out some hotels making the commitment. In the corpus, there are a total of 24 pieces promising to implement relevant corrective measures (Table 1). In (17), the hotel adopts the present continuous tense to emphasize that the hotel is making efforts to improve the complaints mentioned and to declare its "commitment to redress" to the customer.

(17) Please rest assured that we take this issue seriously, and we're consistently working on this issue with all concerned departments.

Although the substantial commitment increases the human cost of the hotel, it can play a positive role in the optimization of the hotel management and improve customer satisfaction with the hotel treatment. Therefore, if the hotel still has the conditions to take substantive actions, it can clearly inform customers in the reply so as to realize service recovery.

4.2.6 Submove: Emphasis of Gratitude/Apology

After a series of specific handling of the complaint, the hotel expresses *Gratitude/Apology* to the customer again, usually emphasizing the appreciation for the support to the hotel or expressing their apology for the unfavorable experience (18-19).

(18) Again, thank you very much for taking your valued time sharing your candid feedback with us, which will definitely help us become a better hotel.

(19) Once again, please accept our sincere apologies.

Applying many emotional expressions shortens the distance between the customer and the hotel and accomplishes the maintenance of harmonious relationships. At the beginning of complaint handling, the hotel generally expresses apology or gratitude, and at the end of complaint handling, the same emotion is expressed again. In this closed-loop mode of *expressing emotion -- handling complaints -- expressing emotion*, the hotel can not only standardize complaints handling, but also help customers realize the hotel's sincerity.

4.3 Promotion-oriented Functions

For hotel management, monitoring and responding to complaints and comments is not only about solving the problems raised by customers and avoiding escalating into a reputation crisis but also about undertaking the responsibility of spreading brand values. Similarly, from the perspective of pragmatic functions, discourse forms in business scenes convey information and reflect the specific social communication functions (Zhang, 2007). Complaints responses are not only satisfied with establishing the two

communication functions of interpersonal relationship and problem-solving but also need to realize the promotional function through online responses to create a good brand image and bring tangible economic benefits.

4.3.1 Submove: Recommendation

After solving the complaints through a series of moves, the hotel also applies other such as *Recommendation*, which proposes other options to the customer. In this process (20), many positive words, such as *more spacious*, *elegant*, *exceptional*, and *superior*, promise the hotel's quality and convey a positive brand image to customers, which plays an invisible role in marketing and communication.

(20) For your easy reference, the Deluxe Room and Executive Room of 64 m² are more spacious with elegant design, equipped with exceptional facilities and superior amenities, which are more suitable for you.

The pattern is a declarative sentence rather than an imperative sentence. Thus, although the move further describes the value of the hotel to customers, there is no sign of an effort to persuade or force customers to buy. The promotion of words directly affects customers' attitudes toward the hotel. If used correctly, it will destroy the previous efforts to deal with complaints and cause customers to perceive the hotel negatively. For five-star hotels, fostering a loyal customer relationship is far more critical than being forced today.

4.3.2 Submove: Invitation

The hotel replies tend to invite the complaining customers to contact via mail or phone, including the hotel and the employee's email address (21-22). They explain further to allow customers to contact them on their next visit. Personal attention avoids making customers feel abrupt or uncomfortable.

(21) Please feel free to contact us at elsa.mak@hilton.com upon your next stay so that we can assist with the arrangements for your next stay.

(22) Please feel free to reach out to me at Andrew.Rogers@ritzcarlton.com.

To encourage customers to make further contact, a word such as feel free frequently appears in the movie. From the customer's point of view, it may effectively reduce the psychological burden and improve the interpersonal atmosphere. After the customer accepts, it is also conducive to the hotel to strengthen the relationship with the customer. In addition to inviting customers to communicate, some of the replies will also invite customers to visit again, trying to create more opportunities for customers to feel the hotel service; it will recover the wrong impression left by the complaints and restore customers' confidence in the brand. However, the move appears less frequently. Compared with the invitation for further communication, the invitation to the next visit is more valuable. The probability of being rejected by complaints will be higher. Being rejected by the customer will damage the hotel's face. In order to reduce the risk of face loss, the replies prefer to reduce the frequency of inviting customers to visit again explicitly.

4.3.3 Submove: Expectation

Expectation is the extension of the previous move. After the *Invitation*, the hotel conveys the expectation to the customers, hoping to serve the commented customers again and leave them with a better impression of the hotel. In (23), on the one hand, the hotel makes a hidden commitment to customers to improve the other expectations. On the other hand, it also constructs its image of customer experience and service quality to achieve the public purpose.

(23) We sincerely hope you will accord us another opportunity in your next stay to witness our endeavor to genuine hospitality.

As an invisible invitation, this move will not be rejected but can imply that customers have the social right to meet their needs of the face. When the customer receives the message, they may re-establish their expectations for the hotel and give the hotel a second chance so that the promotion function of this move can be realized.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Applying the research framework of rapport management theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), this study uses genre analysis to code the online complaint response corpora of ten popular hotels in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The study summarizes four major moves and fourteen submoves of complaint responses. Based on the connotation and functions conveyed by the moves, they are classified into three pragmatic functions: relation-oriented, task-oriented, and promotion-oriented. The proportion of relation-oriented function is the highest, which aligns with the RMT framework to help both sides establish a harmonious relationship. Moreover, the moves expressing emotion, such as *Apology and Gratitude*, are used to the highest degree. It also shows the necessity of conveying empathy to the complaining customers to maintain the facial sensitivity and social rights of customers and establish a harmonious management relationship. The findings help hotels handle complaints more effectively

at the language level. The response strategies are optimized as well, thus achieving service recovery and reshaping the confidence of complaining customers' potential customers.

Different from previous studies (e.g., Herck *et al.*, 2022; Cenni & Goethals, 2020; Ho, 2017), almost no defensive moves, such as *Denying the problem* or *Dismissing the service failure*, are detected in this study. It may be due to establishing long-term relationships and rejecting damaging harmony in Chinese culture (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Although defensive moves can maintain the face of the hotel to some extent, they ignore the face of the complainants and the need to seek solutions (Ho, 2017). It will prevent businesses from building long-term business relationships with their customers. In the movie such as *Regret* and *Concern*, the influence of culture is also found. Chinese hotels tend to use "we" rather than "I" as the subject of the presentation. It is mainly because, in the collective culture, individuals incline to put the collective interests first and maintain the collective face (Hofstede, 2001). Culture can influence the choice of moves as a hidden factor, so there are differences in cultural backgrounds.

Although this study has identified a series of moves from 120 complaint responses and combined them with cultural factors, the sample selection needs to be more significant. Hence, the subsequent study can expand the selection range and quantity of the corpus. Future research can start from the perspective of culture and discuss the style reflected by moves. Regions with different cultures can be selected so that it's possible to find out some moves undetected in this paper, such as defensive moves.

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