

## **Hotel Responses in Arabic to Negative Reviews on TripAdvisor**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v25i2.739>

Mashaal Al-Sager and Mohammad Mahzari  
*Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia*

Received: 7.10.2024

Accepted: 1.2.2025

Published: 2.6.2025

**Abstract:** The present study has sought to bridge a gap of research on online hotel responses in Arabic to negative reviews in the business context from the perspective of discourse analysis. The study identified the structural generic concept of moves found in Arabic responses to negative reviews posted by dissatisfied customers on TripAdvisor. Responses were collected from 5-star hotels located in six popular regional destinations in Saudi Arabia. The corpus comprised 252 responses written in Arabic and included 41 hotels. Responses were manually collected and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The results showed that there was a total of 23 moves used by hotel managers in response to negative reviews on TripAdvisor. The use of opening pleasantries/greetings and expressing gratitude were the most frequent moves, followed by closing pleasantries, visit invitation, proving action, and apologizing, respectively. The most common moves were used to support the relationship between hotel managers and customers. In addition, the personal pronoun ‘we’ was used more frequently than ‘I’ to refer to the corporate identity when addressing the customers, expressing gratitude, inviting for a visit, apologizing, and so forth. These results can be used in preparing workshops and training courses to enhance the efficiency of language use for hotel managers when responding to dissatisfied customers by using the moves that support the relationship and avoid the others that damage it.

**Keywords:** customers’ complaints, moves, negative reviews, negative word of mouth, online hotel responses, rapport management theory

### **1. Introduction**

Consumer-generated content has significantly increased in frequency and influence over the last decade, particularly in the travel sector and on travelling platforms, such as TripAdvisor, Booking, and Agoda. When it relates to providing information on experience, such as hotel stays, dining out, visiting places, and the like, online reviews are regarded as very beneficial. Therefore, travelers may rely more on others’ experiences than on hotel advertisements. Currently, TripAdvisor is one of the most popular travel-related websites with the largest travel guidance. It offers tourists advice on booking flights and hotels, making vacation plans, and reading reviews on various topics, such as hotels, things to do, and restaurants. In addition, TripAdvisor allows customers to post reviews about their stay at the hotel and provides the same opportunity for hotel management to respond. However, hotel managers cannot delete or edit published reviews.

Customers use online reviews more frequently to make decisions both before and during trips (Mauri and Minazzi 2013), and because reviews are public, the impact of consumer feedback is greatly amplified (Einwiller and Steilen 2015). Negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) affects service providers' reputations and can significantly and negatively impact their companies' performance (Levy, Duan and Boo 2013). Consequently, controlling negative eWOM today represents an important issue for hospitality managers (Park and Allen 2013), leading to the emergence of a new type of business-to-consumer communication in the form of online responses to complaints. Additionally, effectively handling customer complaints allows businesses to maintain customer contentment and win loyalty (Chou 2015).

From a discourse analytic perspective, there have been contributions exploring hotel responses to negative reviews in different languages, such as English, Dutch, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish (Radovanović 2014; Zhang and Vásquez 2014; Cenni and Goethals 2020; Morrow and Yamanouchi 2020; Toribio and Mariottini 2023; Laosrirattanachai and Laosrirattanachai 2024). To the best of our knowledge, Arabic has not yet been investigated in terms of hotel responses to negative reviews, although one study explored hotel complaints on TripAdvisor in Saudi Arabia (Alqreeni and Mahzari 2023). With the new Saudi Vision 2030, it is a government program aimed at increasing economic, social, and cultural diversification. The country is seeking to support the tourism sector and attract more tourists in the future because of its important role in economic growth. The current study will contribute to the implications for the tourism industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Determining whether, when, and how to respond to customer reviews, especially negative ones, is a challenge for businesses seeking efficient strategies to manage e-WOM. Wei, Miao, and Huang (2013) called on hospitality organizations to monitor and respond to user-generated comments. Chan and Guillet (2011) recommended that being unresponsive to customers' negative comments may put a company in a bad position, as it may lose the customers' business. Leung et al. (2013) encouraged managers to address negative customer reviews and provide explanations and advised academics to investigate the effectiveness of these responses.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the moves employed by hotel managers when responding to negative reviews to understand how they handle consumer dissatisfaction in an online environment, such as TripAdvisor, in Saudi Arabia. It adopts the analytical framework of genre/move analysis (Swales 1990) to identify moves, in conflation with rapport management theory (RMT) (Spencer-Oatey 2008). This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What moves are used by hotel managers to respond to negative reviews on TripAdvisor?
- (2) Why do hotel managers use these moves from the RMT perspective?
- (3) Do hotel managers use their corporate or personal identities to respond to negative reviews?

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Electronic word of mouth and travel**

On travelling platforms, online consumer reviews can be viewed as a form of interaction. Thus, according to Mudambi and Schuff (2010:186), online reviews are “peer-generated product evaluations posted on business or third-party websites,” providing a particular computer-mediated communication (CMC) genre that is text based, asynchronous, and typically anonymous. As preferred by international marketing scholars, eWOM and online consumer reviews can be used interchangeably (Vásquez 2014). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define eWOM as any positive or negative opinion expressed by real, potential, or former customers about a product or company that is made available to a large number of institutions and people via the Internet. It would be an understatement to claim that eWOM forms that are available, convenient, and non-perishable in this world of online interconnectivity and mobility (e.g., news groups, discussion groups, and online opinion platforms) have largely replaced traditional word-of-mouth.

Some scholars have questioned the motivations behind posting online reviews (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Yoo and Gretzel 2008). According to Yoo and Gretzel (2008), there are four significant motivators for writing a review: (1) pleasure/positive self-improvement, (2) expression of negative feelings and collective power, (3) concern for other customers, and (4) assistance to the company. The second and third factors, in particular, appear to be the main reasons for millions of negative reviews (i.e., complaints) on TripAdvisor. Therefore, an increasing number of businesses are getting aware of the significance of online reputation management, as eWOM expands and influences consumer purchasing and decision-making (O'Connor 2010; Vásquez 2014).

Positive and negative reviews usually remain on websites for a long time; however, negative reviews affect performance indicators and reputation of businesses (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Ye, Law and Gu 2009). Yavas et al. (2004) state that customers are more in service recovery than in routine services. These are challenges for organizations and travel agents, because dealing with customer complaints is critical. If people’s complaints are not resolved, it will result in a decline in customer confidence and the downfall of the organization and company. Nowadays worldwide, response to customers’ complaints is challenging for all organizations because the solution of how and when to respond is critical and requires patience and solid reason. Unresponsiveness to people affects the organization and its future (Yavas et al. 2004). Therefore, the purpose of handling complaints is to bring back satisfaction because complaints can be harmful to a business, and pleased complainants indicate excellent post-complaint behavior (Stauss 2002). Stauss (2002) defines complaint (dis)satisfaction as a complainant’s evaluation of the organization’s response to the complaint.

### **2.2 Genre analysis and moves**

The study of discourse structures in texts and the interactions between texts and members of discourse communities that produce and consume these texts are both included in genre analysis (Bhatia 2002; Swales 2004). Each genre has a typical

move structure and communicative function that conveys social actions (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993). Swales (1981) initiates the notion of a move structure when describing a research article to understand its rhetorical structure. According to Biber and Conrad (2009:15), “the text is described as a sequence of ‘moves,’ where each move represents a stretch of text serving a particular communicative function”. This approach has been adopted to analyze and describe the rhetorical structure of a specific genre to explore the moves that represent the texts in that genre.

For example, Upton (2002) and Connor and Upton (2003) examined a fundraising document corpus, a type of philanthropic discourse (created by various organizations). Biber, Connor, and Upton (2007) applied a move analysis to the fundraising letters and identified seven moves that occurred across their data, such as getting attention, introducing the cause and/or establishing credentials of the organization, soliciting responses, offering incentives, referencing inserts, expressing gratitude, and concluding with pleasantries. Based on their findings, the authors determined the move types that most closely matched the main fundraising method and developed a genre prototype.

This approach has been applied to a wide range of traditional modes of written communication in business text genres, such as letters of application (Bhatia 1993), letters of negotiation (Dos Santos 2002), tax computation letters (Flowerdew and Wan 2006), and preface sections (Alotaibi 2021). Recently, genre analysis has been applied not only to hotel responses to negative reviews but also to different languages in this new genre of computer-mediated business discourse, as mentioned above. This can help to better understand businesses’ responses to online consumer reviews and identify how hotel managers manage their online reputations when responding to negative reviews. This approach to hotel responses is extended to the Arabic language in our study.

### **2.3 Rapport Management Theory (RMT)**

RMT focuses, in particular, on the ways in which (dis)harmony is (mis)managed (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009), or the ways in which language is used to create, maintain, or threaten harmonious social interactions (Spencer-Oatey 2008). To differentiate between the social and individual aspects of face more clearly and to take into consideration the many settings in managing rapport of interaction as a variable, politeness theory was developed to create the RMT.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a positive face and a negative face are two interconnected elements of the face, and this appears to be true for all rational people regardless of their cultural background. A positive face is associated with a person’s desire to be accepted and valued, whereas a negative face is concerned with a desire to maintain one’s own territory and be free from restrictions.

One of the fundamental principles of the RMT is to differentiate between the management of social obligations, rights, and face management (Spencer-Oatey 2008). The most influential aspect is management, which focuses on people’s perceptions of their values, dignity, reputation, competency, and other similar concepts (Spencer-Oatey 2008). Social rights are more closely tied to social

expectations and norms, focusing on ideas, such as fairness, consideration, and behavioral appropriateness (Spencer-Oatey 2008:13–14). Furthermore, this situation involves face, for example, when a client, upon arrival at the hotel, comments that s/he did not feel welcomed (I felt unwelcome, from the minute I entered the lobby.) (Cenni and Goethals 2020). This situation was exemplified by Cenni and Goethals (2020), who clarified the connection between the RMT and the hotel with the customer. The researchers stated that when a customer complained, an employee did not go beyond fulfilling specific requests (such as providing a requested room). Additionally, given that consumer is paying for a certain service, this is not how a client should be treated. Customers may feel that this violates their right to be treated properly. Conversely, visitors and hotel operators have social obligations and norms that they must respect, in addition to their social rights. For instance, if a visitor cancels a reservation after it has been made, the hotel may consider this a violation of the guest's social obligations.

Additionally, face and sociality rights are considered to have a collective feature in addition to being defined by an individual (Spencer-Oatey 2008). In other words, the group to which the speaker belongs may also be considered the face or sociality rights' owner in addition to the speaker as an individual. For instance, visitors may feel (un)welcome at both the personal and group levels (Cenni and Goethals 2020). When they believe they are treated differently because they belong to a particular type of tourists or group, for example, they are foreigners or are visiting during the off-peak season (Cenni and Goethals 2020). A similar idea could be applied to businesses' perspectives, where negative reviews might result in individual staff members losing face or, more accurately, the entire hotel group losing face. Therefore, the RMT by Spencer-Oatey (2008) is used to interpret moves and their communicative functions in terms of enhancing and damaging rapport.

### **3. Literature review**

Most studies have investigated negative reviews or responses to those reviews from the perspective of fields, such as hospitality and tourism, marketing, and public relation, rather than discourse analysis. However, a few studies have been conducted from a discourse analytic perspective to examine the negative reviews or the ways to respond to those negative reviews (Radovanović 2014; Ruth 2014; Zhang and Vásquez 2014; Ho 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Feng and Ren 2019; Cenni and Goethals 2020; Morrow and Yamanouchi 2020; Aldossary and Mahzari 2023; Toribio and Mariottini 2023; Laosrirattanachai and Laosrirattanachai 2024).

For example, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) investigated the English responses of 80 hotels to online consumer complaints in China on TripAdvisor. The results explored 10 move types. However, the most frequent moves expressed gratitude and apologies for the sources of trouble, whereas the least frequent moves were avoidance of recurring problems and soliciting responses. It was also found that there was an emphasis on corporate rather than personal identity in the responses. Another study on the structure of responses to negative online reviews on TripAdvisor was conducted by Ho (2017a), who found that three moves—

expressing feelings, acknowledging the issue, and thanking the reviewer—were necessary, whereas others, such as continuing the relationship, denying the issue, greeting, recognizing the reviewer's value, and self-promoting, were optional in hotels in Asian cities. In those moves, rapport enhancement was reinforced by the use of personal pronouns 'I' and 'my.' Laosrirattanachai and Laosrirattanachai (2024) examined the hotel responses to positive, negative, and mixed reviews to explore formality levels, politeness strategies, moves, and steps on TripAdvisor. The results showed that the shift from casual style to consultative one was employed more frequently. Also, strategies, such as offering, promising, or giving gifts, apologizing, and begging for forgiveness, were predominant in the responses, alongside 6 moves and 16 steps. The insight can be employed into ESP materials to improve writing skills in responses effectively.

Ho (2017b) explored how hotels attempted to manage or recover negative reviews across 5-star hotels in Beijing using the RMT. Ho (2017b) classified moves into two main categories: managing rapport and denying problems. The former includes the problem acknowledgement; explaining the cause of the problem; and apologizing, rectifying problems, expressing feelings, showing appreciation, and minimizing imposition. The latter includes the challenge to reviewer's decision: framing problems as isolated incidents; rebutting, suggesting, or recommending; highlighting facilities or services; and emphasizing practices or missions. The rapport was enhanced by the seven moves mentioned first, but the denial problem was considered damaging, which could help clarify the misunderstanding between hotel management and customers. Finally, denying problem moves were frequently accompanied by one or more 'Manage Rapport' moves that assisted the customer in recovering harmony or rapport and advancing the general purpose of service recovery. Toribio and Mariottini (2023) examined hotel and restaurant responses to complaints in Spanish and Italian on TripAdvisor. Cross-cultural variation was found in the style of communication in the conflict interactions. For example, the Italian representatives tended to use unmitigated disagreement and acts of disqualifications or self-praise that reflect the confrontational style. However, Spanish representatives were more supportive because they employed more friendly style and mitigating supportive moves.

From a customer perspective, Ho (2018) explored effective and ineffective hotel responses to negative reviews in terms of rapport management and persuasive strategies. The effective responses included a higher frequency of acknowledging the problem as a move for enhancing rapport. In addition, these effective responses included more transitions, code glosses, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, and engagement markers as patterns of using meta-discourse, which made the responses more persuasive because of their appeal to rationality, emotion, credibility, and character. Ineffective responses included more denying of problems as a move for damaging rapport and frame markers as meta-discourse. This move can be considered a way for intensifying clarification to avoid misunderstandings with dissatisfied customers. Feng and Ren (2019) examined relational acts in management responses to online consumer reviews in Chinese. The results explored 14 relational acts in the Chinese management response genre to online

reviews. Thanking, justification, and promises were the most frequent relational acts. By contrast, comforting customers, requesting further details, and self-denigration were the least frequent relational acts.

In a cross-cultural study, Cenni and Goethals (2020) examined hotel responses to negative reviews of dissatisfied customers in three languages: English, Dutch, and Italian. The results revealed that the English and Dutch responses showed significant similarities in terms of communicative strategies, but the Italian subset consistently showed divergences. The results also showed that Italian respondents chose to confront and defend a service failure in a more confrontational manner, such as denying the problem, transferring responsibility to others, and offering explanations when compared to the other languages. Unlike the previous studies on moves, Radovanović (2014) identified the use of hedges and boosters in English responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor in the UK and Serbia. Those modifiers were used to negotiate a harmonious relationship between the customer and the hotel manager. The modifiers found can be taught to ESL learners to improve their business-writing skills in professional workplace contexts when responding to the negative reviews. Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020) compared English and Japanese hotels' apologies when responding to negative reviews on TripAdvisor using the move analysis and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework of rapport management. The results showed that both languages have significant similarities in terms of the frequency of apologizing, preferring to be unclear about taking responsibility for service failure, and using the corporate voice. In contrast, they differed in frequency and used moves for rapport enhancement, such as explanation, repair, opening, and closing.

Ruth (2014) analyzed 1183 corporate apologies on Twitter as a social media platform in response to customer complaints. The study found that the components of an apology include the illocutionary force indicating device, explanations, and offers of Repair. In addition, the apology included strategies for rapport building to improve reputation as it happens in opening and closing moves, such as greetings, nominations, discourse markers, and emoticons. Furthermore, Aldossary and Mahzari (2023) explored the types of moves used in online Arabic corporate apologies on Twitter. Also, it adopted Morrow and Yamanouchi's (2020) model of moves and the RMT. The results revealed 12 moves used in the corporate apology; however, closing, opening, and repairing were the most frequent moves. All moves were used to enhance rapport, except for denying the problem and restoring the image with their customers. Arabic has received less attention in understanding how hotel responses are constructed on TripAdvisor; therefore, this study partly meets the need to explore the moves of hotel responses to negative reviews left by dissatisfied customers.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Data**

To explore the moves employed in the hotel responses to negative reviews in Arabic, 252 complaint responses were collected from TripAdvisor in Saudi Arabia and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The hotel responses included 15,164

words with an average word count 60.17 for each response. Saudi Arabia was chosen because of the increasing concern and growth in the tourism industry, especially with the new Saudi Vision 2030, as mentioned above. TripAdvisor was chosen because it is one of the most well-known travel websites in the world, and several studies have been conducted on it. These responses were collected from 41 hotels that were rated 5-star and located in different cities in Saudi Arabia because of their popularity as tourist destinations in the country. These cities are Jeddah, Al-Madinah, and Makkah in the west; Riyadh in the central region; and Dammam and Al-Khobar in the east. Responses were collected from 10 hotels in Jeddah, nine in Al-Madinah, eight in Makkah, 10 in Riyadh, three in Al-Khobar, and one in Dammam. After selecting the hotel, filtration was applied to limit the results to 'poor' (2-stars) or 'terrible' (1-star) reviews, which include the negative reviews and responses. Not every negative review received a response from the hotel manager on TripAdvisor. Therefore, the number of responses collected differed between hotels, based on the available responses. The responses were written by hotel managers between 2016 and 2023, but they were collected in February and March 2023.

The English responses and the English responses translated to Arabic were excluded from the data because they appeared in the reviews during data collection on TripAdvisor. Moreover, the names of the hotels and managers were anonymized in the examples in the Results section for ethical reasons. In addition, the responses used in the results were presented with their original spellings and translated into English.

## 4.2 Procedure

For the analytical procedure, hotel responses were copied and pasted into an Excel sheet for manual coding in several rounds based on their primary communicative function. To ensure coding consistency, the researchers followed two steps to establish reliability in the first phase of move codification. For example, the first author independently coded the moves in the first 50 hotel responses. The second author then revised them based on their primary communicative functions, as mentioned above. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and by adding new codes because of the nature of the data and the modifications needed in comparison with previous studies on hotel responses to negative reviews (Zhang and Vásquez 2014; Ho 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Cenni and Goethals 2020; Morrow and Yamanouchi 2020). Therefore, the researchers did not follow a specific model from previous studies. Instead, they pieced together the types of moves used by hotel managers in genre discourse. Identical steps were taken for the remaining 202 responses in terms of coding, revision, and discussion to settle disagreements until identifying 23 move types discussed in the following section.

In the second phase, we conducted a qualitative analysis by focusing on analyzing specific moves to explore the different ways employed in opening and closing responses and the focus of gratitude and apology with their positions in the responses. In addition, more attention was given to the use of the pronouns *I* and *we* in apologies and gratitude, which reflected personal and corporate identities.

Finally, expressing positive and negative feelings was identified and analyzed in terms of modification and intensification.

**5. Results and discussion**

This section presents the moves used in hotel responses to negative reviews and their possible functions, with Arabic examples posted on TripAdvisor. According to Figure 1, there are 23 moves employed in hotel responses by hotel managers to negative reviews posted by customers about their stay experience. These moves differed in frequency and numbered 1607 in total.

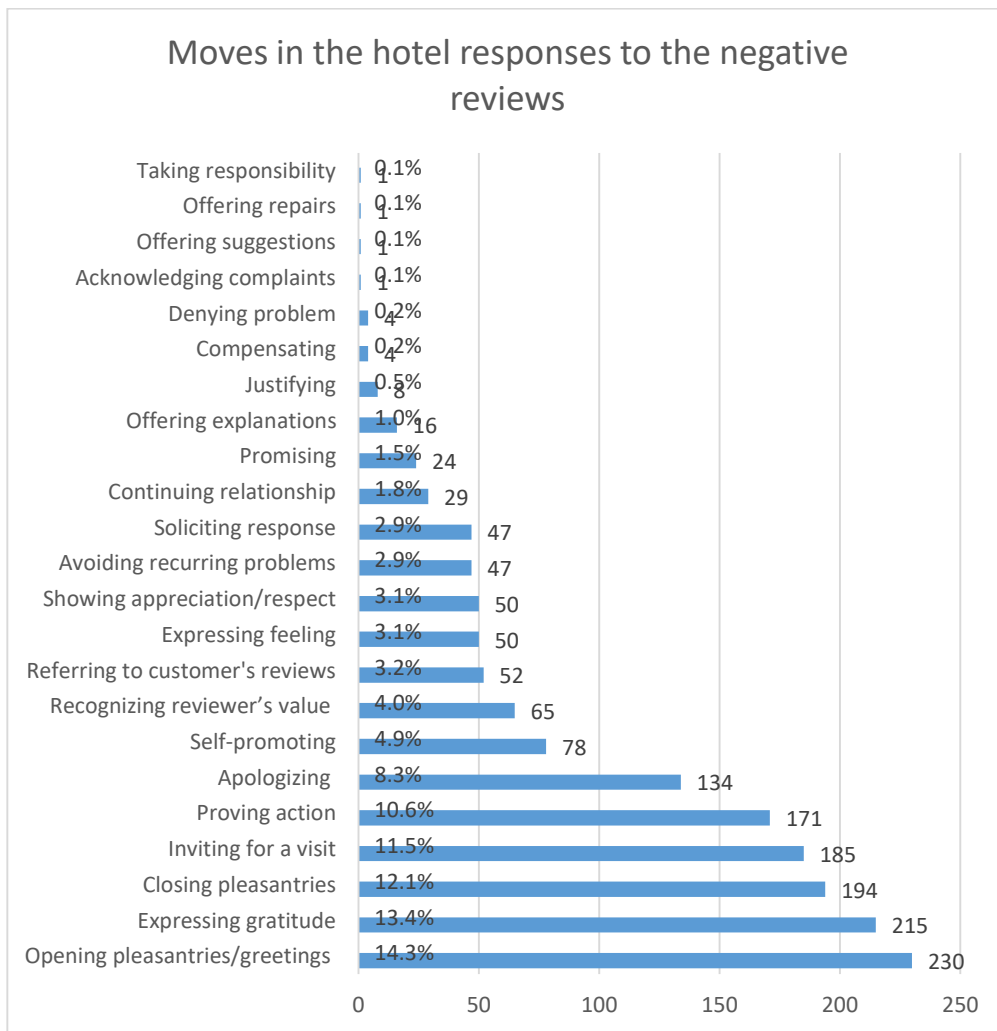


Figure 1. Frequency of moves in the hotel responses to the negative reviews

### Move 1: Opening pleasantries/greetings

This move had the highest frequency in the data and was used 230 times (14.3%). It always appeared at the beginning of responses. It was used to begin the response to a negative review by directly addressing and greeting the reviewer and engaging him/her in the conversation to be closer to the hotel manager. Rapport can be enhanced by this move because the reviewer's sociality rights were managed (Ho 2018). This finding of the high frequency of using *opening pleasantries* indicated that there was a similarity with Zhang and Vásquez (2014), who stated that using greeting moves in hotel responses to negative reviews in China occurs more frequently than other moves on TripAdvisor. In addition, this finding is in agreement with Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020), who found that openings are more frequent in English and Japanese texts than in other moves, and logged unique similarities in the occurrence of opening and closing moves in hotel responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor (discussed later). However, this move included more than one way to begin the response (see Figure 2).

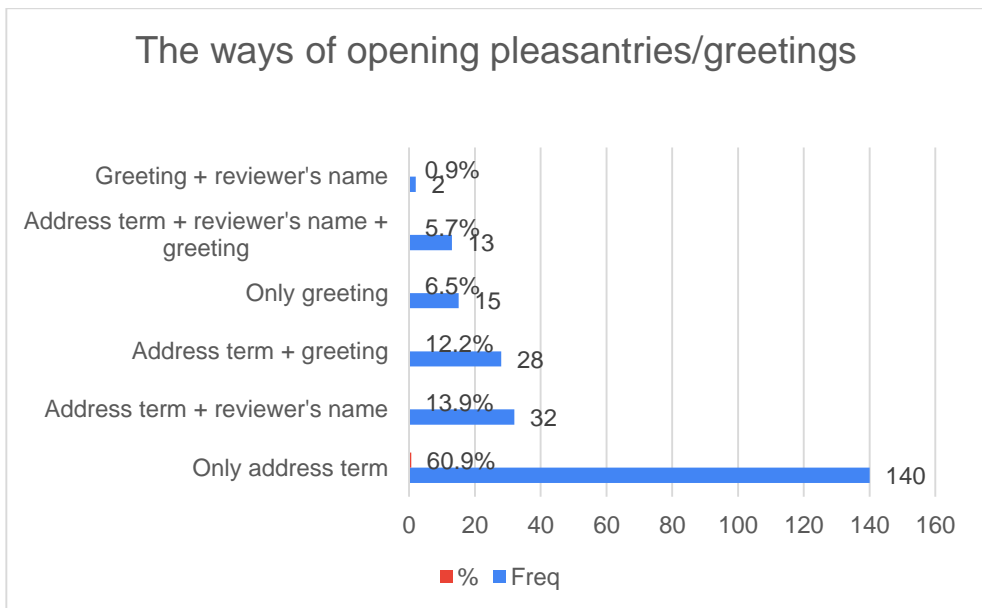


Figure 2. Frequency of ways of opening pleasantries/greetings in the hotel responses

According to Figure 2, using the address term without any other expression is the most frequent (140:60.9%), such as *ضيفنا العزيز* *dʿajfuna: alʿazi:z* ‘our dear guest.’ It is followed by another way of using address term with the name of reviewer (32:13.9%), such as *ضيفنا العزيز علي* *dʿajfuna: alʿazi:z Ali* ‘our dear guest Ali’ and address term with greeting (28:12.2%), such as *ضيفنا العزيز تحية طيبة* *dʿajfuna: alʿazi:z tahijjah tʿajjibah* ‘our dear guest, a lovely greeting.’ Other ways of opening pleasantries were used, but less than 10 percent, such as only greeting,

address term with the name of the reviewer and greeting, and greeting with the name of the reviewer. The most used address term was *dʿajfunā: alʿazīz* ‘our dear guest.’ Sometimes, the reviewer was described with *alkarīm* ‘gracious,’ *alfa:dʿil* ‘virtuous,’ *alyā:li* ‘precious,’ or it was used with more than one address term to address the reviewer who left the negative review, such as *dʿajfunā: alʿazīz alʾustāḍ fahd* ‘our dear guest Mr. Fahd.’ It was found that the address term was used with the possessive adjective of the first person plural pronoun to refer to the corporate identity (155:75.6%) more than the possessive adjective of the first person singular pronoun (50:24.4%) that indicated the personal identity, such as *dʿajfunā: alʿazīz* ‘our dear guest’ vs. *dʿajfi alʿazīz* ‘my dear guest,’ respectively (see Figure 3). In addition, using more plural forms than singular ones may place more importance on the reviewer in this context because of his/her sociality rights.

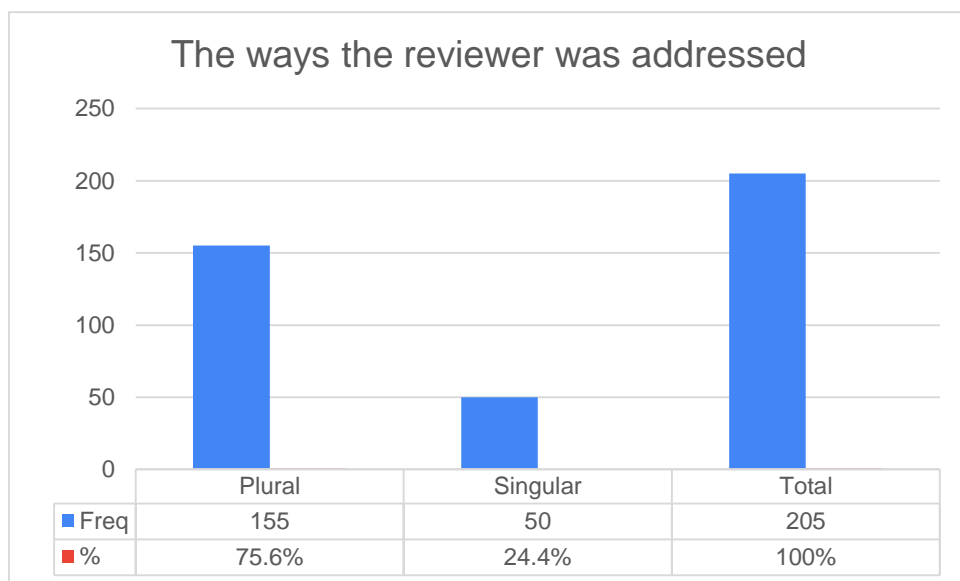


Figure 3. Frequency of the ways the reviewer was addressed in the hotel responses

For greeting, different forms were employed, and *tahijjah tʿajjibah* ‘a lovely greeting’ and *marḥaba*: ‘welcome’ were the most frequent forms followed by *assalamu ʿalaykum wa rahmatu Allah wa baraka:tuh* ‘May the peace, blessings, and mercy of Allah be upon you’ and the verb form for welcome and greeting, such as *nurāḥḥib bikum/nuḥajjikum* ‘we welcome you/we greet you.’ In addition, using the first-person plural pronoun in greetings indicated that all hotel members were welcoming the reviewer, in which a positive message is invoked and reflects the corporate identity. The frequent use of this move indicated that, in hotel responses

to consumer reviews, it most likely distinguishes the newer genre of CMC as a formal type of communication (Zhang and Vásquez 2014). According to Zhang and Vásquez (2014), opening pleasantries typically occur in personalized email messages and formal letters.

#### Move 2: Expressing gratitude

The second most frequent move was *expressing gratitude* (215:13.4%). This move was used to thank the reviewers for the reasons mentioned in the review related to their hotel visits in terms of thanking for comments, time, choosing the hotel, feedback, stay, contact, opinion, visit, attention, concern, and understanding, respectively. In other words, the focus of thanking was not only on the stay or comment, but also for different reasons (see Examples 1-11). It enhances the rapport with the reviewer because it manages the reviewers' faces by acknowledging their contribution to the negative review, which is appreciated and valued (Ho 2017b, 2018; Cenni and Goethals 2020).

#	The Focus of Gratitude	Examples
1	Comment	نشكر لكم تعليقكم <i>nafkur lakum taʕli:qukum</i> 'We thank you for your comment.'
2	Time	شكرا لك على الوقت لتسجيل ملاحظاتكم <i>fukran lak ʕala: alwaqt litaszi:l mula:ħaðʕa:tikum</i> 'Thank you for the time to write your feedback.'
3	Choosing the hotel	نشكركم لاختياركم فندق "اسم الفندق" <i>nafkurkum lixtija:rikum funduq "ʔism alfunduq"</i> 'We thank you for choosing (the hotel name).'
4	Feedback	نشكركم أيضا على تقييمكم <i>nafkurkum ʔajdʕan ʕala: taqjji:mikum</i> 'We also thank you for your feedback.'
5	Stay	شكرا لإقامتكم لدينا <i>fukran liʔiqa:matikum ladajna:</i> 'Thanks for your stay with us.'
6	Contact	نود أن نشكرك على تواصلك معنا <i>nawad ʔan nafkurk ʕala: tawa:sʕulk maʕana:</i> 'We would like to thank you for contacting us.'
7	Opinion	شكرا لرأيك <i>fukran liraʔjjik</i> 'Thanks for your opinion.'
8	Visit	شكرا لكم على زيارتكم <i>fukran lakum ʕala: zija:ratikum</i> 'Thank you for your visit.'
9	Attention	شكرا لك على لفت انتباهنا

- 10 Concern  
*fukran lak ʕala: laft ʔintiba:hina:*  
 ‘Thank you for drawing our attention.’  
 ونود أن نشكرك لاهتمامك بكتابة شكواك  
*wa nawad ʔan naʕkurk lihtima:mik bikita:bat ʕakwa:k*  
 ‘We would like to thank you for your concern about writing your complaint.’
- 11 Understanding  
 لك جزيل الشكر على تفهمك واهتمامك  
*lak zazi:l alfukur ʕala: tafahhumik wa ʔihtima:mik*  
 ‘Many thanks to you for your understanding and concern.’

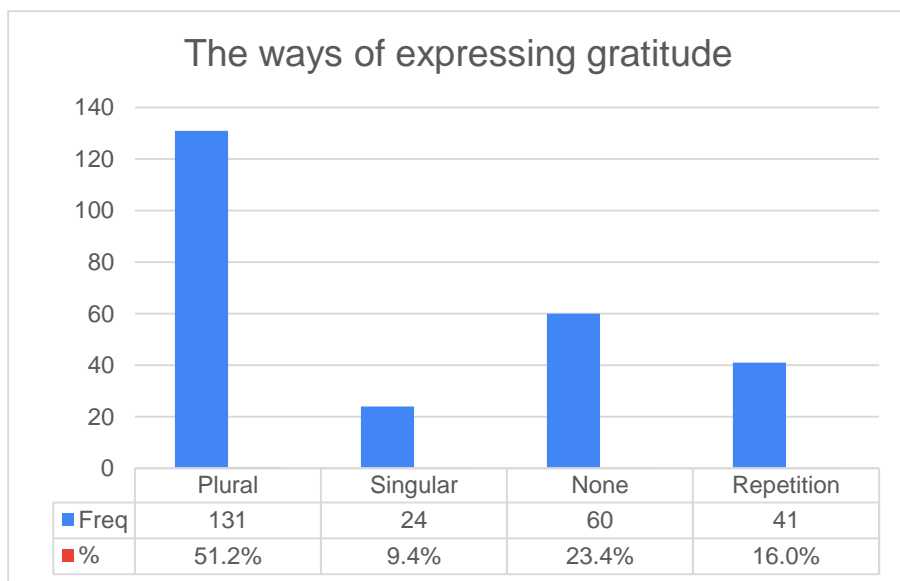


Figure 4. Frequency of ways of expressing gratitude in the hotel responses

The gratitude was increased by using various intensifiers, such as *شكرا جزيلا fukran zazi:lan* ‘thanks a lot,’ *مع خالص الشكر zazi:l alfukur* ‘many thanks,’ *التقدير والتقدير maʕ xa:lisʕ alfukur wa attaqli:r* ‘with sincere thanks and appreciation,’ and *شكرا مرة أخرى fukran marrah ʔuxra:* ‘thanks again.’ In addition, it was found that gratitude was offered mostly by using the first person plural pronoun (131 times) than the first person singular pronoun (24 times), for instance, *نشكرك/نشكركم naʕkurk/naʕkurkum* ‘we thank you (singular)/we thank you (plural)’ and *أشكرك/أشكركم ʔaʕkurk/ʔaʕkurkum* ‘I thank you (singular)/I thank you (plural),’ respectively (see Figure 4). Furthermore, it was found that gratitude was used 60 times without a subject pronoun that could indicate the singular or plural form of the hotel manager, such as *شكرا fukran* ‘thanks.’ Finally, although the frequency of gratitude was 215, it was repeated 41 times in some responses. In these responses,

it was used mostly twice in one response but rarely thrice in one response. The repetition was used to intensify gratitude.

The first-person plural pronoun was used mostly to reflect corporate identity rather than personal identity, as shown in Figure 4. This result is similar to Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) study but differs from Ho's (2017a) finding that the use of 'I' and 'my' emphasizes rapport enhancement.

Gratitude was used at different positions in the responses, similar to Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) findings. However, it was used at the beginning more than in the middle and at the end of the response (see Figure 5). For example, it was used 173 times (80.5%) at the beginning, 35 times (16.3%) in the middle, and seven times (3.3%) at the end. The gratitude at the beginning and in the middle was used for the same reasons in the examples mentioned above, but it was used mostly for closing in the end. This is especially true for the form of 'thank you,' which is followed by the reason for or focus of thanking.

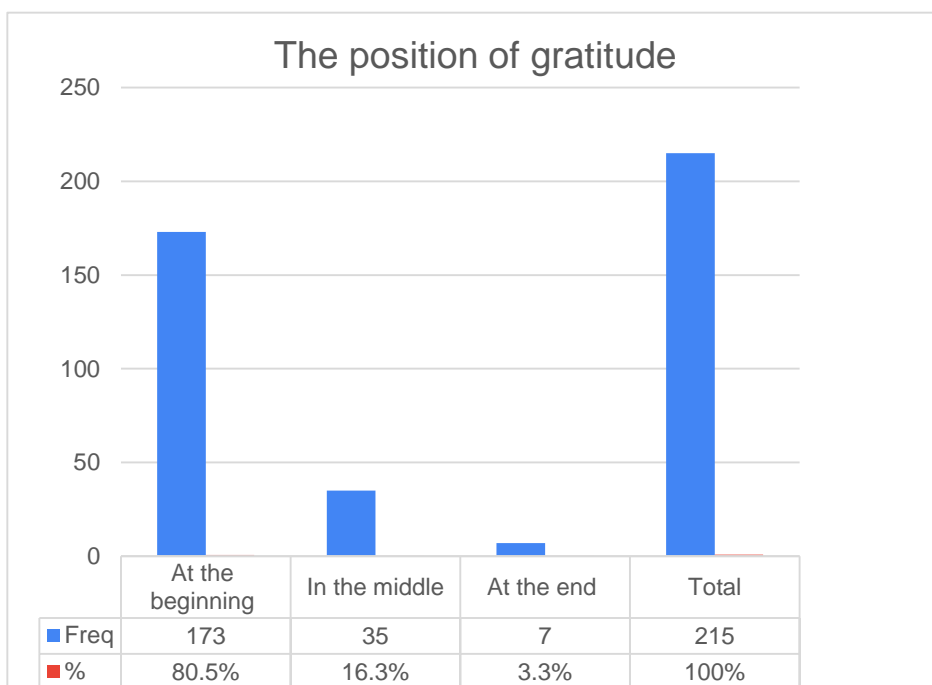


Figure 5. Frequency of the position of gratitude in the hotel responses

### Move 3: Closing pleasantries

This move occurred 194 times (12.1%), and it functions as a signal to close the hotel response. In this move, hotel managers indicate their leadership position in customer services or hotel management (Zhang and Vásquez 2014). However, there were different ways to end responses, which also differed in frequency (see Figure

6). The tendency of hotel managers to use their real names and end the responses by mentioning their position of leadership in customer services or hotel administration agreed with some studies, such as those on Chinese (Zhang and Vásquez 2014) and Japanese (Morrow and Yamanouchi 2020) in terms of the usage of self-identification in *closing pleasantries* moves.

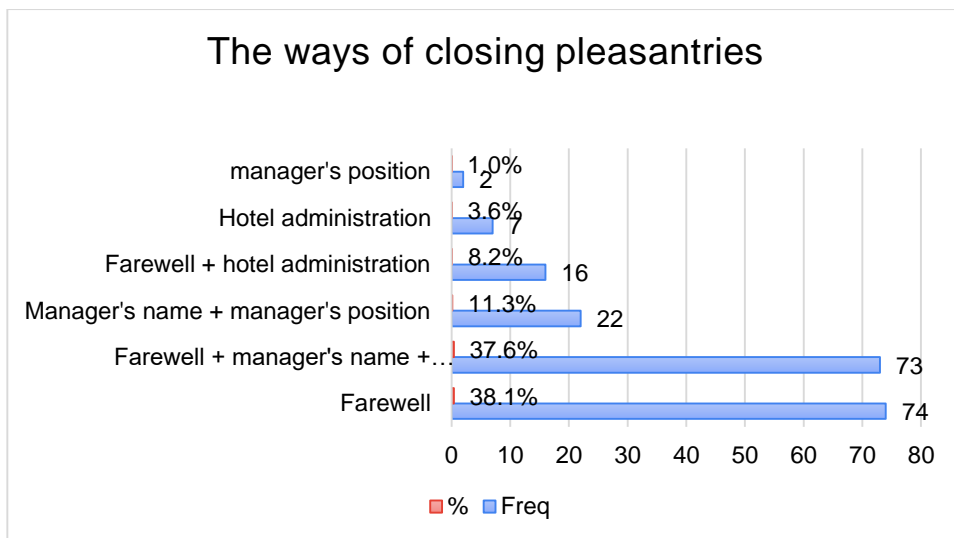


Figure 6. Frequency of ways of closing pleasantries in the hotel responses

This move contrasts *the opening pleasantries/greetings* because it was used less frequently than *opening pleasantries*. The use of farewell only was the most frequent way, followed by the use of farewell, name of manager, and his/her position at the hotel. Other ways were used but less frequently, such as the use of the name of a manager with a position, farewell with hotel administration, the use of hotel administration only, and position only. The forms of *closing pleasantries* differ (see Examples 12–17).

#	Examples
12	تحياتي <i>tahijja:ti</i> 'My greetings.'
13	تحياتي (اسم المدير) المدير العام لفندق (اسم الفندق) <i>tahijja:ti (ʔism almudi:r) almudi:r alʕa:m lifunduq (ʔism alfunduq).</i> 'My greetings, (manager's name), the general manager of (the hotel name).'
14	(اسم المدير) المدير العام لفندق (اسم الفندق) <i>(ʔism almudi:r) almudi:r alʕa:m lifunduq (ʔism alfunduq).</i> '(Manager's name), the general manager of (the hotel name).'
15	مع أطيب التحايا لإدارة الفندق <i>maʕ ʔatʕjab alttaha:ja: ʔida:rat alfunduq</i>

- ‘With best regards, the hotel administration.’
- 16 إدارة العلاقات العامة وخدمة العملاء  
*ʔida:rat alʕala:qa:t alʕa:mmah wa xidmat alʕumala:ʔ*  
 ‘The administration of public relations and customer service.’
- 17 المدير العام لفندق (اسم الفندق)  
*almudi:r alʕa:m lifunduq(ʔism alfunduq)*  
 ‘The general manager of (the hotel name).’

#### Move 4: Inviting for a visit

This move was used as the reviewer’s invitation to return for a better experience. It was the third most frequent move in the hotel responses, used 185 times (11.5%). However, hotels’ invitations have different forms (see Examples, 18-21).

- | #  | Examples   |
|----|--|
| 18 | ندعوك لزيارتنا مرة أخرى<br><i>nadʕu:k lizija:ratina: marrah ʔuxra:</i><br>‘We invite you to visit us again.’           |
| 19 | نتطلع لزيارتكم القادمة<br><i>natatʕallaʕ lizija:raticum alqa:dimah</i><br>‘We are looking forward to your next visit.’ |
| 20 | نأمل أن تزورنا مجددا<br><i>naʔmal ʔan tazuru: rana: muzaddadan</i><br>‘We hope you visit us again.’                    |
| 21 | نتمنى ان نراك مره أخرى<br><i>natamanna: ʔan nara:k marrah ʔuxra:</i><br>‘We wish to see you again.’                    |

In the invitations, hotel managers always used the first-person plural pronoun, as shown in the example above. This move functions as a pre-closing technique to end the hotel’s response. It is located at the end of the response, but before the closing pleasantries (Zhang and Vásquez 2014). In this case, the direct verb *invite* or the emotional verb, such as *hope/wish*, was used in other responses (Cenni and Goethals 2020). Finally, this move overlaps with the move of *continuing relationship* in its function, which is discussed later.

#### Move 5: Proving action

This move was performed 171 times (10.6%). It serves as the reviewer’s guarantee that actions have been taken regarding the unpleasant experience, and it can be seen that the action has been taken by [...] department/management teams (Zhang and Vásquez 2014). In addition, rapport enhancement can be seen in this move because it fulfils the reviewer’s interactional goals (Ho 2017b). The proof of action was mentioned in different ways, such as taking it into consideration and sharing comments with the relevant department or person (see Examples 22-25).

#	Examples
22	سيتم مشاركة ملاحظتك مع القسم المختص <i>sajatim muḥa:raḥat mula:ḥadʿatak maʿ alqism almuxtasʿ</i> 'Your feedback will be shared with the relevant department.'
23	تأكد أن كل ملاحظتك أخذت بعين الإعتبار <i>taʿakkad ʿanna kul mula:ḥadʿa:ṭik ʿuxiḍat biʿajn alʿiṭiba:r</i> 'Make sure that all of your feedback was taken into consideration.'
24	ونؤكد لك أن تعليقاتك سيتم توصيلها للشخص المسؤول للتأكد من تحسين الخدمة <i>wa nuʿakkid lak ʿanna taʿli:qa:ṭik sajatim tawsʿi:laha: liḥaḥsʿ almasʿu:l</i> <i>liḥtaʿakkud min taḥsi:n alxidmah</i> 'We assure you that your comments will be delivered to the person in charge to make sure of improving the service.'
25	وسوف يقوم فريق العمل بدراسة جميع السلبيات التي ذكرتها <i>wa sawfa jaqu:m fari:q alʿamal bidira:sat zami:ʿ assilbijja:t allati ḍakartaha:</i> 'The team will investigate all the negative comments that you have mentioned.'

#### Move 6: Apologizing

This move occurred 134 times (8.3%), as we focused on the hotel responses to the reviewer's negative reviews with the ratings between 'Terrible' and 'Poor.' When a hotel manager apologizes, it means that the problem is acknowledged (Ho 2018). However, the use of an apology was not always about the source of the problem, but there were different focuses on the reasons for the apology to shift from the source of the problem to something different, such as unpleasant experience, noise, what happened, and so forth (see Examples 26-35).

#	The Focus of Apology	Examples
26	Unpleasant experience	نأسف بمرورك تجربة غير مرضية <i>naʿsaf bimuru:rak tazrubah yaḥr murdʿjah</i> 'We apologize for your unpleasant experience.'
27	Inconvenience	نعذر عن أي إزعاج غير مقصود <i>naʿtaḍir ʿan ʿaj izʿa:j yaḥr maqsʿu:d</i> 'We apologize for any unintended inconvenience.'
28	About what happened	ارجو ان تقبل خالص اعتذاري عن ما حدث لك خلال اقامتك <i>ʿarzu: ʿan taqbal xa:lisʿ ʿiṣtiḍa:ri ʿan ma:</i> <i>ḥadaḥ lak xila:l ʿiqa:matik</i> 'Please, accept my sincere apology for what happened to you during your stay.'
29	About what affected the stay	ويؤسفنا أنه قد واجهتك بعض الأمور التي أثرت على إقامتك لدينا <i>wa juʿsifuna: ʿannahu qad wa:zahatk baʿdʿ</i> <i>alʿumu:r allati ʿaḥḥarat ʿala: iqa:matik</i> <i>ladajna:</i>

- 30 About the unsatisfying service  
 ‘(It) makes us sorry (to know) that you faced some issues that affected your stay with us.’  
 نعتذر لكم عن جميع الخدمات التي لم تتل رضاكم  
*naʕtaḍir lakum ʕan zami:ʕ alxadama:t allati lam tanal*  
*ridʕa:kum*  
 ‘We apologize to you for all the services that have not satisfied you.’
- 31 About the stay  
 يؤسفنا أن اقامتكم معنا لم تتل على رضاكم التام  
*juʔsifuna: ʔanna ʔiqa:matikum maʕana: lam tanal ʕala ridʕa:kum atta:m*  
 ‘(It) makes us sorry (to know) that your stay with us was not completely satisfactory to you.’
- 32 General  
 تفضلوا بقبول خالص الاعتذار ونشكركم على ملاحظتكم البناءة  
*tafadʕdʕalu: biqabu:l xa:lisʕ aliʕtiḍa:r wa naʕkurkum ʕala: mula:hadʕa:tikum albanna:ʔah*  
 ‘Please accept the sincere apology and we thank you for your constructive feedback.’
- 33 Problems  
 نعتذر منك بسبب المشكلة التي واجهتها  
*naʕtaḍir mink bisabab almufkilah allati wa:zahtaha:*  
 ‘We apologize to you for the problem you faced.’
- 34 Specific problem  
 تقبل خالص اعتذارنا عن ما وجدته من قذارة في الدور الأول  
*taqabbal xa:lisʕ ʔiʕtiḍa:rana: ʕan ma:wazadtahu min qaḍa:rah fi addawr alaʔawwal*  
 ‘Accept our sincere apology for the garbage you found on the first floor.’
- 35 Misunderstanding  
 نعتذر عن اي سوء فهم حصل من قبل قسم الاستقبال  
*naʕtaḍir ʕan ʔaj su:ʔ fihim haʕal min qibal qism alʔistiqba:l*  
 ‘We apologize for any misunderstanding on the part of the Reception Department.’

In addition, this means that there is a creative and business language in which hotels focus on apologizing for unpleasant experiences in general, rather than focusing on specific failed services, to avoid abusing the hotel’s reputation. From the perspective of rapport management theory, it is interpreted as an attempt to manage not only reviewers’ personal faces, but also their sociality rights, more specifically ‘equity right’ (Cenni and Goethals 2020). This refers to our expectation of being “treated fairly” (Spencer-Oatey 2008:16). Thus, apologizing was used to enhance the rapport with the reviewer (Ho 2017b). Regarding frequency, this finding differs from that of Cenni and Goethals (2020), who found that *apology* moves written in English, Dutch, and Italian had a high frequency of hotel responses to negative online reviews on TripAdvisor. This is also in contrast with what was

found by Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020), who concluded that *apologizing* moves have a high frequency in English and Japanese texts in response to negative reviews on TripAdvisor. These discrepancies may stem from cultural differences in responding to negative online reviews.

In the data, the apology was expressed by different forms, as in verbs like *اعتذر* *naʕtaḍir* ‘we apologize,’ nouns like *أسف* *ʔasaf* and *اعتذار* *ʔiʕtiḍa:r* ‘apology,’ adjectives like *أسف* *ʔa:sif* ‘I’m sorry,’ and adverbs like *بكل أسف* *bikulli ʔasaf* ‘terribly sorry,’ respectively, as shown in Figure 7. Although the frequency of this move was 134 times, as mentioned above, the apology was repeated 30 times in some responses. Similar to gratitude, it was used mostly two times in one response and rarely three times. The apology expressions were also intensified by using various intensifiers, either by using adjectives, such as ‘sincere,’ ‘deep,’ and ‘very’ in the form of nouns, or by using adverbs, such as ‘honestly,’ ‘sincerely,’ ‘terribly,’ and ‘deeply’ in the form of verbs.

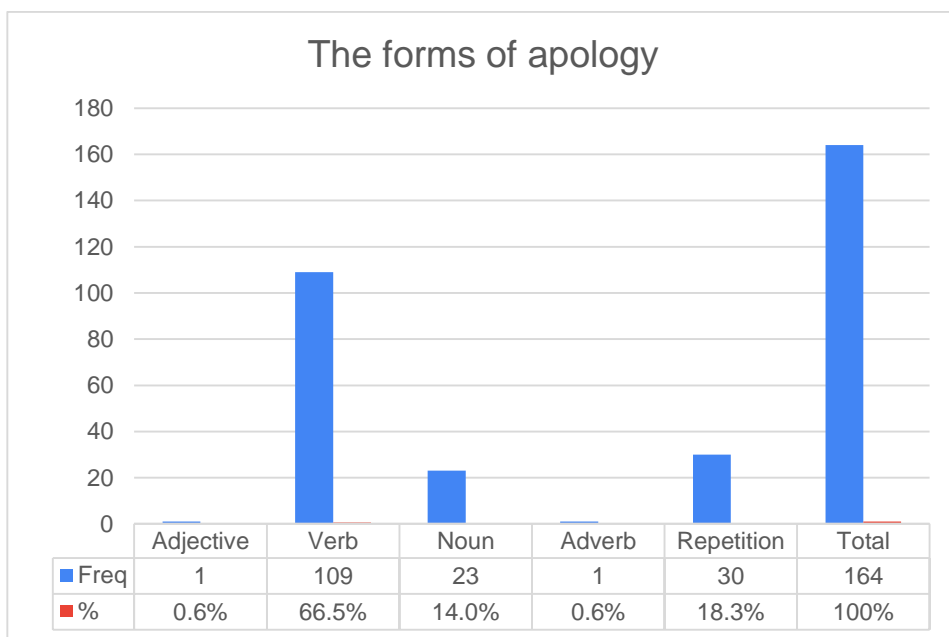


Figure 7. Frequency of forms of apology in the hotel responses

It was observed that the hotel managers used the plural form of subject pronoun as *اعتذر* *naʕtaḍir* and *نأسف* *naʔsaf* ‘we apologize’ more than the singular form of subject/object pronoun, such as *اعتذر* *ʔaʕtiḍir* ‘I apologize’ and *بؤسفي/أسف* *juʔsifuni:/ ʔʔasaf* ‘(It) makes me sorry/I’m sorry’ (see Figure 8). In addition, when the hotel manager apologized by using the singular form of subject pronoun, he/she would sometimes say *أود أن أعتذر نيابة عن الفندق وفريقه* *ʔawad ʔan ʔaʕtaḍir nija:batan ʕan alfunduq wa fari:qih* ‘I’d like to apologize on behalf of the hotel and its team.’ In other words, the hotel manager used the expression ‘on the behalf of’ instead of

‘we.’ Thus, the use of plural forms indicates corporate identity rather than personal identity.

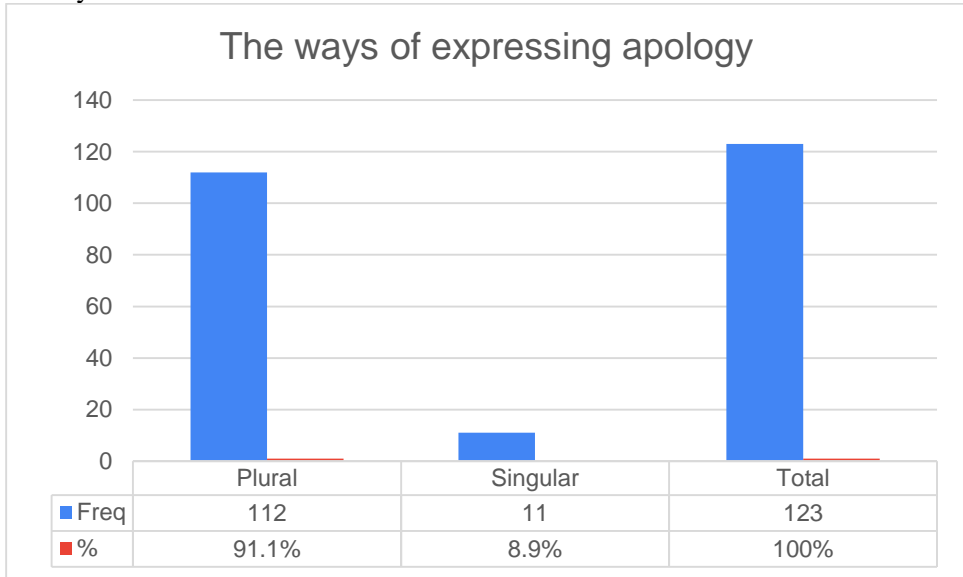


Figure 8. Frequency of ways of expressing apology in the hotel responses

The apology appeared in different positions in the hotel’s responses to negative reviews. As shown in Figure 9, it appeared in the middle (106:79.1%) more than at the beginning (27:20.1%) and end (1:0.7%). Sometimes, this move appeared more than once in responses, near the end of the response, to strengthen the intensity of the apology (Zhang and Vásquez 2014).

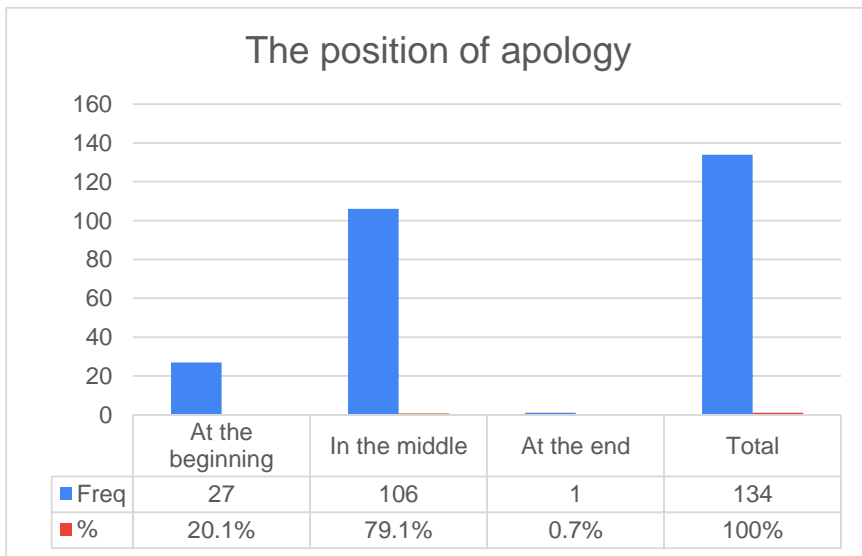


Figure 9. Frequency of the position of apology in the hotel responses

## Move 7: Self-promoting

This move occurred 78 times (4.9%), and it promoted the hotel's amenities, services, and image (see Examples 36-38).

#	Examples
36	نحن نفخر في تلبية احتياجات ضيوفنا أفضل طريقة ممكنة <i>nahnu nafxar fi: talbijat ihtija:za:t d'uju:funa: ʔafd'al t'ari:qah  mumkinah</i> 'We take pride in meeting our guests' needs in the best possible way.'
37	نسعى في فندق (اسم الفندق)، لتقديم أرقى الخدمات وتحقيق أعلى معايير الجودة <i>nasʕa: fi: funduq (ʔism alfunduq), litaqdi:m ʔarqa: alxadama:t wa  taḥqi:q ʔaʕla: maʕa:jj:i:r alʔawdah</i> 'In (the hotel name), we strive to provide the best in services and achieve the highest quality standards.'
38	رضانكم دائماً غايتنا <i>rid'a: ʔukum da: ʔiman ya:jatuna:</i> 'Your satisfaction is always our goal.'

Self-promoting ignores the reviewer's complaint, that is, interactional goals, focusing only on the hotel's management and marketing for the hotel in the response (Ho 2018). This move overlaps with the move of *denying problems* but in a different way. Therefore, it is considered rapport damaging.

## Move 8: Recognizing reviewer's value

This move was performed 65 (4%) times, which shows how the hotel valued the reviewers' comments as customers. *Recognizing the reviewer's value*, the hotel manager enhances rapport with the reviewer because it acknowledges the importance of the reviewer and his/her opinion that fulfils his/her face wants (Ho 2018) (see Examples 39-40).

#	Examples
39	تقييمكم في غاية الأهمية بالنسبة لنا <i>taqjji:mukum fi: ya:jat alʔahammijjah binnisbah lana:</i> 'Your evaluation is extremely important to us.'
40	رأيك وانطباعك عن الفندق في غاية الأهمية لنا حيث انه يساعدنا على تقديم خدماتنا بشكل أفضل <i>raʔjuk wa int'iba:ʕuk ʕan alfunduq fi ya:jat alʔahammijjah lana: ḥajθ  ʔannahu</i> <i>jusa:ʕiduna: ʕala: taqdi:m xadamatina: bifakil ʔafd'al</i> 'Your opinion and impression about the hotel is very important to us as they help us provide our services in a better way.'

## Move 9: Referring to customer's reviews

This move was used 52 times (3.2%). It functions as a hotel that relies on a specific feature of the reviewer's complaints (Zhang and Vásquez 2014) (see Examples 41-43).

- | #  | Examples  |
|----|---|
| 41 | <p>سوف يتم مشاركة ملاحظاتك بخصوص المعاملة والخدمات مع الإدارة المختصة لاتخاذ اللازم<br/> <i>sawfa jatim muṣa:rakat mula:ħaḏʿa:tik bixusʿu:sʿ almuṣa:malah wa<br/> alxadama:t maʿ alʿida:rah almuxtasʿsʿah littixa:ḏ allazim</i><br/> ‘Your feedback regarding the treatment and services will be shared with the respective department to take necessary action.’</p> |
| 42 | <p>فيما يتعلق بتعليقاتكم حول الحشرات والذباب وحمام سباحة غير نظيف. لقد ناقشت ذلك مع الفريق<br/> <i>fī:ma: yataḥallaq bitaḥḥliqa:tikum ħawl alħafara:t wa alḏuba:b wa<br/> ħamma:m siba:ħah yaġr nadʿi:f. laqad na:qaft ḏa:lik maʿ alfari:q</i><br/> ‘Regarding your comments on the insects, flies, and unclean swimming pool, I discussed that with the team.’</p>   |
| 43 | <p>بالنسبة إلى اقتراحكم عن المسبح فقد تم مناقشة الأمر وسوف يتم العمل عليها<br/> <i>binnisbah ʔila: ʔiqтира:hikum ħan almasbaħ faqad tamma muna:qaṣat<br/> alʔamr wa sawfa jatim alħamal ḥalajħa:</i><br/> ‘Regarding your suggestion about the swimming pool, it was discussed, and it would be handled.’</p>   |

The frequency of this move was lower than that of *apologizing*. Hotel managers intended to avoid paying attention to specific complaints to maintain the hotel's evaluation and reputation. This move overlaps with the move of *proving the action* in terms of discussing complaints with the team. However, it differs in that it does not mention a specific problem in proving an action. In other words, the hotel manager transferred the complaint/feedback/comment of the reviewer to the respective department/team without mentioning the problem in the response.

## Move 10: Expressing feelings

The move of *expressing feelings* reflects how the hotel manager feels about the reviewer's complaint written in a negative review (Ho 2017a). It was used 50 times (3.1%). The hotel managers expressed their feelings and emotions either positively or negatively reading the review or problems mentioned in the responses (see Examples 44-47).

- | #  | Examples  |
|----|---|
| 44 | <p>يسعدنا اقامتكم بالفندق<br/> <i>yusʿiduna: iqa:matikum bilfunduq</i><br/> ‘Your stay in the hotel makes us happy.’</p>  |
| 45 | <p>نود أن نعرب لكم عن سعادتنا بتعليقكم<br/> <i>nawad an nuṣrib lakum ħan saħa:datina: bitaḥḥli:qikum</i><br/> ‘We'd like to express our pleasure with your comments.’</p> |

- 46 نحن مستأؤون أنكم واجهتم بعض الأشياء التي اثرت على إقامتكم  
*naħnu musta:ʔu:n ʔannakum wa:ʔaħtum baħd<sup>s</sup> alʔafja:ʔ allati ʔaθθarat*  
*ʕala: ʔiqa:matikum*  
 ‘We are upset that you faced some things which affected your stay.’
- 47 وشعرنا بخيبة أمل عميقة  
*wa faʕurna: bixajbat ʔamal ʕami:qah*  
 ‘We felt deeply disappointed.’

By forming an affective association with the reviewer, sociality rights are managed, and rapport is enhanced when the hotel manager attempts to reveal himself/herself and be close to the reviewer (Ho 2018). The low frequency of *expressing feelings* by hotel managers in the Arabic responses is perhaps due to the rare expressing of feelings in the Arabic formal responses. This result contradicts the findings of Ho (2018), who reported that *expressing feelings* was rated as the most preferred move on TripAdvisor.

Hotel managers expressed their feelings positively, indicating that they were happy because of the reviewer’s stay. Also, they expressed positive feelings when the reviewer mentioned something he/she liked during his/her stay besides the negative review. This means that hotel managers exploit the good things mentioned by the reviewer to express their feelings positively before expressing their negative feelings about the dissatisfied experience or service failure. The positive adjectives used by hotel managers were ‘happy,’ ‘proud,’ and ‘lucky,’ which were intensified by ‘very’ and emphasized by ‘always’ and ‘indeed’. For negative feelings, they used ‘worried,’ ‘disappointed,’ ‘upset,’ and ‘sad,’ which were significantly intensified.

According to Figure 10, positive feelings were used more than negative feelings (32 and 18 times, respectively). In addition, the first-person plural pronoun was used more frequently in positive feelings than in negative feelings. In addition, negative feelings were repeated in some responses more frequently than positive feelings to intensify expressing dissatisfaction with the dissatisfaction experienced by the customer during his/her stay.

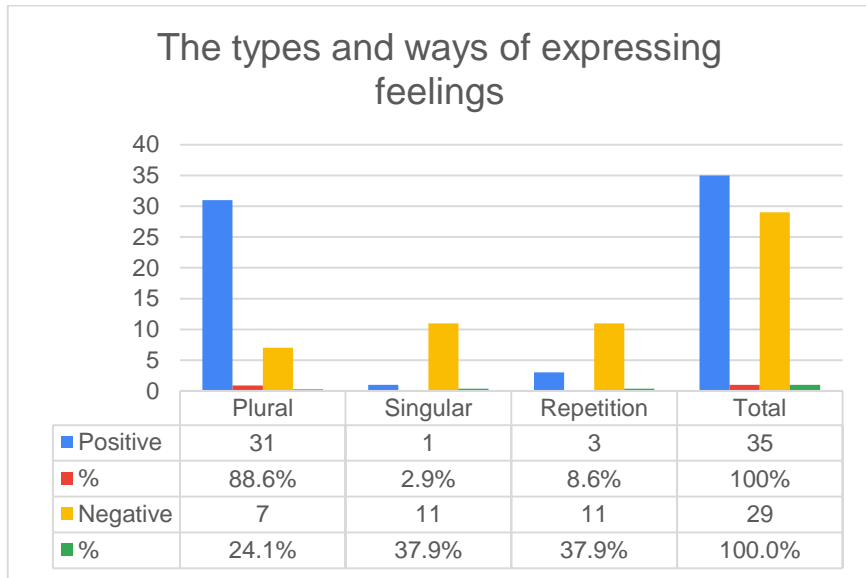


Figure 10. Frequency of types and ways of expressing feelings in the hotel responses

#### Move 11: Showing appreciation/respect

This move was used 50 times (3.1%). It shows how hotel managers appreciate what was written in the response, such as appreciating the reviewer's time, comments, interest, feedback, frankness, and sharing opinions (see Examples 48-50).

#	Examples
48	نقدر كثيرًا اهتمامكم بمشاركتنا رأيكم <i>nuqaddir kaθi:ran ihtima:mukum bimufa:rakatina: ra?jukum</i> 'We greatly appreciate your concern about sharing your opinion with us.'
49	نقدر لك أخذ الوقت لنشر تجربتك أثناء البقاء في المنتجع <i>nuqaddir lak ?axð alwaqt linaθr tazrubatik ?aθna:? albaqa:? fi: almuntazaθ</i> 'We appreciate your time in sharing your experience during your stay in the resort.'
50	واننا نقدر حرصكم على إبلاغنا بملاحظاتكم <i>wa ?innana: nuqaddir hirs'ukum əala: ?ibla:yina: bimula:ħað'a:tikum</i> 'We appreciate your interest to inform us about your feedback.'

It is considered rapport enhancing because the review was appreciated and valued (Ho 2017b, 2018; Cenni and Goethals 2020). The appreciation was intensified using adverbs such as 'very' and 'greatly' in the response. This move is similar to *expressing feelings* move in terms of frequency. This provides the reviewer with a sense of trust and satisfaction. However, it overlaps with the same function of *expressing gratitude*. The main goal beyond discussing them here is to distinguish it from thanking in terms of frequency. This move was used with the

first-person plural pronoun (49:98%) rather than the singular pronoun (1:2%) (see Figure 11).

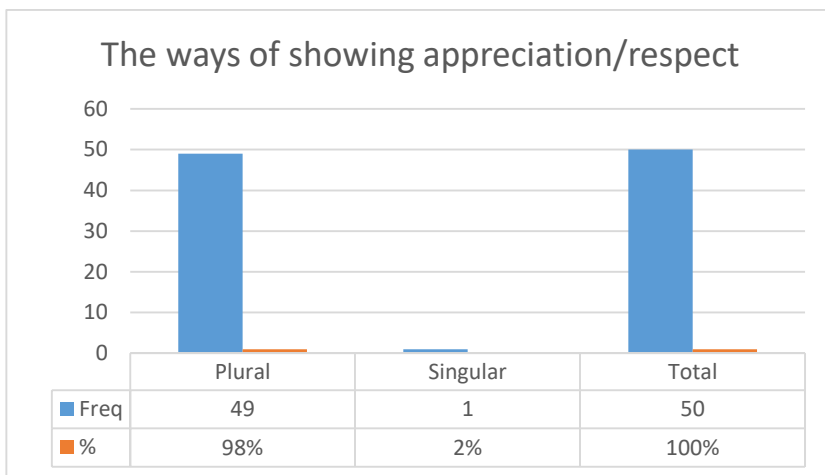


Figure 11. Frequency of ways of showing appreciation/respect in the hotel responses

#### Move 12: Avoiding recurring problems

This move indicates that hotel management makes an effort to reassure reviewers that the reasons for their discontent are one-off situations and will not recur (Zhang and Vásquez 2014). It was used 47 times (2.9%) (see Examples 51-53).

#

#### Examples

- 51 لاَتخاذ الإِجْرَاءات الصَّحِيحَةَ الْمُناسِبَةَ لِتَجْنِب تَكَرُّرِهَا فِي الْمُسْتَقْبَل  
*littixa:ḍ alʔiḡra:ʔa:t asʕsʕaḥi:ḥah almuna:sibah litaḡannub tikra:raha: fi: almustaqbal*  
 ‘To take the appropriate corrective measures to avoid its recurrence in the future.’
- 52 لَمْنَع تَكَرُّرِهَا مَجْدِداً  
*limanʕ tikra:raha: muzaddadan*  
 ‘To stop its recurrence again.’
- 53 وَسَنْقُوم بِعَمَلِ الْلاَزِمِ فِي الْمَرَّاتِ الْقَادِمَةِ لِنَكُون عِنْد حَسَنِ ظَنِّكُمْ  
*wa sanaqu:m biʕamal alla:zim fi: almarra:t alqa:dimah linaku:n ʕind ḥusun dʕannikum*  
 ‘Next time we will do what is necessary to meet your expectations.’

Sometimes, this move was substituted with Move 5, *proving action*, in which there is an assurance that the action has been taken. In many cases, Moves 5 and 12 occurred together. In addition, this move overlaps with the move of *promising*, but the difference is that the move of *avoiding recurring problems* does not include the word ‘promise.’ Instead, it was used with expressions such as ‘to stop,’ ‘to take appropriate corrective measures,’ and ‘we will do what is necessary.’

## Move 13: Soliciting response

This move occurred 47 times (2.9%), similar to the previous move in terms of frequency. This indicates that the complaint was not obvious, and the hotel manager asked for further clarification from the reviewer (Ho 2018) (see Examples 54-55). In addition, it provides an opportunity to discuss service failures from public to private, which also functions as a face-saving act for hotels to be criticized on online platforms (Cenni and Goethals 2020).

#	Examples
54	<p>ندعوكم لأرسال ايميل على [name@hotel.com] ليتم التواصل معكم ومعرفة ماحدث  <i>nadʕu:kum liʔirsa:l ʔimajl ʕala: [name@hotel.com] lijatim attawa:sʕul  maʕakum wa maʕrifat ma: ʔadaθ</i>  ‘We invite you to send an email to [name@hotel.com] to contact and learn more about what happened.’</p>
55	<p>حتي يتسنى لنا معرفه القصور والإستفاده من ملاحظاتكم المهمه على الايميل  [name@hotel.com]  <i>ʔatta: jatasanna: lana: maʕrifat alqusʕu:r wa alʔistifa:dah min  mula:ʔadʕa:tikum almuhimmah ʕala: alʔimajl [name@hotel.com]</i>  ‘So that we know the shortcomings and benefit from your important feedback to the email [name@hotel.com].’</p>

## Move 14: Continuing relationship

This move was used 29 times (1.8%), and it functions as an invitation for the reviewer to stay in touch with the hotel staff or visit the hotel again in the future (see Examples 56-57).

#	Examples
56	<p>أتمنى أن تتصل بي خلال سفرك التالي الى الرياض  <i>ʔatamanna: an tattasʕil bi: xila:l safarik atta:li ʔila: arrija:dʕ</i>  ‘I hope you contact me on your next trip to Riyadh.’</p>
57	<p>نرجو منك التواصل معنا في حال قررت زيارتنا مره أخرى  <i>narzu: mink attawa:sʕul maʕana: fi: ʔa:l qarrart zija:ratina: marrah  ʔuxra:</i>  ‘Please, contact us if you have decided to visit us next time.’</p>

This move overlaps with the move of *inviting for a visit*, but it is not a direct invitation, such as ‘we invite you to visit us next time.’ There is rapport enhancement between the reviewer and hotel management, which plays a role in service recovery (Ho 2017a). This enhancement was managed by the reviewers’ sociality rights (Ho 2018).

## Move 15: Promising

This move was utilized a little, 24 times (1.5%), and it was promising to the reviewer regarding his/her negative review. *Promising* moves appeared in different forms, that is, what the promise was for, such as service improvement, offering the best services, not to let you down, and so forth (see Examples 58-61).

#	The Focus of Promising	Examples
58	Service improvement	نعدكم على تطوير خدماتنا <i>naʕidukum ʕala: tatʕwi:r xadama:tina:</i> 'We promise you to improve our services.'
59	Offering the best hotel services	نعدكم بتوفير أفضل خدمة فندقية <i>naʕidukum bitawfi:r ʔafdʕal xidmah funduqijjah</i> 'We promise you to provide you with the best hotel services.'
60	Not to let you down	نعدك أننا لن نخذلك <i>naʕiduk annana: lan naxḏulak</i> 'We promise you that we won't let you down.'
61	Taking a proper proof of action for the complaint as in A and to investigate the complaint as in B.	(A) نعدك باتخاذ الإجراء المناسب فوراً <i>naʕiduk bittixa:ḏ alʔizra:ʔ almuna:sib fawran</i> 'We promise you to take the appropriate action immediately.'  (B) ونعدكم بأنني وفريق العمل نقوم حالياً بدراسة جميع هذه النقاط <i>wa naʕidukum biʔanni wa fari:q alʕamal naqu:m ḥa:lijjan bidira:sat zami:ʕ haḏihi annuqa:tʕ</i> 'We promise you that the team and I will investigate all these points.'

This move overlaps with the move of *avoiding recurring problems* but without using the verb 'promise' as mentioned in Move 12. It was observed that *promising* was accompanied by the first-person plural pronoun, such as *نعدكم* *naʕidukum* 'we promise you,' except in case of three responses where it was expressed by a noun, such as *مع الوعد* *maʕ alwafḏ* 'with promise.' Hotel management usually used the move of promising after the move of apology to obtain reviewers' satisfaction.

## Move 16: Offering explanations

This move plays the role in hotels' providing explanation for the service failure to the reviewer. It was only used 16 times (1%) (see Examples 62-64).

- | #  | <b>Examples</b>  |
|----|--|
| 62 | <p>بخصوص النادي الرياضي تم تعديل مواعيد عمل النادي الرياضي ليصبح من الساعة 6 صباحاً وحتى مساءً 11</p> <p><i>bixus<sup>u</sup>:s<sup>f</sup> anna:di arrija:d<sup>i</sup> tamma taʕdi:l mawa:ʕi:d ʕamal anna:di arrija:d<sup>i</sup> lijus<sup>b</sup>iḥ min assa:ʕah 6 s<sup>ʕ</sup>aba:ḥan wa ḥatta: 11 masa:ʔan</i></p> <p>‘Regarding the sports club, the working hours have been changed from 6:00 am to 11:00 p.m.’</p>                     |
| 63 | <p>بخصوص الحمامات ومساحتها حسب نوع الغرفة</p> <p><i>bixus<sup>u</sup>:s<sup>f</sup> alhamma:ma:t wa masa:ḥatiha: ḥasab naw<sup>ʕ</sup> alyurfah</i></p> <p>‘The size of the bathroom depends on the type of room reserved.’</p>  |
| 64 | <p>أما حول المسافة من الفندق لبوابة السيدات فإن فندق (اسم الفندق) يوفر خدمة الحافلات المجانية لتوصيل السيدات</p> <p><i>amma: ḥawl almasa:fah min alfunduq libawwa:bat assajjida:t faʔinna funduq (ʔism alfunduq) juwaffir xidmat alha:fila:t almazza:nijjah litaws<sup>ʕ</sup>:l assajjida:t</i></p> <p>‘Regarding the distance from the hotel to the Ladies’ Gate, the hotel (the hotel name) provide free bus services to pick up ladies.’</p> |

It serves both for acknowledging and dismissing communicative goals (Cenni and Goethals 2020). In addition, it enhances the rapport with the reviewer because it fulfils the reviewers’ interactional goals (Ho 2017b, 2018).

#### Move 17: Justifying

Justification usually refers to the provision of reasons for service failures in response to negative reviews. This move appeared only eight times in the data (see Examples 65-66). This move was seen after the apology in the hotel responses. This fulfils the reviewers’ interactional goals (Ho 2017b).

- | #  | <b>Examples</b>   |
|----|---|
| 65 | <p>فإن المغادرة المتأخرة للضيوف السابقة يمكن في بعض الأحيان أن يعيق فريق الإشراف الداخلي في تجهيز الغرف في الموعد المحدد للاستلام</p> <p><i>faʔinna almuya:darah almutaʔaxxirah lid<sup>ʕ</sup>d<sup>ʕ</sup>uju:f assa:biqah jumkin fi: baʕd<sup>ʕ</sup> alʔaḥja:n ʔan juʕi:q fari:q alʔifra:f adda:xili fi: tazhi:z alyuraf fi: almawʕi:d almuḥaddad lilʔistila:m</i></p> <p>‘The former guests’ late check-out may sometimes hinder the internal supervision team from preparing the rooms on-time for check-in.’</p> |
| 66 | <p>لكن تم تغيير وقت تسجيل الوصول / المغادرة تحت شروط وسياسة الفندق الجديدة</p> <p><i>la:kin tamma taʔjjir waqt taszi:l alwus<sup>ʕ</sup>:l/almuya:darah taḥta furu:t<sup>ʕ</sup> wa sija:sat alfunduq alzadi:dah</i></p> <p>‘... but the check-in/check-out time has been changed under the new hotel conditions and policy.’</p>   |

#### Move 18: Compensating

This move refers to the hotel offering free services, such as room upgrades, early check-ins, and other compensations to reviewers, because of previous unpleasant

experiences and money spent at the hotel. It was only used four times in hotel responses to negative reviews (see Examples 67-68).

- | #  | Examples   |
|----|--|
| 67 | نتشرف بكم مرة أخرى لتعويضكم عما لقيتموه<br><i>natafarraf bikum marrah ʔuxra: litaʕwi:dʕikum ʕamma: laqi:tumu:h</i><br>‘We would be honored to have you again to make up for this mishap.’  |
| 68 | كما نقدم لكم ترقية مجانية لحجزكم القادم معنا إن شاء الله إلى فئة الغرفة الأعلى عند حجزكم القادم<br>ما عدا فترتي رمضان والحج نظرا لعدم توافر الإمكانية خلال هذه الفترة<br><i>kama: nuqaddim lakum tarqijah mazza:nijjah lihazzikum alqa:dim maʕana: in</i><br><i>shaʔallah ʔila: fiʔat alyurfah alʔaʕla: ʕinda hazzikum alqa:dim ma: ʕada: fatrataj ramadʕa:n wa alhaʕ naðʕaran liʕadam tawa:fur alʔimka:nijjah xila:l haðihi alfatrah</i><br>‘Also, we offer you a free-of-charge room upgrade for your next reservation with us, God willing, except during Ramadan and Hajj due to unavailability during this period.’ |

Compensation has been found to be an effective strategy for customer satisfaction (Levy et al. 2013). However, hotels are hesitant to offer compensation to TripAdvisor because other customers will request the same treatment (Cenni and Goethals 2020). Some hotels exceptionally used certain conditions to make compensation where compensation cannot be provided during the seasons of Ramadan and Hajj in other responses. This move occurred close to the move of invitation most of the time.

#### Move 19: Denying the problem

This move refers to the hotel *denying the problem* presented in the reviewer’s negative review, directly or indirectly (Ho 2018). It was used only four times (see Examples 69-70).

- | #  | Examples  |
|----|---|
| 69 | عملنا على التحقق مع موظفين الاستقبال وتبين ان الحجز كان في فندق اخر<br><i>ʕamilna: ʕala: attahaqquq maʕ muwaðʕʕafi:n alʔistiqba:l wa tabajjan ʔanna alhaʕz ka:n fi: funduq ʔa:xar</i><br>‘We investigated (it) with the receptionists and found that the reservation was in another hotel.’   |
| 70 | أما بالنسبة للاتصال بالانترنت فلا توجد لدينا قيود بالنسبة لعدد الأجهزة وطريقة الاتصال بالشبكة<br><i>amma binnisbah lilʔittisʕa:l bilʔintarnit fala: tu:ʕad ladajna: quju:d binnisbah liʕadad alʔazhizah wa tʕari:qat alʔittisʕa:l bi alfabakah</i><br>‘Regarding connection to the Internet, there is no limit for the number of devices and methods of connection to the network.’ |

This move ignores the reviewer’s interactional goals and threatens his/her face, thereby damaging the rapport (Ho 2017b, 2018). The lower frequency of this

move indicates that hotel management is usually concerned with gaining customers' trust and satisfaction in terms of enhancing rapport, rather than damaging it. However, this move can assist in strengthening the clarification of responses to avoid misunderstandings (Ho 2018).

#### Move 20: Acknowledging complaints

This move functions as the hotel's acknowledgment and emphasis of the existence of the problem (Ho 2018). The frequency of complaint acknowledgment was used only once. Therefore, the following example is the only one found in the data (see Example 71).

#	Example
71	<p>مع العلم أننا لا ننكر وجود بعض المشاكل البسيطة حالياً  <i>maʕ alʕilm annana: la: nunkir wuzu:d baʕdʕ almafafa:kil albasʕi:tʕah</i>  <i>ha:lijjan</i>            'To your knowledge, we do not deny the existence of some minor problems currently.'</p>

This move enhances the rapport with the reviewer because it can fulfill the reviewer's interactional goals (Ho 2017b, 2018). Additionally, Ho's (2018) study pointed out the preference for using the *acknowledging problem* move that disagrees with the results of our present study, which noted that the use of acknowledge complaints move was rare so as to not threaten the reputation of the hotel in general and of the public platform (in particular, TripAdvisor).

#### Move 21: Offering suggestions

Based on customer's negative reviews/complaints, the hotel manager suggests unique services to the reviewers. This move was used only once (see Example 72).

#	Example
72	<p>بالنسبة للأسعار يسرنا اقتراح عضوية السركل والتي تمنحكم خصومات وعروض ممتازة لزيارتكم            القادمة بجميع فنادق ومنتجعات (اسم الفندق)  <i>binnisbah lilʔasʕa:r jasurruna: iqtira:h ʕudʕwijjat assirkil wa allati:</i>  <i>tamnaħukum xusʕu:ma:t wa ʕuru:dʕ mumta:zah lizija:ratikum alqa:dimah</i>  <i>bizami:ʕfana:diq wa muntazaʕa:t (ʔism alfunduq)</i>            'Regarding prices, we are pleased to suggest the Circle Membership that gives you excellent discounts and offers for your next visit to all the hotels and resorts (the hotel name).'</p>

This move was an indirect way of denying the use of amenities or services during future visits (Ho 2018). This damages rapport because it threatens the reviewer's face and ignores the reviewer's interactional goals by not acknowledging his/her complaints in the review (Ho 2017b).

## Move 22: Offering repairs

*Offering repairs* means that the hotel provided repairs in the meanwhile of the reviewer's complaint and during his/her stay. It was employed only once (see Example 73).

#

**Example**

- 73 نود إبلاغكم بأنه قد تم حل الموقف الخاص بانقطاع المياه  
*nawad ʔibla:yikum biʔannahu qad tamma ḥal almawqif alxa:sʕ biʔinqitʕa:ʕ  
 almija:h*  
 'We'd like to inform you that the issue of water cut-off has been solved.'

This serves as a face-saving strategy in which the company takes an action of correction (Ruth 2014). Also, it enhances the rapport with the reviewer (Ho 2017b).

## Move 23: Taking responsibility

Similarly, this move acknowledges complaints, but in a different way, by showing that responsibility is taken to the complaint. It was used only once (see Example 74). This is like the act of *apologizing* in which the apologizer accepts the wrongdoing (Ruth 2014). In addition, it indicates not only *taking responsibility* but also an awareness of problems that can enhance rapport and fulfill the reviewer's interactional goals (Ho 2017b).

#

**Example**

- 74 نشعر بالمسؤولية تجاه ما حدث  
*nafʕur bilmasʔu:lijjah tiza:h ma: ḥadaθ*  
 'We feel responsible for what happened.'

**6. Summary and implications**

This study was conducted to identify Arabic hotel responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor and their functions, to interpret the functions from the perspective of rapport management theory, and to explore whether hotels use corporate or personal identity in Arabic responses. The results show that there are 23 moves used 1607 times in the 252 responses, but the most frequent ones are *opening pleasantries/greetings*, *expressing gratitude*, *closing pleasantries*, *inviting for a visit*, *proving action*, and *apologizing*. In addition, the results reveal more moves than those in previous studies; however, similar moves differed only in frequency. All the moves found are used to enhance rapport, except four moves that are *self-promoting*, *justifying*, *denying the problem*, and *offering suggestions*, which are interpreted as damaging rapport. In addition, the hotel managers emphasize corporate identity rather than the personal identity observed in the use of first-person plural pronouns in different moves, such as *opening pleasantries/greetings*, *expressing gratitude*, *inviting for a visit*, *apologizing*, and so forth.

The implications of this study are significant for the hotels and the practitioners responsible for responding to negative online reviews. In addition,

they are important for the hospitality industry responsible for teaching, training, and providing practitioners with the guidelines of the moves that construct the response to negative reviews by considering the issues related to rapport damage and discussed in this study to understand this type of genre. The implication for business communication can fulfill the expectations of their customers, which may turn into the hospitality and tourism sector's economic growth.

### **7. Limitations and suggestions**

We are aware that our study is limited by the number of hotel responses. Consequently, further research should include more responses and more countries from the Arab world famous for tourism to better understand how hotel managers respond to negative reviews in Arabic. In addition, our study focused on national and international chain 5-star hotels; therefore, we suggest that future studies explore the responses in non-chain hotels, small family hotels, and Airbnb to compare the responses with those discussed in this study, especially in Saudi Arabia because of the new Saudi vision 2030 towards increasing the number of tourists. Finally, hotel responses are interpreted from the perspective of the researchers, and not from the reviewers' point of view, in terms of their effectiveness. Consequently, the reviewers' responses to hotel responses should be investigated from their perspective as customers to better understand the effectiveness of these responses. This can be conducted via contacting the dissatisfied customers to know whether they are satisfied or not about the hotel responses to their negative reviews using surveys as an example.

### **Acknowledgments**

This study is supported via funding from Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University project number (PSAU/2024/R/1446).

Mashaal Al-Sager

MA in Linguistics

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities in Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj 11942, Saudi Arabia

ORCID Number: 0009-0006-7242-0743

Email: [m.alsager29@gmail.com](mailto:m.alsager29@gmail.com)

Mohammad Mahzari – Corresponding Author

Associate Professor of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Science and Humanities in Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj 11942, Saudi Arabia

ORCID Number: 0000-0002-3884-1679

Email: [m.mahzari@psau.edu.sa](mailto:m.mahzari@psau.edu.sa)

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