An Analysis of Moves and First-Person References in Indonesian Hotel Responses to Online Positive Reviews

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Abstract
Technology advancements have allowed customers to post their reviews on online platforms. In the hotel industry, responding to positive and negative reviews is imperative because it helps hotels maintain their relationship with past customers and establish a positive online persona. This paper examined the generic structure of Indonesian hotel responses to positive reviews (RPRs) through move-step and first-person reference analysis. For this purpose, we compiled a corpus of 87 authentic hotel responses to positive reviews written by past customers on TripAdvisor. The results revealed that the generic structure of this genre consists of five major moves (opening, thanking or appreciating, acknowledging a message, ending, and closing) and a minor move (positive small talk). Unique to these findings is the positive small talk, which includes explicit hopes for customers’ satisfaction and the use of phrases such as ‘your second home’ and ‘one big family’ when referring to the hotels. Regarding the first-person reference, hotel representatives tended to use the plural pronoun ‘we,’ reflecting a cooperative identity. The exclusive ‘we’ serves various communicative functions in the hotel RPRs. However, it is mainly typical of three major moves and steps: thanking or appreciating the positive reviews and the stay, stating the hotels’ commitment and standard, and soliciting a return visit. These findings can be of use as an alternative

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model to which practitioners in the hotel industry, including students of business English and ESP courses, may refer when aiming to produce texts within this genre.

**Keywords:** First-person references, move analysis, responses to positive reviews (RPRs).

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Technology advancements have created online spaces where hotel customers can write reviews for the kind of services they experience during their stay. It has been a common practice among customers to read these user-generated reviews on travel websites, such as TripAdvisor, before making a purchase or a booking decision. This is because they consider such reviews to be the best way to find unbiased information (Marzá, 2013). Customers also pay attention to the ways hotels respond to these positive and negative reviews because the quality of the hotel’s response reflects the hotels’ professionalism (Thumvichit, 2016) and ensures prospective customers that their service is worth purchasing. Moreover, hotel responses imply the extent to which the hotels are serious and committed to handling customers’ concerns. Through these responses, prospective customers may dispel their doubts and be convinced to proceed to bookings.

For the hotel industry to rely on online reputation to increase brand image, responding appropriately to customers’ reviews is crucial in “managing reputation, word-of-mouth sales, and, ultimately, their survival” (Li et al., 2020, p. 1). In addition, appropriate responses to online reviews are powerful means to maintain relationships with customers and encourage their (re)purchase behavior (Li et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2009). Given the urgency of handling customers’ online reviews, hotels are strongly advised to not only maintain their presence but also seriously consider online reviews and be active in travel websites focusing on reviewing hotel services (El-Said, 2020; Ye et al., 2009). Hotels have attempted to respond actively to their customers’ comments (Zhang et al., 2020). This attempt can be seen on TripAdvisor, one of the largest and most popular travel websites, where hotel representatives are allowed to write direct responses to their customers’ reviews. TripAdvisor is one of the most widely known and visited websites for travel-related content, such as travel advice, hotel reviews, and photos. An interesting feature of TripAdvisor is its interactive approach, allowing hotel representatives to respond to customers’ reviews (Marzá, 2013).

Considering the importance of responding to customers’ online reviews, hotels’ responses to customers’ reviews have received considerable attention from researchers, particularly those focusing on hospitality business and marketing (e.g., El-Said, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2020) and linguistics (e.g., Napolitano, 2018; Panseeta & Todd, 2014; Taw et. al., 2021; Thumvichit, 2016; Thumvichit & Gampper, 2019). Due to the significant influence of negative reviews on sales (Napolitano, 2018; Thumvichit & Gampper, 2019) and hotels’ online reputation, considerable research has concentrated on analyzing hotels’ responses to negative reviews (henceforth RNRs) (e.g., Ishak, 2022; Panseeta & Todd, 2014; Thumvichit & Gampper, 2019; van Herck et al., 2021; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014). As
opposed to that, there has been less attention paid to observing hotels’ responses to positive reviews (henceforth RPRs), as evidenced by the remarkably smaller number of publications tackling this issue (e.g., Cenni & Goethals, 2021; Thumvichit, 2016). To our understanding, this gap in the literature is mainly caused by two factors. First, online positive reviews carry appreciation and endorsements; hence, there are fewer ‘threats’ than negative reviews. Second, positive reviews are considered not harmful to hotels’ brand image. Instead, they highlight the hotels’ facilities and services, hence, boosting the hotels’ reputation. For these reasons, the literature has relatively overlooked hotels’ responses to positive reviews.

We, however, argue that how hotels respond to positive reviews needs further analysis and that the generic structure of RPRs is worth investigating. Hotels are expected to respond to positive and negative reviews simultaneously. Customers’ feedback, appreciation, and praise embedded in their positive reviews cannot be ignored and should be appropriately acknowledged by the hotels. In the hospitality business, where customers’ satisfaction is of utmost importance, replying to positive reviews is imperative to secure customers’ satisfaction (Thumvichit, 2016). Moreover, responding to customers’ feedback may help hotels create a good image for their business as it indicates an “attention to customers’ satisfaction and quality of the hotel’s services” (p. 2). It is also critical for hotels to maintain a good relationship with their past customers by frequently responding to both positive and negative reviews (El-Said, 2020) since both types of reviews may influence customers’ attitudes (Zhao et al., 2015). Motivated by these reasons, the present paper attempted to fill in the gap in the literature by answering the following questions:

1. What are the typical moves and steps of hotel responses to positive reviews?
2. What are first-person references typical to the major moves?

As previously mentioned, the primary objective of this paper was to examine the generic structure of hotel RPRs through move-step and first-person reference analysis. The findings from the analysis could reveal the moves and steps that characterize this genre of digital hotel-customer interactions. The frequencies of first-person references typical to major moves were also examined as they might reveal how hotel representatives build professional identities and customer relationships (van Herck et al., 2021). Altogether, this information can be used as a reference manual for practitioners in the hotel industry who wish to construct responses to customer positive reviews. Derived from texts produced by professionals in authentic settings, the generic structure and linguistic features of RPRs, as found in this paper, were expected to serve as authentic and valuable materials for second language learners studying business English. Such authentic materials are highly relevant in teaching business English “as the real business world is always dynamic and never limited to what has been presented in the textbooks” (Panseeta & Todd, 2014, p. 9).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Move Analysis of Responses to Positive Reviews

Genre is generally defined as a class of communicative events that share some set of communicative purposes recognized by the practicing members of the discourse community where the genre occurs (Swales, 1990). Thus, genre analysis is “the study
of situated linguistic behavior” (Bathia, 2002, p. 4) to investigate “how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret and use these genres to achieve their community goals” (p. 6). This study holds that hotel RPRs belong to a business genre realized in online settings (travel websites) that mediate two-way interactions between corporates, in this context, hotels, and their customers. Thus, to analyze this particular genre, the discursive features of hotel RPRs in digital communication are the main concern.

Move analysis is an approach to genre analysis grounded in Swales’ genre theory, which focuses on communicative purposes called moves, and rhetorical strategies called steps (Cotos, 2018). Swales (2004) defined a move as a “discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse” (p. 228). Moves have lower-level parts, called ‘steps’, which have communicative purposes for the move to which they belong (Swales, 1990).

According to Bathia (1991, p. 155), one of the main objectives in analyzing moves and steps is “to characterize typical or conventional textual features of any genre-specific text in an attempt to identify pedagogically utilizable ones form-function correlations”. This aim highlights the contribution of genre analysis to classroom instructions. Teachers of business English, for instance, may design or develop materials from an existing generic structure of a particular text, elicited from analyzing the moves and steps of a particular text. This was exemplified in Bathia’s (1991) monumental study, where he designed ESP teaching materials for business communication courses. Another important thing is that such genre-based materials should serve as conventional models that students can learn and creatively adapt to achieve communicative goals as desired by the members of the genre (Panseeta & Todd, 2014).

Every genre has a typical move structure and a communicative purpose (Bathia, 1993; Swales, 1990), and hotels’ responses to positive and negative reviews on online platforms have their own organizational patterns and communicative purposes. As previously mentioned, since negative reviews are somewhat considered more influential to hotels’ reputations, the move structure of hotel RNRs has been discussed by many authors in the literature. Hotel RPRs, on the other hand, have rarely been studied directly. Thumvichit (2016), Cenni and Goethals (2021), and Taw et al. (2021) are among the most recent studies that focus on analyzing the move taxonomy of hotel RPRs.

Thumvichit (2016) examined how twenty RPRs written by top-ranked hotels in Thailand are generally structured. The results elicited 151 communicative units that can be categorized into five moves: salutation, thanking, acknowledging, ending, and closing. These moves, along with 12 steps, are presented in Table 1.

| Table 1. Generic structure of RPRs (source: Thumvichit, 2016). |
|------------------|------------------|
| **Moves**        | **Steps**        |
| Move 1: Salutation | -                |
| Move 2: Thanking  | Step 2a: Choosing the hotel |
|                  | Step 2b: Sharing experience |
| Move 3: Acknowledging a message | Step 3a: Expressing gratitude |
|                  | Step 3b: Restating complements |
|                  | Step 3c: Declaring mission accomplished |
|                  | Step 3d: Passing on to associated staff |
Thumvichit (2016) further explained that each move has a distinct purpose, and they represent the functional structure of hotel RPRs. The ‘Salutation’ move includes such phrases as “Dear …” that begin hotel RPRs. The ‘Thanking’ move consists of two steps: choosing the hotel and sharing the experience, which follows the first move. The ‘Acknowledging messages’ move shows hotels’ interest and attention to their customers’ reviews. Through this move, hotels may express their gratitude to their customers, re-state customers’ compliments, remind customers about the hotels’ mission, and ensure that their messages have been passed to other relevant staff. The ‘Ending’ is the move where hotels conclude their responses by thanking customers for the second time and showing an expectation for a return visit. Few hotels also close (i.e., ‘Closing’ move) the responses by stating their direct contact information. Lastly, hotel RPRs are closed with signoff, signature, and job title. While this move appears in all data, the steps have different frequencies of occurrence across the data.

Cenni and Goethals (2021) analyzed hotel RPRs in English, Dutch, and Italian posted on TripAdvisor. Their study explored the move structure of the responses and the potential face-work strategies. With respect to the move analysis, the study identified three major moves: thanking the reviewer, highlighting positive aspects of the hotel, and soliciting future visits, and five minor moves: sharing feedback with the team, acknowledging criticism, inviting direct contact, positive small talk, and commercial offers. Additionally, they argued that in responding to positive reviews, hotels might choose to portray their positive face by, for example, using emoticons or showing modesty while evading a compliment. However, hotels generally avoid this strategy and prefer to enhance their professional face by adopting a more formal interaction. This emphasizes their awareness to adopt appropriate communicative and face-related strategies. The move distribution of hotels’ RPRs identified in their study is shown in Table 2.

Taw et al. (2021) studied hotel responses to positive and negative customer reviews. It compared 3- to 5-star hotels in tourist destinations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in terms of the move structures in the opening and closing of their responses to online reviews. Following Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) Rapport Management Model and Bathia’s (1991) genre analysis model, the study examined how hotels managed rapport virtually while responding to both positive and negative reviews on TripAdvisor. The study’s results revealed that 5-star hotel responses preferred having both salutation and greeting in the opening. For closing, 4- to 5-star hotels tended to use a more formal writing style than 3-star hotels. This emphasis on formality was likely due to the hotels’ intention to achieve effective business communication.

Table 2. Move distribution of hotels’ RPRs (source: Cenni & Goethals, 2021).
Table 2 continued…

| Middle       | Major                  | End          |
|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Sub-moves    | HIGHLIGHTING POSITIVE FEATURES | Minor       |
|              | Mentioned by the reviewer – general | Apology/ Consider criticism |
|              | Mentioned by the reviewer – specific | SOLICITING FUTURE VISIT |
|              | Hotel own perspective – general | Offer direct contact |
|              | Hotel own perspective – specific | Positive small talk |
|              | General                | Commercial offers |
|              | Specific                |              |

2.2 First-Person References in Responses to Customer Reviews

In the study of hotels’ RNRs, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) examined the move structure and the use of first-person pronouns. The study found that the first-person plural is four times more frequent than its singular counterpart. They argued that the higher frequency of ‘we’ instances indicates that the authors of hotels’ RNRs refer to themselves as a corporate collective, which portrays a collective identity rather than an individual. The only exception to this trend is found in ‘Apologizing’ and ‘Soliciting Response’ moves, where the use of a first-person singular is more dominant. In other genres, such as academic writing, using ‘I’ is correlated with an attempt to offer a low profile (Azar & Hashim, 2022). In this case, using ‘I’ in apologizing may function to show the sincerity of hotel representatives in their claims. Meanwhile, using ‘I’ in ‘Soliciting Response’ might be related to the authors’ purpose of showing responsibility. Ho (2017) confirmed that the use of personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘my’ in hotel RNRs emphasizes the accountability and responsibility of hotels’ representatives for customers’ dissatisfaction, which can enhance the rapport between hotels and customers.

Singular and plural first-person pronouns used in customer-firm interactions are also the main focus of Packard et al. (2018). The study analyzes the implications of using ‘I’ and ‘we’ references in over 1,200 email interactions between firms and customers. The study found that greater use of the ‘I’ pronoun in a customer-firm interaction increases customers’ satisfaction and purchase intentions, whereas the use of the ‘we’ pronoun shows no significant effect on customers’ purchases.

Another recent study of first-person references in customer-firm online communication was conducted by van Herck et al. (2021). They compared the communicative styles between English and German email responses to customers’ complaints through a rhetorical move and first-person analysis. The findings of their study revealed that there are six major moves and 20 sub-moves in total. ‘Greeting’, ‘Gratitude’, ‘Apology’, ‘Explanation’, ‘Conclusion’, ‘Sign-off’, and ‘Signature’ are “considered the genre’s core elements” (p. 230). Generally, the emails in both languages use more ‘we’ than ‘I’ references; however, this tendency varies by sub-moves. For example, there are more ‘I’ than ‘we’ references in ‘Apology’ and ‘Empathy’ in the English data.
3. METHODS

3.1 Corpus Design

Genre analysis often uses a range of research methods; one of the prominent ones is corpus studies (Bathia, 2002). The strength of corpus studies lies in the ability “to reveal patterns of form and use in particular genres and areas of language that are unsuspected by the researcher and difficult to perceive in other ways” (p. 13). Following that, this study takes a corpus-based approach in analyzing the moves and steps and first-person references of hotel RPRs.

The present study examined the generic structure of RPRs written by 4- and 5-star hotels located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The city is known for its tourism potential, such as natural and cultural attractions (Hapsari et al., 2020). This study specifically looks into the hotels categorized as the top ten hotels in Malang. Responses by top hotels are worth investigating because their “representativeness are expected to be professional and prudent” (Panseeta & Todd, 2014, p. 3) and “should be able to represent ‘business professionalism’” (p. 5). Therefore, the results obtained from this study can be an alternative model for practitioners and academics, particularly learners of business English, who aim to produce texts within the same genre.

The data for this study were collected from TripAdvisor, as it is one of the largest travel communities (Miguéns et al., 2008) and the most popular websites for travel accommodation (Panseeta & Todd, 2014). There are 311 hotels located in Malang and listed on TripAdvisor. The website has a feature that sorts the hotels based on four categories: ‘traveler ranked’, ‘best value’, ‘price’ (low to high), and ‘distance to city center’. The ‘Traveler ranked’ option lists TripAdvisor’s highest-rated hotels based on travelers’ reviews. We sorted the hotels by this first category as it was the most relevant category to the purpose of the study. Hence, the study examined the RPRs written by the hotels that rank 1st to 10th, which all belong to either 4- or 5-star hotels.

To elicit data from TripAdvisor, we followed the following procedure. First, we visited each hotel’s homepage and checked the review section. TripAdvisor categorized customers’ reviews into excellent, very good, average, poor, and terrible. To ensure the positivity of the reviews, we selected the ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’ categories. Through initial scans of hotel responses to the positive reviews, we noticed identical RPRs. The identical responses were excluded, whereas the specific and personalized RPRs were all included in the corpus.

We decided on the following criteria for compiling the corpus (see Table 3). The hotels’ responses we collected must be dated primarily in 2021 and 2020 and, to a lesser degree, in 2017, 2018, and 2019. They were compiled to the corpus if (a) they were written in English, (b) they belonged to the ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’ category, (c) they were neither identical nor template responses, and (d) the responses’ date was not older than 2017. These steps resulted in 87 RPRs. The names of the hotels, hotel representatives, and customers were anonymized to ensure their privacy.

The corpus comprises 87 hotel RPRs, with 48 responses categorized as excellent and 39 as very good. There are 7,275 words in total (3,929 words in excellent responses; 3,346 words in very good responses). The shortest hotel RPR contains 22 words, and the longest one has 186 words. The most frequent phrases in the corpus include ‘thank you’, ‘we are’, and hotel names.
### Models of Analysis

This study primarily followed Swales’ model of move-step analysis. The coding scheme was primarily based on the generic structures of hotels’ RPRs, as found in previous studies (Cenni & Goethals, 2021; Thumvichit, 2016). Thus, the data were manually coded by elaborating on the two previous studies focusing on identifying the move taxonomy of hotels’ responses to positive reviews.

To identify the moves and steps of hotel RPRs, first, we read through each hotel’s responses in the corpus several times while manually coding every move and step in the hotel’s responses. The moves were coded based on the communicative functions that they served. Then, a university lecturer who has taught English for Business for more than five years was requested to check the coded data. Some discrepancies in the coded moves and steps were then elucidated through discussions.

The instrument used to help us analyze the coded data was AntConc 2.0.4 (Anthony, 2021). The software can search for certain moves and steps that need further investigation. To do this, we input the names of moves and steps in the search bar of the KWIC (Key Word in Context) feature. AntConc 2.0.4 was also used for the first-person reference analysis. It could calculate the frequency of the personal pronoun ‘I’ and ‘we’ along with their variations. It is important to note that most instances of ‘we’-references in the data were exclusive (i.e., the reader was excluded). Upon searching for the pronoun frequencies, concordance analysis was done to understand the context where the pronouns occurred so that their usage could be further analyzed. Table 4 shows the pronouns investigated in this study.

### Results and Discussion

The results of the present study are presented in two sub-sections: (1) the moves and steps of the RPRs, and (2) the use of first-person references in the RPRs.

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**Table 3. Corpus data.**

| Hotel | Rank | Excellent (number of responses) | Very good (number of responses) |
|-------|------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A     | 1    | 4                              | 5                               |
| B     | 8    | 5                              | 5                               |
| C     | 10   | 5                              | 5                               |
| D     | 3    | 5                              | -                               |
| E     | 6    | 5                              | 4                               |
| F     | 5    | 5                              | 5                               |
| G     | 9    | 5                              | 5                               |
| H     | 4    | 4                              | -                               |
| I     | 7    | 5                              | 5                               |
| J     | 2    | 6                              | 5                               |
| Total |      | 48                             | 39                              |

**Table 4. The pronominal forms examined in this study.**

| English Pronouns       | Personal | Possessive | Reflexive |
|------------------------|----------|------------|-----------|
| 1st person singular    | I, me    | my, mine   | myself    |
| 1st person plural      | we, us   | our, ours  | ourselves |
4.1 Results from Move-Step Analysis of RPRs Written by Hotels in Malang

The first research question deals with the typical moves and steps of hotel RPRs as displayed on the TripAdvisor homepage of ten hotels in Malang. In general, the generic structure of the hotel RPR genre consists of five major and one minor move. The major moves include ‘opening’, ‘thanking or appreciating’, ‘acknowledging a message’, ‘ending’, and ‘closing’. The minor move, appearing in a significantly lower frequency than the other moves, is a ‘positive small talk’ that consists of two steps: expressing ‘hopes’ and ‘delights’. This taxonomy is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Move-step structure of RPRs written by hotels in Malang.

| Moves and Steps                             | Data set (N=87) |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 Opening                                   | Major 130      |
| Salutation                                  | 87             |
| Greetings                                   | 43             |
| 2 Thanking/Appreciating                     | Major 131      |
| For the stay                                | 37             |
| For the positive review                     | 94             |
| 3 Positive small talk                       | Minor 25       |
| Hope                                        | 19             |
| Others                                     | 6              |
| 4 Acknowledging message                     | Major 121      |
| Restating review                            | 68             |
| Stating hotel commitment/ standard          | 40             |
| Passing on to associated staff              | 13             |
| 5 Ending                                    | Major 142      |
| Considering a criticism                     | 33             |
| Giving a second thank                       | 29             |
| Soliciting return visit                     | 74             |
| Offering a direct contact                   | 6              |
| 6 Closing                                   | Major 207      |
| Sign off                                    | 87             |
| Full name                                   | 42             |
| Affiliation                                 | 39             |
| Position                                    | 39             |

4.1.1 Major moves

Five major moves and one minor move were identified in the hotels’ RPRs under this study. The first major move is ‘opening’, which consists of two steps: ‘salutation’ (N=87) and ‘greetings’ (N=43). ‘Salutation’, indicated by phrases beginning with ‘Dear …’, appears at the beginning of all 87 hotel responses and has two main forms. The first is a specific salutation, where hotel representatives address the customers by their names or usernames. The second is a general salutation, where customers are addressed as ‘guest’ or ‘valuable guest’. Viewed from the terms of address used in ‘salutation’, the authors of hotel RPRs tend to use English and Indonesian terms of address or without terms of address. (1) displays some examples of this move.

(1) **Dear Mr. Fani.** (Hotel I)  
**Dear Bapak** (Mr.) Adhi. (Hotel D)  
**Dear Valuable Guest,** (Hotel A)
In the hotels’ RPRs, ‘greetings’ usually follow the ‘salutation’. This step appears 43 times and is usually in the form shown in (2).

(2) Greetings from the [hotel name]. (Hotel G)
Warmest greeting from [hotel name]. (Hotel H)
Cheers from [hotel name]. (Hotel D)

The second move is ‘thanking or appreciating’. This move consists of two steps: ‘thanking’ or ‘appreciating’ the guests for ‘their stay’ (N=37) and ‘their positive reviews’ (N=94). This move is generally realized in an explicit thanking expression, which mostly begins with a ‘thank you for…’ phrase, as shown in the following examples.

(3) Thank you for your kind review. (Hotel J)
Thank you for choosing us during your stay in Malang (Hotel C)

This move is also realized in an expression of gratitude, where the authors of hotel RPRs implicitly thank the guests by showing their appreciation for their stay and positive feedback. Such appreciation can be seen in (4).

(4) Your kind words towards the service we offer are very much appreciated. (Hotel G)
We very much appreciate your comments regarding your stay at [hotel name]. (Hotel C)

The third major move is ‘acknowledging a message’, which contains ‘a restatement of reviews’ (N=68), ‘a statement of hotel commitment or standard’ (N=40), and ‘passing on to associated staff’ (N=13). In ‘restatement of reviews’, hotel representatives recapitulate the positive features of the hotels as mentioned by the customers. In this step, they also highlight some other features that are still related to the ones mentioned by the customers. This particular step can be seen in (5).

(5) We’re glad you enjoyed your stay at [hotel name]. (Hotel E)
We were delightful to hear you enjoyed your stay here. (Hotel F)
Truly an honor to be called an oasis in Malang. (Hotel G)
We are very happy when we know that you and your family was satisfied during stayed at our resort and enjoyed romantic dinner with us. (Hotel H)

In the first and second responses written by hotels E and F in (5), the restatements are general as they do not specifically restate any positive features provided by the customers. In comparison, the last two examples are more specific as there is a mention of the positive features, i.e., being called an oasis (hotel G) and being praised for the dinner. ‘Restatement of reviews’ also includes utterances that contain some highlights of one of the hotel’s best-selling features. (6) illustrates the examples.

(6) We are located in the main street of Malang, which is about 4 km to the city center and 7 km to Malang airport. (Hotel B)
… strategic location is our added value to pampering our guest who stay with us. (Hotel I)

The second step in ‘acknowledging a message move’ is a statement of the hotels’ commitment or standard,’ which functions to mention what has been prioritized by the hotels and to claim that a positive feature of the hotels is a result of their strong
commitment to the standards of operation. This step appears in some instances, as shown in (7).

(7) … dedicated to always serve guests with finest service up to their satisfaction. (Hotel A)
     Guest satisfaction is top priority from us. (Hotel C)
     … it is also our priority to maintain all our asset at the best condition. (Hotel D)

The third step in the ‘acknowledging a message’ move is ‘passing on to the associated staff’, which is used to confirm that customers’ compliments given to a particular staff member have been delivered. (8) displays some examples.

(8) Your complimentary will be forwarded to Mr. Ruli Executive Housekeeper for his excellent service. (Hotel I)
     Muna (the Guest Relation that led your bike tour) and the rest of our staff will definitely be happy to read what you wrote. (Hotel J)

The fourth major move is ‘ending’, which contains four steps, namely, ‘considering criticism’ (N=33), ‘giving a second thank’ (N=26), ‘soliciting a return visit’ (N=74), and ‘offering a direct contact’ (N=6). ‘Considering criticism’ is apparent whenever the positive reviews from guests include minor negative feedback towards the hotels. This step may include apologies and reports of the hotels’ actions. ‘Considering criticism’ can be seen in (9).

(9) However, we do apologize for the elevator which is not met your expectation. (Hotel A)
     However, we sincerely apologize we forgot to refill toilet tissue in the bathroom, we shared with respective team about your recent experience to prevent the issue. (Hotel C)

‘Giving a second thank’, as the name suggests, is where hotel representatives express their gratitude to the customers for the second time. Different from the second major move, ‘thanking or appreciating’, ‘giving a second thank’ appears at the end of the responses and is indicated mainly by phrases such as ‘again’ or ‘once again’. (10) presents some examples.

(10) Thank you once again for your feedback. (Hotel D)
     Thank you once again for taking your time to share your experience with us, (Hotel G)
     Thank you once again for your kind feedback. (Hotel J)

‘Soliciting a return visit ‘is the most frequent step in the ‘ending’ move, and it is mostly stated explicitly in statements beginning with ‘We hope to’ and ‘We look forward to’ as shown in (11).

(11) We are looking forward to welcome you again for your next visit in our property. (Hotel D)
     We hope you could stay again in here another time. (Hotel E)

‘Offering direct contact’ appears less frequently compared to the other steps in the ‘ending’ move. The function of this step is to provide customers with a direct way to communicate with the hotels. (12) shows some examples of this step.

(12) … please do not hesitate to contact me at XX@hotelB.com for further assistance. (Hotel B)
     Please let me know if I can assist you further. (Hotel C)
The fifth major move is ‘closing’, which appears in all hotels’ RPRs in the corpus. It comprises four steps: ‘sign-off’, ‘full name’, ‘affiliation’, and ‘position’, where ‘sign-off’ is the most frequent step in the hotels’ RPRs (N=87). ‘Sign-off’ includes phrases such as ‘Yours truly’ and ‘Warm regards’, similar to other business letters. This step is usually followed by the ‘full name’ (N=42) of the hotels’ representatives in charge of writing the responses. However, it can also be followed by ‘affiliation’ (N=39), such as ‘management’, ‘team of [hotel name]’, and ‘[hotel name] family’. Lastly, ‘closing’ is ended by ‘position’ (N=39), which informs the job title, hence the responsibility, of the hotels’ representatives, such as ‘general manager’ and ‘front office manager’.

4.1.2 Minor moves

In addition to the previously mentioned five major moves, there is ‘positive small talk’, categorized as a minor move because of its significantly lower frequency than the other major moves. ‘Positive small talk’ usually appears after ‘thanking or appreciating’. There are two steps in this minor move: expression of ‘hopes’ and ‘others’. Expressing hopes is typical in two out of ten hotels. It serves as small talk, highlighting the hotels’ expectations for the guests to enjoy their service.

(13) We hope your family was satisfied with our villa, food, ambience, and also our surrounding areas. (Hotel H)
We really hope our sincere service could meet your expectation. (Hotel I)

The other step in this move is labeled as ‘others’ as it includes several utterances other than ‘hopes’ which may function as words of affirmation to build customer rapport. All instances of this step are shown in (14).

(14) We are very happy to have your great experience during your stay with us. (Hotel I)
A pleasant moment when we are welcoming you on your second home [name of hotel]. (Hotel H)
We could see as well that you were our big family. (Hotel J)
We are happy to welcome you as our valuable guest. (Hotel I)
It has been an honor to be at your service. (Hotel A)
It was a great honor to greet you as our valuable guest. (Hotel I)

4.2 Results from Analysis of the First-person References Used in RPRs Written by Hotels in Malang

The second research question concerns the most frequent first-person references used in the hotels’ RPRs. The corpus-assisted analysis results confirm that the first-person plural is remarkably more frequently used than the singular one. Table 6 presents the overall frequency of ‘I’ and ‘we’ references and their variations in the hotels’ RPRs.

Table 6 shows that the first-person singular pronoun (‘I’, ‘me’) is rarely used in the hotels’ RPRs. It occurs ten times (1.37 per 1,000 words) in the data set. Concordance analysis of ‘I’ and ‘me’ revealed the instances where these pronouns occur, which are listed in Table 7.
Table 6. Frequency of first-person references in the hotel’s RPRs.

| Pronouns          | Absolute frequency | Normalized frequency (per 1,000 words) |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------|
| First-person singular: |                    |                                        |
| I                 | 10                 | 1.37                                   |
| me                | 7                  | 0.96                                   |
| mine              | -                  | -                                      |
| my                | -                  | -                                      |
| myself            | -                  | -                                      |
| First-person plural: |                   |                                        |
| we                | 516                | 70.92                                  |
| us                | 268                | 36.83                                  |
| our               | 82                 | 11.27                                  |
| ours              | 166                | 22.8                                   |
| ourselves         | -                  | -                                      |

Table 7. The instances of ‘I’ and ‘me’ in the hotels’ RPRs.

| Pronoun | Instance                                                                 | Hotel |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| I       | will share your comments with our team …                                  | C     |
|         | am sure that this feedback will serve as a …                              | C     |
|         | sincerely appreciate your recent stay …                                   | F     |
|         | can assist you further …                                                   | C     |
|         | am very happy that your last experience …                                  | C     |
|         | do hope to welcome you back …                                              | C     |
|         | am thrilled to read that the whole team have …                            | F     |
| me      | Please let me know if …                                                    | C     |
|         | … and please do let me know once you plan to …                            | C     |
|         | … and please do not hesitate to contact me at …                            | B     |

As shown in Table 7, the use of ‘I’ and ‘me’ is limited to their frequency and range. ‘I’ and ‘me’ appear in three out of ten hotels. From these instances, it can be seen that this pronoun reference is used for several communicative purposes, such as passing on the positive review to relevant staff, appreciating the stay, and soliciting a return visit.

On the other hand, the first-person plural pronoun is strikingly more dominant in the hotels’ RPRs. Overall, this pronoun appears 516 times, or 70.92 per 1,000 words, across all data sets, where ‘we’, ‘our’, and ‘us’ are the most frequent pronouns in the hotel RPRs. The pronoun ‘we’ occurs 268 times (36.83 per thousand words) and has various communicative functions. To classify the functions of the pronoun ‘we’, concordance analysis was done, eliciting the context where the ‘we’-reference appears in the major moves of the hotels’ RPRs. The concordance analysis result revealed that three major moves are most typical: ‘thanking/appreciating the review’ and ‘stay’, ‘stating hotel commitment or standard’, and ‘soliciting return visit’. Table 8 shows the most frequent instances of ‘we’ references and the major moves they are most familiar with.

Table 8. Most frequent instances of ‘we’ references.

| Pronoun | Instance                                                                 | Hotel |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| we      | are (F=74; Range=56) glad, pleased, happy, delighted to learn/hear/read   |       |
|         | (Hotel A, B, C, D, F, G, H, I, J) Thanking/Appreciating the positive review |       |
|         | looking forward/ waiting for your next visit                              |       |
|         | (Hotel B, C, D, F, G, H, J) Soliciting return visit                       |       |
Table 8 continued…

| Move | Frequency | Range | Example | Function |
|------|-----------|-------|---------|----------|
| hope (F=23; Range=22) | to see/welcome you again/back you could stay again you will choose to stay with us your next visit will be pleasant | (Hotel C, G, J, E, F, B, G) | Soliciting return visit |
| will (F=23; Range=19) | give you the best … always keep maintaining … do our best to … apply in our facility | (Hotel E, I, J) | Stating hotel commitment/standard |
| would (F=11; Range=10) | like to thank | (Hotel C, G, I) | Thanking/Appreciating the stay |

5. DISCUSSION

It is important to acknowledge the possibility that some steps could appear due to each hotel representative’s writing style or the hotel’s policies (Thumvichit, 2016). However, the analysis revealed several moves and steps most frequently used among them. First of all, similar to the findings in Thumvichit (2016), Cenni and Goethal (2021), and Taw et al. (2021), the hotels’ RPRs under the present study consist of several moves that characterize this genre. The analysis of the responses written by the top hotels in Malang reveals that the generic structure of this genre has five major and one minor move. The five major moves are ‘opening’, ‘thanking or appreciating’, ‘acknowledging a message’, ‘ending’, and ‘closing’, quite similar to those identified in Thumvichit (2016). As found in other hotels’ RPRs (e.g., Taw et al., 2021; Thumvichit, 2016), the opening of Malang hotels’ RPRs generally starts with a ‘salutation’ and ‘greeting’. The common practice to begin a response by making a salutation and greeting the customers, according to Taw et al. (2021), is to show formality and gain effective business communication. The opening of Malang hotel RPRs are characterized by the use of both English and Indonesian terms of address. While some hotel representatives choose to use ‘Mr.’, ‘Ms.’, and ‘Mrs.’, some authors of hotel RPRs prefer to keep the Indonesian term of address ‘Bapak’ and ‘Ibu’ as a way to maintain politeness.

Second, ‘thanking or appreciating’ follows the opening and functions to express hotels’ gratitude for their customers’ stay and the positive reviews they shared on TripAdvisor. This move is also present in Thumvichit’s (2016) and is among the major moves in Cenni and Goethal’s (2021) studies of hotels’ RPRs. Even in hotels’ RNRs, ‘thanking’ and ‘appreciating’ is never absent (e.g., Ishak, 2022; Panseeta & Todd, 2014; Thumvichit & Gamper, 2019; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014), which emphasizes its indispensable role in establishing a good hotel image and building rapport with past customers. Hotels’ attempts to build rapport with past customers can also be seen through ‘positive small talk’, where they hope customers enjoy their stay and hotel services and express their happiness for having them stay at their property. The attempt to strengthen the hotel-customer relationship is probably most apparent through how they refer to the hotels as ‘your second home’ and the customers as their ‘one big family’.

‘Acknowledging message’ is the third major move in Malang hotels’ RPRs, where the hotels’ representatives address the main points of customers’ reviews. In
this move, the hotels restate what their customers find them positive. There are instances where the restatement is general, in which the hotels do not repeat all the great features in the positive reviews. In other instances, the hotels specifically mention every positive feature that the customers have highlighted in their reviews. The latter can be seen as the hotels’ strategy to make the replies sound more personalized, and it helps them highlight their strengths. Besides restating customers’ positive reviews, hotels also embed some of their best services, such as having a strategic location, which is not mentioned in the reviews. This function can be considered a promotional strategy, which, according to Li et al. (2020), tends to be perceived as “self-serving and disingenuous” by the customers. Promotional information in an RPR creates self-interest and seller-oriented sentiments, which invalidate the benefits of showing gratitude and expressing apology and decrease repurchase intention. In addition, this move also includes hotels’ short mention of their standard and commitment. While interpersonal and transactional references to standards and improvement function as a marketing tool and highlight a company’s strengths (van Herck et al., 2021). By explicitly mentioning standards and commitment, the hotels emphasize that the positive reviews resulted from committed work and living up to a high standard of operation. They indirectly inform future customers that such positive service is not only provided once and that quality service is also guaranteed in their future stay.

The ‘ending’ move appears as the conclusion of hotels’ RPRs. This move consists of four different steps, each with its distinctive functions. The first step is ‘consider criticism’, which is absent in Thumvichit (2016) but apparent in Cenni and Goethal (2021). As described in the methodology, the positivity of the customers’ reviews of the hotels under study is ensured by selecting the ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’ reviews. Our initial reading of the data confirms that these positive reviews, in some cases, also contain customers’ feedback. The feedback is mostly from constructive comments for hotels to improve some of their services. Compared to compliments on the positive features, such negative feedback is less influential on the hotel’s positive face. Despite that, hotels’ representatives pay attention to the feedback and address it through this step. Through ‘consider criticism’, hotels do not only apologize but also report what actions had been taken to improve the situation. This step is followed by ‘giving a second thank’ and ‘soliciting a return visit’. According to van Herck et al. (2021), such apology and gratitude serve an interpersonal, addressee-oriented purpose. Altogether, steps such as ‘(re)thanking’, ‘highlighting positive features’, and ‘soliciting future visits’ portray a positive face (Cenni & Goethal, 2021), and ‘consider criticism’ helps hotels appear humble and that they take the customers’ reviews, either positive or negative, seriously.

Lastly, ‘closing’ is prevalent in the hotels’ RPRs (e.g., Cenni & Goethal, 2021; Taw et al., 2021; Thumvichit, 2016) as well as RNRs (e.g., Panseeta & Todd, 2014; Thumvichit & Gampfer, 2019), which may indicate that customer-hotel communication taking place in online platform follows formal business writing convention. The move comprises steps such as ‘sign-off’, ‘full name’, ‘affiliation’, and ‘position’. ‘Sign-off’ appears in all hotels’ RPRs, while ‘full name’, ‘affiliation’, and ‘position’ appear in about half of the hotel RPRs. Regarding the mention of ‘affiliation’, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) argued that it might indicate that in this genre, a collective, corporate identity is more preferred than an individual one. This collective corporate identity is also seen in the high frequency of ‘we’ references used in the hotels’ RPRs. It is most prevalent in moves, such as ‘thanking/appreciating’, ‘stating
hotel commitment or standard’, and ‘soliciting a return visit’. The higher frequency of ‘we’ compared to ‘I’ in hotel RPRs may suggest that hotel representatives responsible for customer reviews prefer to carry an organizational rather than personal identity (van Herck et al., 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to examine the generic structure of RPRs written by top-ranked hotels located in Malang, Indonesia, through the analysis of moves and first-person references. The results showed that the generic structure of the hotel RPRs consists of six moves: ‘opening’, ‘thanking or appreciating’, ‘positive small talk’, ‘acknowledging a message’, ‘ending’, and ‘closing’, which, in general, is similar to the findings from previous studies on RPRs (Cenni & Goethals, 2021; Taw et al., 2021; Thumvichit, 2016). The moves comprise seventeen steps in total, each with different communicative purposes, but altogether help hotels create a positive image, promote their services, and build rapport with their customers. One minor move is ‘positive small talk’ which contains hopes for customers, and phrases such as ‘your second home’ refer to the hotels. In addition, the RPRs are characterized by the use of both English and Indonesian terms of address in salutation and the expressions of hopes and words of affirmation as positive small talks. The hotels’ RPRs tend to use ‘we’ to emphasize a corporate instead of personal identity. This collective identity is most apparent in ‘thanking or appreciating’, ‘stating hotel commitment or standard’, and ‘soliciting a return visit’.

The findings from this study may serve as an alternative reference for Indonesian practitioners working in the hotel industry responsible for handling customers’ online positive reviews. In the classroom setting, the generic structure identified from the Indonesian hotels’ RPRs can be used as supplementary material for preparing students to familiarize themselves with the conventions prevalent in customer-hotel digital interactions.

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