

A GENRE ANALYSIS OF HOTEL RESPONSES TO 'POSITIVE REVIEWS': EVIDENCE FROM TRIPADVISOR.COM

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Abstract

The present study seeks to explain discourse communities of hotels' responses to positive customers' reviews, which can be used for developing writing materials for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. This study is greatly influenced by genre models developed by Swale (1990) and Bhatia (1993). The purpose of this study is to identify surface linguistic features including move structure, lexical choices and expressions in the replies written by hotels' representatives. Twenty responses from top hotels in Thailand were collected. The results revealed five moves and some steps within each across the corpus. Frequently used expressions and word choices were identified to distribute selection for learners

Keywords: Genre analysis, Move analysis, Material development, TripAdvisor

1. Introduction

The reputation of internet applications on hospitality and tourism industries is growing steadily. Accessing to online communities is what travelers can't deny. Consequently, the countless number of user-generated written reviews on tourist accommodations has been composed. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) pointed out that about 75% of tourists have taken online reviews into consideration when planning their itineraries. It is possible that travelers find it convenient to consult with others' past experiences to assist themselves in making decision. Online word of mouth (WOM) communication and online interaction have drawn attention from scholars for decades. In the internet era, as the electronic reviews spread quickly, the hotel image can either be benefited or harmed. For instance, tourists may simply book a hotel after reading some positive reviews. On the other hand, consumers may refuse to book a hotel because of some negative comments.

As far as the impact of the reviews is concerned, hotels are expected to respond to the customers. Not only negative reviews, but also positive reviews are sometimes taken into consideration to ensure high customer's satisfaction. Positive reviews play a crucial role in hotel business where customers' fully satisfaction is necessary. After having pleased experience with a hotel, customers share their experience by writing a positive review to help potential customers make decision. Typically, top hotels have senior staffs take care of these reviews (Panseeta & Todd, 2014). The quality of the responses by hotel representatives can reflect the professionalism of hotel.

Providing students with authentic experience is essential. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course plays a vital role in preparing students for professional communication. From teaching perspective, preparing students in hospitality and tourism management program to compose professional correspondences is essential. In a language classroom, a commercial textbook is always relied on. Although the selection of textbooks for ESP is quite large, there is no guarantee that students will experience genuine up-to-date professional communication. As an ESP lecturer, I am eager to find out how these replies are constructed by professionals in authentic setting. What I found in this study will lead to material developments for Business English and English for Hotel courses. The present study attempts to add understanding to how the responses to positive reviews are composed by identifying rhetorical strategies, lexical choices, and expressions. With an authentic ESP manual, students are given chances to practice producing necessary language for work situation. It is expected that their language skills are professionalized to handle after-school experience. This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the typical rhetorical strategies (moves and steps) of hotel responses to positive review on TripAdvisor.com?
- 2) What are lexical choices and expressions preferred in this genre?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Electronic word-of-mouth and TripAdvisor

Many recent studies have already confirmed how influential electronic WOM can be, especially in tourism and hospitality business. Pan et al. (2007) points out that online customer-generated reviews are crucial source where travelers can find travel-related information. The tourists always find the reviews are more up-to-the-minute, amusing, and dependable information compared with that offered by travel service suppliers (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). On the other hand, Chevalier and Mayzkin (2006) found that the customer reviews of books at Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com noticeably influenced book sales. In addition, the study conducted by Ghose and Ipeiritis (2006) suggested that online WOM (on a variety of products) potentially dwindles the amount of mental effort using to make decision: as a result, the sales figures are increased.

TripAdvisor.com is a travel website providing users with travel-related content. It is one of the largest interactive communities where information about restaurants, accommodations, and tourist destinations is offered. TripAdvisor.com is playing a big role in online tourism and hospitality marketing, and its reputation is growing rapidly (Law, 2006). There are multiple functions to be explored in the website, but one of the popular features is to provide prospective customers with user-generated reviews and tourist-related content. Customers are allowed to post their personal opinions about services they have experienced. As one realized the impact of the reviews, hotel representatives can also respond to customers' message, particularly critical ones.

As mentioned earlier, TripAdvisor.com allows users to share their experiences by writing a review of the services that are available on its website: the review section is there to aid other potential customers in making a booking decision. Also, it gives hotel representatives an opportunity to respond to criticisms which usually occur in this business. With the review feature on the website, the audiences become less passive reviewers and more active partakers (Fortanet, Palmer & Posteguillo 1999, p. 98). Previously, there are a number of studies on the similar genre: Racine (2002) indicated Amazon.com and other e-retailers serve as subgenres in the catalog genre that is already existed (p. 144). Then, the extension of online user review genre to other types of products and services occurred. In other words, the success and effectiveness of customer review section turn this discourse community into distinct genre (Skalicky, 2013, p. 85).

2.1 Hotel responses on TripAdvisor

Once one customer gives a feedback, either positive or negative, by writing a review on the website, it is crucial for hotel staff to respond the texts. Replying to the message indicates that the hotels do pay attention to customers' satisfaction and quality of their services. Panseeta and Todd (2014) stated that all elements of the language they use to compose the text, comprising words, phrases, tones, and text structure, can portend their professionalism.

There are several studies focusing on customers' negative reviews. This is simply because the negative feedback can harm hotel reputation (Xie, Zhang, & Zhang, 2014). However, after browsing through the review section, hotels also frequently responded to positive reviews. This can be implied that the compliment from customers many times cannot be ignored. It is important for hotel to ensure customers' full satisfaction even after the stay.

However, very few researches in linguistics made attempts to uncover this discourse community. Although responding to complain is more critical among hotels and popular among researchers, I found it worth understanding how hotels respond to positive text. Since it now became a duty of hotel staff, hospitality students should be prepared for this situation.

2.2 Move-step approach in genre analysis

Genre analysis serves a useful purpose of helping scholars gain insight into textual convention of the particular genre being under discussion (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2009; Swales, 1990). Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990) concluded that although there are plenty of areas in a genre to be focused on, its communicative purpose is always the key. For decades, genre analysis has drawn attention from scholars from different disciplinary employing different approaches (Panseera & Todd, 2014). That is, genre analysis can provide textual patterns (e.g. rhetorical strategies) and linguistic characteristics (e.g. lexical choices) information which can contribute to language-related teaching and learning.

There might be many text types within one specific genre, but they normally share a similar purpose (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). This means that an internal structure of each discourse community is built to help the members achieve their communicative purposes. Although there is no visible rule and regulation for composing a text, a discourse community will develop patterns which can help each member reach a shared goal. For instance, all the reviews written by helpful reviewers in the corpus indicates common pattern which comprises several communicative units.

One of the key steps in genre analysis is to identify communicative units and investigate rhetorical structures of particular genres. Introduced by Swale, move-step approach has been used to break texts into purposeful units (moves and steps); move-step strategy can also be adapted for other researchers' purposes and genres. Biber et al (2007) concluded that a move is a section of a text that shows a particular communicative function; not only has its own goal, each move also represents the bigger picture of the communicative purpose of the genre

In addition, previous studies from this perspective were qualitative in nature with a minimal number of compositions; they usually pay attention to micro level (internal features) from a discourse community. However, with the debut of corpus linguistics, researchers are allowed to analyze texts empirically; consequently, the finding can be applied to a large number of texts within the same genre. The Corpus tools are capable of examining textual patterns across the context. Corpus approach for the study of genre analysis not only benefits the study in term of textual pattern (external structures), but also lexis and grammatical selection.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The present study aims to analyze hotel responses to positive reviews on TripAdvisor.com, so the positivity of the reviews was initially identified. To make sure that the replied reviews were positive, all the replies were taken from 'excellent' rating scale. Twenty replies were collected from Thai top hotels which represent high quality services and professional standards. Only twenty replies were taken, because (1) the study focuses on top hotels, and (2) each of the response of a particular hotel is found identical. In each hotel, generally there is one person who is responsible for replying customers' reviews on the website. Thus, the responses in the same hotel are identical. Top twenty hotels were chosen based on ranking feature of the website. After the hotels were identified, I entered the 'excellent' rating section and collected the latest replies of each hotel; keep in mind that not all the 'excellent' reviews has been replied. Collecting 20 texts from 20 top hotels resulted in a specialized corpus of 1,977 words, ranging from 54 words to 177 words in each text.

3.2 Models of analysis

The genre analysis frameworks developed by Swale (1990) and Bhatia (1993) are used as models, because the notion focuses on investigating conventional text-based discourse of a genre. Bhatia (2002) clearly stated that understanding the actualities of the real-world text is the main role of genre analysis (p.7). As the questions of this study suggested, Swales' genre analysis was used to underline the move units of the responses. By doing so, the text was break down into distinctive moves and steps. According to Swale (2004), a move is "discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (p.288). Thus, I assume that a move is a realizable communicative unit which performs a function in a discourse community. Each move can also contain steps which are strategies used to fulfill larger communicative purpose.

After the specialized corpus was compiled, I read through each text multiple times to explore the communicative units which were then coded. Some moves were realized with steps which are part of communicative success of the move. The data were coded by two inter-raters, an instructor in English department and a graduate student who have experiences in analyzing communicative units.

4. Results

4.1 Move structure

151 communicative units which fell into 5 categories were detected in the corpus. Each move realized here carried out a distinct purpose. As shown in Table 1, five moves and some steps within each were realized in hotels' responses. These moves can represent the functional structure of hotels responses to positive reviews. In this genre, the top hotel representatives seem to follow a similar pattern.

4.1.1 *Salutation*

The replies generally started with *salutation* move (e.g. "Dear...."). The results revealed that 90% of the texts employed this strategy which is used in convention for formal letter. The representatives started with *salutation* move to address whom they respond to.

Table 1: The coding protocol of move and step in hotels' responses to positive reviews on TripAdvisor

Name of move and step		Example
Move 1:	Salutation	"Dear...."
Move 2:	Thanking	
Step 2a:	Choosing the hotel	"Thank you for choosing the hospitality of Banyan Tree Bangkok."
Step 2b:	Sharing experience	"Thank you for taking time to share your positive experience....."
Move 3:	Acknowledging message	
Step 3a:	Express gratitude	"We are truly delight to read that you had a highly satisfying...."
Step 3b:	Re-stating the complement	"....you were able to enjoy the most comfortable bed...."
Step 3c:	Declaring mission accomplished	"The satisfaction and pleasure of our gust is an everyday challenge...."
Step 3d:	Passing on to associated staff	"....I have shared your comment with our team...."
Move 4:	Ending	
Step 4a:	Giving second thank	"Thank you again for your kind patronage...."
Step 4b:	Expecting a return visit	"....we hope to see you back soon."
Step 4c:	Offering a direct contact	"Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at...."
Move 5:	Closing	
Step 5a:	Signing-off	"With kindest regards"
Step 5b:	The author's full name	"Adam Ziiber"
Step 5c:	Position	"Hotel Manager"

4.1.2 *Thanking*

Following move 1, the responder begin their appreciation with *Thanking* move which contains two steps, *choosing the hotel* and *sharing experience*. It is common that the representatives begin their message with expressing thank for either choosing the hotel or taking time to write a positive review for a particular hotel or both. 35% of the top hotel thank customers for trusting them, and 85% of them thank customers for writing the reviews.

4.1.3 *Acknowledging message*

The third move is the body of the message. In this move, the representatives express their interest in reviewers' comments and showed that they have paid attention to their customers' reviews. 80% of the replies initially expressing their gratitude (3a) to learn customer's satisfaction. Hotels later re-state the reviewers' complement on a certain feature; for example, "...you have had an amazing two night cruise on our antique rice barge, enjoying the river life...." It can be implied that *re-stating* strategy aimed to confirm that hotels received the feedback on particular features.

After that, they either preferred to reminded readers with their mission statement (3c) or promising to pass out the message to other relevant staff (3d). In this way, they can emphasize the objective of hotel and ensure customers that their compliments will reach other relevant staff.

4.1.4 Ending

To conclude their messages, authors once again thank customers (4a) for reviewing and then 90% of hotels showed expectation to accommodate users in the future and asked for a return visit. Some representatives close the replies with offering reviewers with their direct contact information (e.g. email address).

4.1.5 Closing

In general, formal letter is closed with signoff, signature, and job title. The results indicate that all responses in the data ended with *closing* move. They had at least a signoff (5a), whereas signature (5b) and job title (5c) are also common. The signoffs range from less (e.g. “*Warmest regards*”) to more formal (e.g. “*Best regards*”).

Table 2: Move frequency of hotels' responses to positive reviews

Move 1:	Salutation	90%
Move 2:	Thanking	
Step 2a:	Choosing the hotel	40%
Step 2b:	Sharing experience	85%
Move 3:	Acknowledging message	
Step 3a:	Expressing gratitude	80%
Step 3b:	Re-stating the complement	40%
Step 3c:	Declaring mission accomplished	25%
Step 3d:	Informing associated staff	35%
Move 4:	Ending	
Step 4a:	Giving second thank	45%
Step 4b:	Expecting a return visit	90%
Step 4c:	Offering a direct contact	15%
Move 5:	Closing	
Step 5a:	Signing-off	100%
Step 5b:	The author's full name	90%
Step 5c:	Position	70%

4.2 Word choices and expressions

Even though hotel representatives provided readers with distinct writing styles, there are several expressions found to be frequently used among them. The frequently used expressions of this genre are similar to other business letters. After the move analysis, I was able to identify typical word choices and expressions. According to table 2, some steps were used by most authors, whereas some could possibly appeared because of writing style or hotel policy. For example, a few authors offered a direct contact information to reviewers. As far as the frequency is concerned, I selected moves and steps that have been employed by most hotels to take part in word choice and expression analysis. Table 3 reveals the result of common expressions and alternative phrase selection for each frequently used step.

Table 3: Frequently used expressions with word selection of hotels' responses to positive reviews

Move/Step	Expression	Phrase selection
Step 2a	Thank you	for choosing for staying at for having decide to come back
Step 2b	Thank you (for taking the time)	to share your feedback/comment/review/experience for submitting a comment to write a review for letting us know
Step 3a	I/we am/are delighted I am so glad It is wonderful/lovely We are happy	to hear/read/learn that
Step 4a	Thank you (once) again (Once) again, thank you	for sharing this review/experience
Step 4b	I/We look forward to	welcoming you back soon seeing you again soon having you back soon
	I/We hope	to see you back soon
Step 5a	(Warmest/Kind/Best) regards Sincerely (yours)	

As shown on table 3, there are several expressions commonly used by the authors. It is common for them to use these expressions to compose a reply. Although the expressions are similar and limited, some representatives strive to vary their sentences by using different word choices following common expressions.

5 Discussion

As stated, the purpose of the present study is to develop materials for ESP courses such as Business English and English of Hotel. Genre analysis allows ESP material developer to shape the language for a particular purpose which meet the need of students who need to be prepared for professional situations. Developing material by using the language that is actually produce in community ensures authenticity. According to the results of this research, common moves and steps of responses to positive reviews were realized. Structures of the texts were clearly classified into different communicative units which served distinct purposes.

Panseeta and Todd (2014) noted that it is possible that learners still find it difficult to construct a message after recognizing textual patterns (p.12). In other words, only a structure itself doesn't guarantee a message construction, because learners may struggle to choose appropriate word choices for each expression. To tackle this ambiguity, common expressions with alternative phrase selections in each frequently used step were identified. This allows learners to consult with the table of expression and use the most suitable ones for their responses. That is, 'patter seeking' is promoted rather than 'pattern imposing' (Bhatia, 2014, P.40). It is essential that learners are exposed to conventional structures and linguistic elements, even though context and culture are significant. Dealing customers' satisfaction is a vital part in hospitality industry. Hotels pay attention to not only customers' complaint but also complement. Customers' satisfaction after service is important. However, there is no fixed pattern in relying customers and professional context cannot be limited. Teachers and students should not rely solely on textbooks. Thus, real-world professional texts should be supplied to students.

Biography

Athip Thumvichit was born in Nakornrachasima, Thailand in 1987. He received B.A. degree in English from Kasetsart University, Thailand. After that, he earned M.E. and TESOL certificate from Cleveland State University, Ohio, USA. In 2013, he is currently a lecturer in Language Department at Dusit Thani College, Thailand, and also a PhD. candidate in English Language Teaching program, Thammasat University, Thailand. His main areas of research interest are genre analysis, corpus linguistics, and material development.

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