



วารสารอิเล็กทรอนิกส์
ทางการศึกษา

OJED, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2026. Article ID: OJED-21-01-016
Article Info: Received 23 February, 2026; Revised 21 May, 2026; Accepted 8 June, 2026

OJED
An Online Journal
of Education
www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/OJED

**การเปรียบเทียบอัตถภาควิเคราะห์ของการตอบกลับข้อร้องเรียนของลูกค้า
ระหว่างพนักงานโรงแรมชาวไทยและผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ**
A Comparative Move Analysis of Customer Complaint Responses
between Thai Hotel Staff and EFL Students

ทวาสิน โสรัจจะ¹ และ ชนิกา แกมพ์เพอร์^{2*}
Tawasin Soratcha¹ and Chanika Gampper^{2*}

บทคัดย่อ

อุตสาหกรรมโรงแรมมีบทบาทสำคัญอย่างยิ่งในการขับเคลื่อนเศรษฐกิจของประเทศไทย โดยภาพลักษณ์ด้านการท่องเที่ยวมีความเชื่อมโยงอย่างใกล้ชิดกับความคิดเห็นและรีวิวของผู้เข้าพักบนแพลตฟอร์มออนไลน์ งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาอัตถภาควิเคราะห์ในการตอบรับข้อร้องเรียนของลูกค้าจากพนักงานโรงแรมชาวไทยและนักเรียนชาวไทยผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ (EFL) และ 2) เปรียบเทียบความเหมือนและความแตกต่างของการใช้อัตถภาคและขั้นตอนย่อยในการตอบรับข้อร้องเรียนระหว่างพนักงานโรงแรมชาวไทยและนักเรียนกลุ่มดังกล่าว กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการวิจัยคือ ข้อความการตอบกลับข้อร้องเรียนเชิงลบจากโรงแรมระดับห้าดาวของไทยบนแพลตฟอร์มทริปแอดไวเซอร์ (TripAdvisor) จำนวน 35 ข้อความ และข้อความจำลองการตอบกลับจากนักเรียน EFL จำนวน 35 ข้อความ เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลประกอบด้วย แนวทางการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลออนไลน์ และแบบทดสอบสถานการณ์จำลองการร้องเรียน ข้อมูลถูกวิเคราะห์โดยใช้กรอบแนวคิดอัตถภาควิเคราะห์ของ Panseeta and Watson Todd (2014) รายการตรวจสอบเชิงวิเคราะห่วมกับการทดสอบค่าสถิติไคสแควร์ (Chi-square test) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) พนักงานโรงแรมและนักเรียนมีการใช้โครงสร้างอัตถภาคที่คล้ายคลึงกันในส่วนการเปิดเรื่อง การจัดการข้อร้องเรียน และการปิดเรื่อง แต่นักเรียนยังขาดความสม่เสมอในบางขั้นตอนย่อย เช่น การทักทายและการเสนอทางแก้ปัญหา และ 2) พนักงานโรงแรมชาวไทยมีความแม่นยำในการใช้ขั้นตอนย่อยตามมาตรฐานวิชาชีพมากกว่านักเรียนอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ โดยเฉพาะการแสดงความขอบคุณและการขอโทษ ข้อมูลที่ได้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงช่องว่างด้านความสามารถทางวัจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ ผลการศึกษานี้จึงสามารถนำไปใช้เป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาหลักสูตรและการจัดการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการโรงแรมและอุตสาหกรรมบริการให้สอดคล้องกับบริบทการทำงานจริงต่อไป

คำสำคัญ : อัตถภาควิเคราะห์, การตอบรับข้อร้องเรียน, ภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์เฉพาะ, อุตสาหกรรมบริการ

¹ นักศึกษามหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ สถาบันภาษา มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ อีเมล : tsoratcha@gmail.com

Master Student in Division of English Language Teaching, Language Institute, Thammasat University. Email: tsoratcha@gmail.com

² อาจารย์ ดร. ประจำสาขาวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ สถาบันภาษา มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ อีเมล : chanika.g@litu.tu.ac.th

Lecturer (Ph.D.) in Division of English Language Teaching, Language Institute, Thammasat University. Email: chanika.g@litu.tu.ac.th

Abstract

The hotel industry plays a crucial role in driving Thailand's economy, with the tourism image closely linked to guests' comments and reviews on online platforms. This study aimed to 1) explore the move analysis in customer complaint responses produced by Thai hotel staff and Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, and 2) compare the similarities and differences in the moves and steps used in complaint responses between Thai hotel staff and EFL students. The sample consisted of 35 authentic negative review responses from five-star Thai hotels on TripAdvisor and 35 constructed responses from EFL students. The research instruments consisted of online data collection guidelines and complaint simulation tasks. Data were analyzed using the move analysis framework by Panseeta and Watson Todd (2014) as an analytical checklist, along with the Chi-square test. The results revealed that 1) hotel staff and students used common move structures in Opening, Dealing with complaints, and Closing, but students showed inconsistencies in specific steps such as greetings and proposing solutions; and 2) Thai hotel staff demonstrated significantly greater accuracy in using professional standard steps, particularly expressing gratitude and apologizing, compared to the students. The data indicates a gap in pragmatic competence. Therefore, the findings can be applied as guidelines for developing English language teaching curricula for the hotel and hospitality industry to align with authentic working contexts.

Keywords: move analysis, complaint responses, English for specific purposes, hospitality industry

Introduction

The hotel business is a key pillar of Thailand's economy, closely related to the tourism industry, which supports millions of travelers each year. In 2022, tourism contributed approximately 7.24% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (Statista, 2023). Consequently, the hotel industry must help maintain Thailand's image, especially regarding tourist complaints. Responding to complaints appropriately is vital for establishing a positive reputation. Currently, responses to negative reviews (RNRs) are publicly available on online platforms like TripAdvisor, heavily influencing travelers' booking intentions and brand perceptions. Online review platforms essentially serve as dynamic electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), where guests share their experiences, compelling hotel management to address these issues promptly to survive in a highly competitive digital landscape (Akbari et al., 2022; Cantallops & Salvi, 2014). Effective service recovery and complaint handling significantly impact customer satisfaction, foster brand loyalty, and restore trust in the hospitality sector (Zou & Migacz, 2022). Conversely, inadequate complaint resolution can negatively impact individual enterprises and the overall image of a country's tourism sector (Berezina et al., 2016; Davidow, 2003). With the stiff competition in Thailand's hotel industry, particularly in major

tourist destinations, effective complaint management has become one of the distinguishing factors among various establishments. Therefore, the scope of this study specifically focuses on responses from five-star hotels, as they represent the highest standard of service recovery expectations.

Handling these online reviews effectively involves understanding specific communication structures. In human-informed settings like hotel management, RNRs serve as purposeful communication aimed at service recovery, acting as habitualized responses to recurring communicative situations (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). This aligns with the concept of genre, which has traditionally been understood as a class of communicative events sharing common purposes recognized by members of a particular discourse community (Swales, 1990). Furthermore, TripAdvisor itself acts as a dynamic discourse community where users share goals, communication styles, and specific language functions (Gee, 2005). Community guidelines and rhetorical strategies, such as hedging and politeness, are widespread in these online reviews to manage face and avoid social strain (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Madon & Singh, 2023). Proper complaint responses, such as offering sincere apologies and concrete solutions, significantly enhance post-recovery customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Zhao et al., 2020).

To understand how conventions of this genre operate, genre analysis serves as a valuable approach. It examines language beyond the sentence level and considers how meaning is constructed within social and contextual settings (Chan & McGrath, 2024). It traces the moves, steps, and lexico-grammatical features of relevant texts, enabling researchers to explore not just how texts are constructed but also why they are shaped in specific ways (Bhatia, 1993; Bhatia, 2004). Previous studies have explored RNRs by developing specific coding schemes to uncover their communicative conventions. For instance, Zhang and Vásquez (2014) conducted a study of 80 RNRs from four- and five-star hotels in China and presented 10 different moves serving specific communicative functions, a foundation that recent studies like Madon and Singh (2023) have built upon to explore the pragmatics of online complaints. Similarly, Thumvichit (2017) extended the genre-based exploration by comparing RNRs from top local Thai hotels with the high-end hotel industry in the UK. Thumvichit found significant variations in response strategies, noting that UK hotels were more likely to admit mistakes, while Thai hotels tended to emphasize expressions of gratitude. These findings suggest that context-related factors and institutional guidelines shape genres in a very real way. More

literature confirms that this genre-based approach remains highly relevant in modern digital contexts. For instance, Laosirattanachai and Laosirattanachai (2024) conducted a corpus-based move analysis on hotel responses to online reviews, reiterating that professional responses continue to rely heavily on structured moves to manage customer dissatisfaction and maintain corporate image in the post-pandemic hospitality landscape.

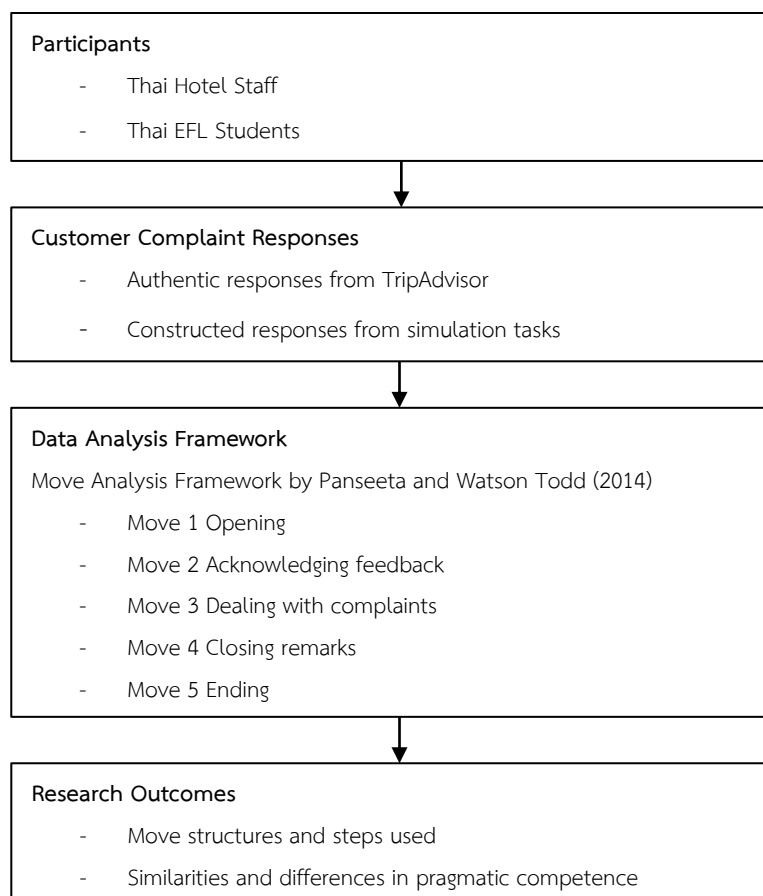
To systematically investigate these structures in the local context, Panseeta and Watson Todd's (2014) move structure serves as an effective analytical framework. Developed specifically from a corpus of 100 RNRs from five-star Thai hotels, this framework provides a highly specific and inclusive structure. It comprises five main moves: Opening (Move 1), Acknowledging feedback (Move 2), Dealing with complaints (Move 3), Closing remarks (Move 4), and Closing (Move 5), along with sixteen distinct steps. This detailed framework furnishes a well-defined set of analytical underpinnings forming the basis for genre-based hotel response research.

Within this framework, certain moves are considered obligatory, such as Opening (Move 1), Dealing with complaints (Move 3), and Ending (Move 5), as they form the core of professional service recovery. Psychologically, the execution of these specific moves directly influences the guests' emotional outcomes. For instance, a polite Opening (Move 1) and sincere apologies in Acknowledging feedback (Move 2) make the guests feel heard and respected, effectively reducing their initial frustration. Subsequently, dealing with complaints (Move 3) by providing concrete solutions or explanations demonstrates corporate accountability, which reassures the guests and rebuilds their trust. Finally, Closing remarks (Move 4) and a professional Ending (Move 5) leave a lasting positive impression, fostering customer retention. Meanwhile, specific sub-steps, such as soliciting direct contact (Move 3 Step 3a) or encouraging a return visit (Move 4 Step 2), function as optional elements depending on the severity of the complaint. Recent studies emphasize that mastering these obligatory and optional components is crucial for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners to achieve pragmatic competence in workplace writing (Taguchi & Roever, 2020).

Despite the establishment of specific move structures for professional hotel responses, there remains a notable gap in understanding how language learners appropriate this specialized genre. In the context of ESP, Thai EFL students preparing for careers in the hospitality industry often face significant challenges in mastering these pragmatic conventions. While professional staff rely on extensive training and institutional guidelines to craft tactful

service recovery messages, EFL students may possess adequate linguistic proficiency but lack the socio-pragmatic awareness required to navigate sensitive customer interactions effectively (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Consequently, exploring the discrepancies between authentic responses produced by experienced hotel professionals and constructed responses from EFL learners is crucial. Identifying these pragmatic gaps not only highlights the practical challenges students face but also provides empirical evidence to inform and refine genre-based pedagogical strategies in hospitality education, ensuring that future professionals are better equipped to meet industry standards.

While existing research has heavily focused on high-profile responses from professional hotel staff, there is a lack of comparative studies examining the gap between these professional standards and the pragmatic competence of language learners. For Thai EFL students studying the hotel business, responding to complaints in English poses a significant challenge. Many Thai students experience language barriers and lack exposure to authentic professional contexts, which may prevent them from responding to complaints clearly and tactfully. Since these students represent the future workforce of the industry, identifying the discrepancies between their constructed responses and actual professional responses is essential. Understanding this gap will help develop tailored genre-based pedagogy to bridge the divide between students' capabilities and industry demands.

Figure 1*Conceptual framework of the study*

Objectives

1. To explore the move analysis in customer complaint responses produced by Thai hotel staff and Thai EFL students.

2. To compare the similarities and differences in the moves and steps used in complaint responses between Thai hotel staff and EFL students.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive and comparative research design utilizing a corpus-based move analysis approach. The methodology is detailed as follows

1. Sample

The sample in this study consisted of two main groups, yielding a total corpus of 70 responses

1.1 Authentic responses from Thai hotel staff: The data included 35 negative review responses (RNRs) written in English by Thai staff from five-star hotels on the TripAdvisor platform. The data were purposively selected by applying "Poor" and "Terrible" review filters to the top 20 most popular properties. The initial data consisted of 72 responses; however, to ensure quality, linguistic homogeneity, and analytical substance, responses that were repetitive, written by native English speakers, or contained fewer than 150 words were excluded.

1.2 Constructed responses from Thai EFL students: The data included 35 constructed responses from Thai EFL students. The participants were third- and fourth-year English major students enrolled in an English for Hotel Business course at a public university in Nakhon Pathom. An initial collection of 56 responses was refined by excluding data from nine students who dropped out, four who were absent, and seven responses under 150 words. This rigorous selection ensured the student dataset matched the professional dataset's consistency and length requirements.

2. Research Instruments

To achieve the research objectives, the study employed two main instruments for data collection

2.1 Complaint simulation tasks: Three complaint scenarios were used to engage students in professionally relevant writing contexts. These scenarios were empirically designed by analyzing 100 authentic complaints from the top 20 five-star hotels on TripAdvisor, which revealed frequent issues such as poor service (61 complaints), room-related issues (35 complaints), and mechanical problems (21 complaints). For example, one specific scenario required students to write a response as a customer service manager addressing a guest's complaint about an unprepared room, a lack of complimentary drinking water, and a malfunctioning telephone. To assure content validity, the tasks were qualitatively validated by three experts (a discourse analysis specialist, a hotel business lecturer, and a native English speaker) The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values of all items are above 0.50, indicating acceptable content validity.

And further refined through a pilot study to ensure relevance, authenticity, and linguistic clarity. Following the expert validation, a pilot study was conducted in April 2023 with 20 fourth-year hospitality students who had previously completed relevant coursework. This phase aimed to evaluate the clarity of the task instructions and ensure the scenarios were

appropriate for the participants' language proficiency. Based on the pilot feedback, minor adjustments were made to the wording of the writing prompt to enhance clarity before the final administration.

2.2 Online data collection guidelines: A structured protocol was established to systematically extract professional RNRs from TripAdvisor. This instrument functioned as an inclusion/exclusion checklist consisting of five main criteria: 1) targeting only "Poor" and "Terrible" reviews, 2) selecting from the top 20 five-star hotels, 3) ensuring responses were written in English by local Thai staff (excluding native speakers), 4) requiring a minimum length of 150 words, and 5) excluding repetitive or formulaic templates. To ensure the quality and validity of this protocol, the criteria were developed based on established corpus linguistics methodologies and validated by the research advisor and the discourse analysis expert. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) value was 0.67, indicating acceptable content validity. Additionally, the extraction consistency was cross-checked by an independent Co-coder to ensure strict adherence to the criteria, resulting in a highly reliable corpus of 35 authentic responses.

3. Data Collection

The data collection process was divided into two phases. First, for the hotel staff data, the researcher manually gathered the RNRs from the TripAdvisor platform based on the established inclusion criteria. Second, for the EFL student data, the researcher sought formal consent from the university lecturer teaching the hotel business subject and distributed consent forms to the participating students. An in-class session was then conducted to introduce the study and the simulation tasks. The students were asked to write complaint responses based on the provided scenarios under the researcher's supervision.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods

4.1 Move analysis coding: The texts from both the professional and student datasets were manually examined, decomposed, and coded according to the move analysis framework proposed by Panseeta and Watson Todd (2014) to identify their specific communicative functions (moves and steps). To validate coding reliability, a triangulated method was used where an independent Co-Coder (an MA student majoring in English Language Teaching with a thesis in move analysis) cross-checked the coding results. An example of how the texts were

segmented and coded according to the framework is presented in Table 1, which serves as an analytical checklist.

A total of 345 moves were identified across the 70 analyzed responses. Specifically, the professional Thai hotel staff corpus (35 responses) yielded 174 moves, while the Thai EFL student corpus (35 responses) produced 171 moves. Across both groups, all five main moves and 16 steps within the framework were utilized to varying degrees, reflecting a shared overall rhetorical structure with significant differences in specific pragmatic execution.

Table 1

Example of Move and Step Coding

Text Segment	Move	Step
Dear Khun 184,	M1	S1
Thank you for reviewing your experience for us.	M2	S1
I must sincerely apologize to hear about the inconvenience.	M2	S3
I will discuss this with my operations team to investigate.	M3	S2
I hope that this visit will not mar your perception of us.	M4	S2
With best regards,	M5	S1
General Manager	M5	S3

4.2 Statistical analysis: A chi-square test was employed to examine the distribution of between-group differences across move types and steps. This test provided insight into whether the observed similarities and differences in pragmatic competence between the Thai hotel staff and the EFL students were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Results

The research findings are presented in two main sections based on the research objectives, followed by the statistical analysis table as supporting data.

1. The move analysis in customer complaint responses produced by Thai hotel staff and Thai EFL students

The analysis revealed the moves and steps used by Thai hotel staff and EFL students in responding to customer complaints. The most common structural components, evident in both groups' responses, included Move 1 (Opening), Move 3 (Dealing with complaints), and Move 5 (Ending). Notably, all participants in both groups (100%) consistently utilized Move 1 Step 1 (Salutation), Move 5 Step 1 (Signing off), and Move 5 Step 2 (Signature).

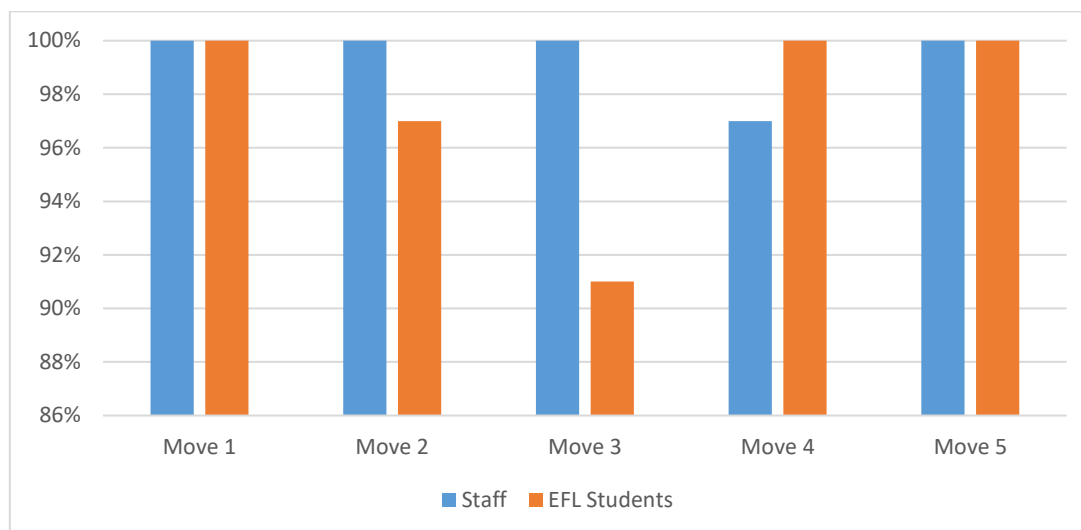
This demonstrates a shared understanding of the basic structural requirements for formal complaint responses among both professionals and learners.

2. The similarities and differences in the moves and steps used between Thai hotel staff and EFL students

While both groups shared fundamental response structures, substantial discrepancies were observed in the execution of specific pragmatic steps. Regarding the opening, Thai hotel staff utilized Move 1 Step 2 (Greeting) significantly more often than EFL students (43% vs. 0%; $\chi^2 = 6.415, p < 0.05$). Move 2 (Acknowledging Feedback) consists of four steps that aim to show empathy and understanding, including Step 1 (Expressing gratitude), Step 2a (Re-stating the complaint), Step 2b (Expressing concern), and Step 3 (Apologizing). Distinguishing these steps is crucial as they serve different pragmatic functions in service recovery. In our analysis, Thai staff employed Move 2 Step 1 (Expressing gratitude) significantly more consistently (100%) than the students (89%) ($\chi^2 = 9.000, p < 0.05$). In contrast, a newly identified step within Move 2 (Acknowledging Feedback), termed 'Introduce' (Self-introduction), was solely employed by EFL students (23%) and never by the Thai professional staff ($\chi^2 = 4.664, p < 0.05$).

Regarding Move 3 (Dealing with complaints), although heavily used by both groups, Thai staff tended to use more comprehensive and explanatory strategies. For instance, significantly more Thai staff reported an investigation or corrective action, which aligns with Move 3 Step 2 (Reporting investigation or corrective action), and promised to improve service, corresponding to Move 3 Step 3b (Promising to improve service), compared to their student counterparts. Overall, Thai hotel staff provided more complete and tactful responses, whereas EFL students demonstrated inconsistencies, occasionally neglecting to apologize or offer concrete solutions.

To visualize the overarching structural patterns, Figure 2 illustrates the comparative frequency of the five main moves employed by both groups. As depicted, Thai hotel staff and EFL students demonstrated remarkably high consistency at the primary move level.

Figure 2*Comparison of the Five Main Moves Used by Thai Hotel Staff and EFL Students*

However, a deeper examination reveals noteworthy distinctions in the execution of specific steps, particularly in the closing stages of the responses. In Move 4 (Closing Remarks), Thai hotel staff placed a stronger emphasis on Move 4 Step 2 (Encouraging a return visit) compared to EFL students (91% vs. 69%), highlighting the industry's focus on customer retention and relationship management. Similarly, in Move 5 (Ending), while both groups universally utilized Move 5 Step 1 (Signing off) and Move 5 Step 2 (Signature), professional staff were notably more consistent in including Move 5 Step 3 (Job title) than the students (74% vs. 46%). This underscores the professionals' strict adherence to corporate identity and formal communication standards, which learners often overlook. Prior to presenting the statistical distribution, it is necessary to explicitly outline the sub-steps analysis. For instance, in Move 2, sub-steps include expressing gratitude (S1), re-stating the complaint (S2a), expressing concern (S2b), and apologizing (S3). In Move 3, sub-steps involve explaining causes (S1), reporting corrective actions (S2), soliciting direct contact (S3a), and promising to improve service (S3b). Similarly, Move 4 includes expressing a second gratitude (S1a) or apology (S1b), and asking for a return visit (S2). This detailed categorization allows for a more precise comparison of structural components. The comprehensive frequency distribution and chi-square test results of all moves and specific steps are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency and Chi-square Test of Moves and Steps Used by Thai Hotel Staff and EFL Students

Move / Step	Thai Staff (N=35)	%	EFL students (N=35)	%	Chi-square test	Total
Move 1	35	100%	35	100%	0.098	70
M1S1	35	100%	35	100%	0.098	70
M1S2	15	43%	0	0%	6.415*	15
Move 2	35	100%	34	97%	0.050	69
M2S1	35	100%	31	89%	0.003	66
M2S2a	15	43%	8	23%	0.775	23
M2S2b	15	43%	18	51%	0.353	33
M2S3	26	74%	31	89%	0.228	57
M2 Introduce	0	0%	8	23%	4.664*	8
Move 3	35	100%	32	91%	0.002*	67
M3S1	31	89%	25	71%	0.091	56
M3S2	18	51%	15	43%	0.027*	33
M3S3a	26	74%	5	14%	6.401*	31
M3S3b	31	89%	29	83%	0.011*	60
Move 4	34	97%	35	100%	0.159	69
M4S1a	18	51%	10	29%	0.809	28
M4S1b	16	46%	15	43%	0.006	31
M4S2	32	91%	24	69%	0.246	56
M4S3	5	14%	2	6%	0.524	7
M4 Suggestion	0	0%	0	0%	6.413*	0
Move 5	35	100%	35	100%	0.098	70
M5S1	35	100%	35	100%	0.098	70
M5S2	35	100%	35	100%	0.098	70
M5S3	26	74%	16	46%	0.770	42

Note. * $p < .05$

3. Qualitative deviations in move structures

Beyond the statistical frequencies, a qualitative analysis revealed distinct patterns of deviations from the standard framework, particularly among the EFL students. These can be categorized into omitting, adding, and misplacing steps.

Omitting Steps

The omission of steps was particularly pronounced in Move 1. While Thai hotel staff typically utilized both salutation and greeting, EFL students frequently omitted the greeting step, jumping directly to Move 2.

Example (Thai hotel staff): *“Dear customer A, [M1 S1] Warm greetings from hotel AVP. [M1S2]”*

Example (EFL student): *“Dear Mr. A [M1 S1] We really apologize for the inconvenient... [M2S3]”*

Adding Steps

Adding steps involves the inclusion of elements not originally part of the framework. This was highly prevalent among EFL students, who frequently introduced self-introductions or unauthorized compensations.

Example (EFL student): *“My name is G, I’m the customer service manager. [Added Step] ...We’ll offer you a complimentary dinner on your next stay... [Added Step]”*

While reflecting an attempt to personalize the response, this highlights a potential lack of awareness regarding appropriate professional boundaries and corporate policies.

Misplacing Steps

Misplacing steps refers to the incorrect sequencing of steps, which disrupts the logical flow. Cross-move misplacement was notably observed in the EFL students' dataset.

Example (EFL student): *“...we wish to contact you personally to discuss this further and ready to compensate you with one meal from the hotel [M4 Suggestion]. If you ever return to our hotel... our hotel would be honored to host you again [M4S2]. Sincerely [M5S1] G [M5S2] customer service manager [M5S3]”*

In this instance, steps intended for Move 4 (providing solutions) were haphazardly mixed, leading to a lack of coherence compared to the highly structured responses of hotel professionals.

Discussion

The findings of this study can be discussed in two main aspects aligning with the research objectives.

First, the high frequency of Opening (Move 1), Dealing with complaints (Move 3), and Ending (Move 5) across both groups confirms their status as obligatory moves within the hotel response genre. The primary characteristic of these moves is their functional indispensability; without a cordial Opening, a concrete response in Move 3, and a professional Ending, the communicative goal of service recovery cannot be fully realized. Specifically, the characteristic of Move 3 Step 3b (Promising to improve service) serves as a crucial sub-step for professional accountability, distinguishing a mere apology from a strategic business response. While both groups recognized these obligatory functions, the discrepancies in executing specific sub-steps, such as the omission of Move 1 Step 2 (Greeting) by EFL students, suggest a lack of awareness regarding the characteristic of 'hospitality tone' that is expected in this professional discourse community.

Second, regarding the comparison of response formats, significant differences emerged in the execution of specific steps and pragmatic strategies. Thai hotel staff consistently employed strategies reflective of high professional standards, utilizing detailed steps such as expressing gratitude, offering apologies, and proposing concrete solutions more frequently. This comprehensive approach is consistent with Panseeta and Watson Todd's (2014) findings on professional hotel responses. It most likely flows from the staff's actual training and extensive experience in navigating real-world customer service situations. From a customer's perspective, this comprehensive approach directly fosters higher post-recovery compared to responses that merely offer empty apologies without actionable solutions (a pattern frequently observed in the learners' corpus). By demonstrating clear accountability, the professional approach effectively reduces guest frustration and rebuilds long-term trust (Zhao et al., 2020).

In contrast, EFL students, despite understanding the overarching move structure, showed a lack of consistency in crucial pragmatic strategies. Their infrequent use of initial greetings, specific apologies, and detailed corrective actions suggests a gap in pragmatic competence and confidence. Moreover, the qualitative findings regarding 'added steps' reveal that EFL students often overcompensate by offering unauthorized complimentary services or overly personalizing their responses (e.g., self-introductions). This likely stems from textbook instructions that emphasize building rapport and empathy, without sufficient contextualization regarding corporate policies and professional boundaries. By 'adding' unauthorized compensation steps or 'misplacing' obligatory closing remarks into the complaint-handling

phase, students disrupted the conventional genre structure. This evidence strongly supports Kasper and Rose (2002), who state that developing pragmatic competence in a second language is a gradual process heavily dependent on the learners' exposure to authentic communicative events. Furthermore, the discrepancies in politeness strategies and methods of offering solutions correlate with Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) postulation that the use of apologies and tactful strategies is deeply intertwined with cultural norms and authentic linguistic exposure, which EFL students are still in the process of acquiring. This aligns with recent findings in second language pragmatics, which emphasize that explicit instruction and exposure to authentic workplace discourse are vital for overcoming pragmatic failures (Taguchi & Roever, 2020). This assertion is corroborated by Wang et al. (2024), who highlight that the overall pragmatic competence of EFL learners often remains at a low level due to limited socio-cultural contact, necessitating targeted genre-based training to prevent communication breakdowns in professional settings.

Recommendations

Implication of the study

The findings of this study revealed that while both Thai hotel staff and EFL students utilized common move structures in negative review responses, the professional staff demonstrated significantly greater consistency and pragmatic accuracy. Specifically, Thai hotel staff consistently employed strategies reflective of professional standards, such as expressing gratitude, offering apologies, and proposing concrete solutions, whereas EFL students lacked these crucial pragmatic components.

Based on these findings, the study holds prominent implications for English Language Teaching (ELT) and professional communication. In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), learners must be prepared for the specific language demands of their target workplace (Chan & McGrath, 2024; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020; Shalash, 2024). EFL learners need to devote more attention to using move-based writing strategies, particularly when addressing sensitive matters such as customer complaints. By implementing genre-based writing instruction in ELT classrooms, educators can draw directly from authentic models designed for workplace communication. Teachers should present complaint-response templates from authentic business discourse, walking students through the moves and steps necessary to reply effectively. Additionally, implementing practical methods such as structured role-playing activities and analyzing real-world case studies can allow students to simulate authentic

customer complaints. This hands-on approach will enable them to practice both linguistic fluency and conflict-resolution skills in a controlled environment. Enhancing move structure awareness will better enable learners to write coherent, contextually appropriate, and formally organized messages that meet the professional standards demanded in the hospitality industry.

Recommendation for future research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the pragmatic gaps between professional staff and EFL students, it was limited to the analysis of English negative review responses from five-star Thai hotels on a single platform (TripAdvisor) and focused on a specific group of Thai EFL students.

Therefore, future research should expand the scope by investigating complaint responses across different hotel tiers (such as three- or four-star establishments) or other hospitality sectors to observe variations in genre conventions. Since hotel star ratings significantly influence customer expectations and response strategies, comparing responses across different hotel tiers would provide a broader understanding of this professional genre. Additionally, future studies could employ alternative methodologies, such as interviewing hotel management or the customers receiving these responses, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and reception of these communicative strategies in real-world contexts.

References

- Akbari, M., Foroudi, P., Zaman Fashami, R., Mahavarpour, N., & Khodayari, M. (2022). Let us talk about something: The evolution of e-WOM from the past to the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 149, 663-689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.05.061>
- Berezina, K., Bilgihan, A., Cobanoglu, C., & Okumus, F. (2016). Understanding satisfied and dissatisfied hotel customers: text mining of online hotel reviews. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 25(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2015.983631>
- Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings*. Longman.
- Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. Continuum.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Ablex Publishing.

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* (Vol. 4). Cambridge University Press.
- Cantallos, A. S., & Salvi, F. (2014). New consumer behavior: A review of research on eWOM and hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 41-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.08.007>
- Chan, C. S. C., & McGrath, L. (2024). English for specific purposes. In J. Stanlaw (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (3rd ed.). Elsevier.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-95504-1.00293-3>
- Davidow, M. (2003). Organizational responses to customer complaints: What works and what doesn't. *Journal of Service Research*, 5(3), 225–250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670502238917>
- Gee, J. P. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). *Pragmatic development in a second language*. Blackwell.
- Laosrirattanachai, P., & Laosrirattanachai, P. (2024). The triangle of language use: A corpus-based analysis of hotel responses to reviews. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 28(1), 1-22.
<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.28109a3>
- Madon, H., & Singh, K. K. M. (2023). A cross-cultural pragmatic study of online complaints by Japanese and Malaysian hotel guests in English. *Journal of Communication, Language and Culture*, 3(1), 71-94. <https://doi.org/10.33093/jclc.2023.3.1.6>
- Panseeta, S., & Watson Todd, R. (2014). A genre analysis of 5-star hotels' responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor. *rEFLECTIONS*, 18, 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v18i0.114196>
- Salmani-Nodoushan, M. A. (2020). English for specific purposes: Traditions, trends, directions. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 7(1), 247-268. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v7i1.16342>
- Shalash, M. J. (2024). English for specific purposes: A specialization in tailoring language instruction. *Journal of Asian Multicultural Research for Educational Study*, 5(1), 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.47616/jamres.v5i1.486>

- Statista. (2023). *Share of tourism contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) value in Thailand from 2017 to 2022*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1143467/thailand-share-of-tourism-to-gdp/>
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- Taguchi, N., & Roever, C. (2020). *Second language pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Thumvichit, A. (2017). *A comparative genre analysis of Thai and UK hotels' responses to complaints on TripAdvisor* [Doctoral dissertation, Thammasat University]. TU e-Thesis Archive. https://ethesisarchive.library.tu.ac.th/thesis/2017/TU_2017_5721320025_8702_8259.pdf
- Wang, Y., Al-Shaibani, G. K. S., & Jiang, L. (2024). Pragmatic competence of EFL and ESL learners and its influencing factors: A systematic review. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(3), 122–140. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1475048.pdf>
- Yates, J., & Orlikowski, W. J. (1992). Genres of organizational communication: A structurational approach to studying communication and media. *The Academy of Management Review*, 17(2), 299–326. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258774>
- Zhang, Y. B., & Vásquez, C. (2014). Hotels' responses to online reviews: Managing consumer dissatisfaction. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 6, 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2014.08.004>
- Zhao, Y., Wen, L., Feng, X., Li, R., & Lin, X. (2020). How managerial responses to online reviews affect customer satisfaction: An empirical study based on additional reviews. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57, Article 102206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102205>
- Zou, S., & Migacz, S. (2022). Why service recovery fails? Examining the roles of restaurant type and failure severity in double deviation with justice theory. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 63(2) 169 –181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965520967921>