

Apologies in Chinese Restaurants' Responses to Negative Online Reviews and Rapport Management-A Cross-cultural Perspective

Disculpas en las respuestas de los restaurantes chinos a las críticas negativas online y el informe de gestión: una perspectiva intercultural

跨文化视角下中国饭店网络差评回应中的道歉与和谐关系管理

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Abstract: The present study, drawing upon Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management framework, presents an analysis of restaurants' apologies to customers in Chinese CMC. 100 responses

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by restaurants to customers' negative reviews on Dianping.com (a Chinese independent third-party reviewing website similar to TripAdvisor) have been collected for our study, and the method of Rhetorical Move Analysis has been used to identify Apologies and accompanying moves in our data. It is revealed that apologies, along with other accompanying moves such as Thanks, Explanations, Repairs, Openings, Closings, Invitations etc., serve as remedial responses to restore rapport or harmony. Considering the public nature of the open online communication, the linguistic domain of apology (including apology expressions, intensification, repetition, honorifics, endearing addressing terms, pronouns, and self-referring expressions) and content of apology (Accepting or not accepting responsibility) are properly designed and managed by the restaurants' response writers in order to repair the relationship with the unsatisfied individual customer on the one hand, while maintaining and protecting the restaurants' good reputation with the overhearing audience online on the other hand. We also compared our Chinese online apologies with those in English and Japanese as studied by Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020) in order to reveal some cross-cultural similarities and differences. The findings are expected to provide some insights into the area of cross-cultural studies of online apologies, as well as to be valuable to business professionals who increasingly interact with consumers cross-culturally on the internet.

Key Words: negative online reviews; response texts; rhetorical moves; rapport management.

Resumen: El presente estudio, basado en el marco de Rapport Management de Spencer-Oatey (2008), presenta un análisis de las disculpas de los restaurantes a los clientes en el CMC chino. Se recogieron para nuestro estudio 100 respuestas de restaurantes a las críticas negativas de los clientes en Dianping.com (un sitio web de revisión independiente de China, similar a TripAdvisor). Se ha utilizado Rhetorical Move Analysis para identificar Disculpas y comentarios adicionales en nuestros datos. Se revela que las disculpas, junto con otros comentarios que lo acompañan, como gracias, explicaciones, reparaciones, aperturas, cierres, invitaciones, etc., sirven como respuestas correctivas para restablecer la relación o la armonía. Teniendo en cuenta la naturaleza pública de la comunicación abierta en línea, el dominio lingüístico de la disculpa (incluidas las expresiones de disculpa, intensificación, repetición, honoríficos, términos de direccionamiento entrañables, pronombres y expresiones autorreferidas) y el contenido de la disculpa (Aceptar o no aceptar responsabilidad) por un lado, está diseñado y administrado por los autores de las respuestas de los restaurantes con el fin de reparar la relación con el cliente individual insatisfecho, mientras, por otro lado, y al mismo tiempo, mantiene y protege la buena reputación de los restaurantes con la audiencia en línea. También comparamos el tipo de disculpas chinas en línea con las del inglés y japonés estudiadas por Morrow y Yamanouchi (2020), lo que revela algunas similitudes y diferencias interculturales. Se espera que los hallazgos proporcionen algunas ideas sobre el área de los estudios interculturales de las disculpas en línea, así como que sean valiosos para los profesionales de negocios que interactúan cada vez más con los consumidores de manera intercultural usando internet.

Palabras clave: comentarios negativos en línea; textos de respuesta; movimientos retóricos; informe de gestión.

摘要: 本研究收集100条大众点评网(中国第三方评论网站, 类似于TripAdvisor)饭店商家对顾客差评进行的回应话语作为研究语料, 采用修辞话步分析方法对道歉言语行为和其它伴随话步进行了判断和统计, 并基于Spencer-Oatey(2008)的关系管理框架, 分析了中国网络饭店商家在网络道歉言语行为中所涉及的关系管理策略。研究表明, 道歉言语行为和其它话步(如致谢、解释、修复、开头、结尾、邀请等)一起共同协作来对双方关系进行修复与管理。在网络公开回应的特殊语境下, 饭店差评回应作者精心选用了致歉语域(包括道歉标记语, 强调、重复、敬语、亲近称呼、代词及自我指称)及致歉内容(是否接受责任)在修复彼此关系的同时, 维护自身所代表饭店商家的良好形象。研究还将汉语的研究发现与Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020)研究中的英语和日语道歉行为进行比较, 以期揭示一些跨文化异同。研究结果对从事网络跨文化交际沟通工作的相关人员具有一定参考价值。

[关键词] 网络差评; 回应话语; 修辞话步; 和谐关系管理

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of mobile and internet technology, restaurant service reviewing websites or apps have become an increasingly popular channel of communication for consumers and restaurants (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Archak et al., 2011; Gao et al., 2018). These websites and apps can satisfy the needs of both customers and restaurant owners or managers. On the one hand, they provide a platform for restaurant customers to evaluate and comment on the food services they have purchased, rating the services and writing a positive or negative review of the services, so that other potential customers will be able to make informed decisions based on the first-hand experience of other customers (O'Connor, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). On the other hand, while being offered the opportunity to get in touch with prospective customers online (Litvin and Hoffman, 2012), these websites also provide restaurant owners and managers with a channel to learn the customers' views on the quality of the food services they provide (O'Connor, 2010) and make improvements. In order to attract more customers, when faced with negative reviews, they have to rely on various discourse strategies to restore the damaged reputation caused by the negative comments while trying to repair the relationship with the reviewers (Litvin & Hoffman, 2012; Looker et al., 2007; O'Connor, 2010).

Recent studies have revealed that customer-generated online reviews can have a powerful impact on sales of products and services (e.g. Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Anderson & Magruder, 2012). According to Nakayama & Wan (2018), about one-third of customers would actually rely on online reviews when choosing a restaurant and over half of 18 to 34-year-olds would take restaurants' online reviews into their decisions. Therefore, Restaurant owners and managers are greatly stimulated to improve the level of their online ratings on the one hand, and to deal with negative reviews with proper strategies on the other.

Negative online reviews are comments or complaints about a business concerning such aspects as quality, variety of commodities, level of service etc. (Park & Allen, 2013). So far, despite the recognized importance of this genre, this area still remains relatively understudied (Leung et al., 2013; Sparks & Bradley, 2014). Some of the previous studies have analyzed its components, or moves and have identified a number of moves contained in the genre, for example, redress, apology, appreciation, explanation, account, and action (Davidow, 2003; Levy et al., 2013; Sparks & Bradley, 2014). Others have focused on the communicative purpose of the review response genre, and believe that service recovery could be

achieved through some of the moves identified: apology, explanation, and appreciation (Levy et al., 2013). In a recent study, Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020) focused particularly on the apologies in negative review responses, and used rapport management framework to account for the strategies manifested in apologies and its accompanying moves, while revealing some cross-cultural similarities and differences between English and Chinese. The present study shall also draw on the theory of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), and investigate into the relationship-repairing and image-protecting strategies reflected in online apologies in Chinese restaurants' negative-review responses on Dianping.com (a popular Chinese third-party reviewing website). Hopefully, it will reveal some distinctive features of Chinese online corporate apologies and provide some insights into the cross-cultural studies of this genre.

2. Apologies in Computer Mediated Communication and Rapport Management

Previously, extensive research has been made on the speech act of apology in face-to-face context (Oishi, 2013). In the recent years, with the development of internet technology and prevalence of online communication, more and more studies begin to be concerned about apologies in CMC context (Lutzky & Kehoe 2017). Kadar, Ning & Ran (2018), drawing on examples from Chinese social media and metadiscourses from CMC, made a case study of Chinese public ritual apology and found out the possible relation-forming function of public online apologies. Page (2014) analyzed apologies from the perspective of their distinctive components (e.g., explanations, offers of repair) and their rapport building potential (as shown through e.g., opening and closing moves, and the use of emoticons), and finds that various accompanying moves are used to support apologies. Harrison & Allton (2013) demonstrated the remedial function of an Apology in managing rapport after an offense. Ho (2017), using Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework of rapport management, examined how hotels managed to achieve service recovery while responding to customers' negative comments on TripAdvisor. In her study, Apology was the second most frequent type of Manage Rapport move, and was therefore a main strategy in managing rapport. This result is very similar to Zhang & Vásquez's (2014) study, in which Apology was also the second most frequent move in their study of the generic structure of hotel's responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor. The findings of these studies all highlight the important role of

apologies as one of the key components of negative review responses, as well as its rapport-managing function.

The findings of studies of apologies in CMC and cross-cultural studies have also revealed that the linguistic domain and content of apologies can be influenced by language and culture, as well as by features of the discourse context (Harrison and Allton, 2013). Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020), drawing on the data of 200 hotel responses to negative reviews on TripAdvisor (100 in English and 100 in Japanese), presents a comparative study of hotels' apologies to customers in English and Japanese online communication. Their findings show considerable similarities and differences in such aspects as the frequency of apologies, strategies in dealing with responsibility, the use of a corporate voice, the use of accompanying moves like Explanation, Repair, Opening and Closing moves to repair relationship and enhance rapport. The present study shall follow their methods with the aim to reveal some distinctive features in Chinese online corporate apologies, while revealing some cross-cultural similarities and differences by comparing our findings with theirs.

3. Theoretical Framework

Goffman's (1967: 5) definition of face dictates that the key to the interpretation of the concept of face is interaction and relation. On basis of this definition, Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory developed their dichotomous notion of face (which comprises a positive face and a negative face) and the construct of rapport. However, it emphasized the individuality of face and overlooked its interactional and relational aspects (e.g. Arundale, 2006; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 2006; Matsumoto, 1988). According to Locher & Watts' (2005) relational work framework, interpersonal behavior can be classified into four broad categories along a continuum -- from impolite and non-politic through non-polite and politic, polite and politic, to over-polite and non-politic, depending on a number of contextual factors like the interpersonal relationship, the roles the interlocutors take, and the nature of the interaction. This relational work framework is regarded to be better than Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in that it not only accounts for polite behaviors, impolite behaviors, but also those that are neither polite nor impolite, but only politic or appropriate.

Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework of rapport and its management, based on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, has a stronger relational and

interactional orientation than Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. According to Spencer-Oatey (2008), rapport refers to the (dis)harmony between interactants and has three bases: face sensitivities, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals (2008: 14). Rapport management refers to "the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations" (2008: 3) through three dimensions including the management of face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theory is generally regarded to be more objective than the previous relational work model, because judging whether a behavior is appropriate or inappropriate to a situation is a subjective process affected by a number of contextual factors (Ho, 2017). Therefore, the present study shall adopt Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theory for its higher objectivity.

Previous research has studied rapport management in various settings, involving people of different backgrounds, and through different modes (synchronous, face-to-face, computer-mediated). The present study aims to extend this field of research by investigating the situation in which there is an urgent need for an individual to manage rapport with his/her interlocutor when faced with a possible damage of the reputation of the organization the individual represents. Specifically, It looks at how Chinese restaurants' review response writers repair relationship through apologizing to the customers while striving to maintain its corporate reputation in an open online context on Dianping.com. Dianping is chosen because it is one of the most popular third-party reviewing websites in China.

The rapport management framework is suitable for this research because it takes account of not only face needs, but also participants' sociality rights and interactional goals. Furthermore, it recognizes the potential effects of the discourse context, of the overhearing audience, and of cultural factors in the production and interpretation of speech acts.

In the following section we shall describe the data and methodology used in our analysis of Chinese apologies in the restaurants' responses to negative reviews on Dianping.com

4. Data and Method

Data for the present study consisted of 100 response texts in Chinese from the Dianping.com website, a popular third-party reviewing website in China. The reviews associated with the response texts were also collected for analysis. On Dianping.com, review-writers can give restaurants an overall rating of 1 to 3, with 1 being poor or terrible, and 3, good or excellent. To

make our samples as broad and representative as possible, we collected only one or two responses from each restaurant. Review responses were collected from restaurants in Nanjing city, Jiangsu Province, a city in the central part of China. We selected the medium-level restaurants (average expenditure of 100-300 Yuan per person) listed on the Dianping website, and for each restaurant we only used the first one or two reviews that had a rating of one with an attached response. The 100 Chinese texts contained 11,948 words, with an average length of 119 words, with the shortest one being 6 words, and the longest 456 words in length.

We analyzed each text in terms of the communicative moves it contained using the rhetorical move method developed by Swales (1981) for his analysis of the generic structure of research articles. This approach was earlier adapted and used by many scholars for analyzing texts of various genres (e.g., Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Samraj, 2002; Bhatia, 1983; Upton, 2002; Biber & Conrad, 2007), and was recently used by Zhang & Vásquez (2014), Ho (2017), and Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020) for analyzing TripAdvisor review responses.

Move analysis involves segmenting the text into functional units or moves, which can enable us to identify the Apologies and accompanying moves in each text. In order to make our move analysis as precise as possible, we first read 15 of the Chinese response texts and noted the communicative functions they contained, and tentatively identified the corresponding moves. Then, we tried to analyze the 15 texts using those moves and, while doing so, refined our criteria to suit the special characteristics of our Chinese data. The remaining texts were then coded according to the refined criteria. The lengths of the coded segments varied: Some shorter segments consisted of phrases or clauses, while longer segments contained one or more sentences (See the sample coded text below). There were a few moves that did not fit into any of our categories so we established a category, "Other" for them. Typical examples of moves are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Typical Examples of Rhetorical Moves in Chinese Negative-Review Response Texts

Move	Chinese Example	English Translation
Openings	你好; 嗨亲; [名字]您好; 女士您好; 先生您好; 尊敬的顾客您好; 亲爱的顾客您好; 亲爱的宾客您好; 客官您好;	Hello; Hi My Dear; Hello Dear Lady; Hello Mr.; Respected Guest; Dear Guest; Dear [Name]; Dear Sir; Dear Valued Guest;

Thanks	非常感谢您选择梅苑餐厅用餐；感谢您的惠临我们餐厅，也非常感谢您对我们的工作提醒；感谢您的点评；感谢您的光临；	Thank you for choosing to dine at the our restaurant/[restaurant name] ;Thank you for providing your honest reminding/feedback; thank you for your comment;
Apologies	真是非常的抱歉!非常抱歉给您带来不愉快的用餐体验!	We are very sorry! We are very sorry for your unpleasant dining experience!
Explanations	我们刚刚更新了一批菜品，可能没有能让您吃到您喜欢的菜。	We have just renewed our menu, that's why you didn't find the dishes you like.
Repairs	在此对于您在用餐过程中发现及指出来的问题，我们会在今后的工作中加以改进，以保证今后不会再犯。	"In regards to the problems pointed out by you, we will improve and make sure this behavior doesn't happen."
Further Contact	150XXXXXXXX这是素素的手机号，以后在就餐过程中有任何问题都可以随时联系我。	This[150XXXXXXXX] is Susu's mobile number, please feel free to contact me for whatever problems in your future meals at our restaurant.
Invitations	真诚期待您的下次光临！期待您的下次光临！	We hope that you will consider dining at our restaurant in the future; we look forward to your future patronage;
Closings	祝您身体健康，生活愉快！	We wish you healthy and enjoy a happy life!
Other	不需要您的好评！对于威胁您的人，您可以选择报警。	We don't need your good comments! You can choose to report to the police about the one who threatened you.

We followed Morrow & Yamanouchi's (2020) practice to code the moves in the response texts, and a Chinese Sample Text is provided below to illustrate how the texts were coded. The moves are shown in brackets following each segment of coded text. Some segments, such as the first one in the Sample Text, consisted of more than a single sentence. In this instance, the second sentence provides an expansion or elaboration of information in the first sentence. So we counted such cases as a single

move. If the same type of move occurred a second time, separated from the first by another move, it was counted as a second occurrence of the move (e.g., the two Apology moves in the Sample Text).

Sample Text

真是非常的抱歉，让您不管在服务上还是口味上都觉得这么失望、生气，都是我们的错，是我们管理不到位，实在对不起。[Apology]叫号机的声音我们也会适当调小的，对服务员服务上的管理与培训我们也会加强的，杜绝此类事件发生，也是希望您能给我们一次改过的机会，让我们能有所进步。[Repair]150XXXXXXXX这是素素的手机号，以后在就餐过程中有任何问题都可以随时联系我。[Further Contact]服务不周的地方我们再次深表歉意！[Apology]真诚期待您的下次光临！[Invitation]

(I am really sorry, to make you feel so disappointed and angry with our service and taste, it is our fault, our management is insufficient, really sorry. [Apology] We will lower the voice of the calling machine, we will strengthen our management and training of the service staff, to avoid more unpleasant happenings like these, we hope that you will give us a chance to remedy our mistakes and make improvements. [Repair] 150XXXXXXXX is Susu's cell phone number, so feel free to contact me if you have any questions in your future meals. [Further Contact] We'd like to apologize once again for our poor service! [Apology] Sincerely look forward to your next visit! [Invitation])

After coding the texts, we were able to figure out the frequency of the moves that they contained. The identification of rhetorical moves and their frequency was the basis for our analysis of the linguistic domain and content of apologies in Section 4.

5. Results and Discussion

In this section, we will present findings from the move analysis, and then describe the linguistic form and content of Apologies in Chinese negative-review response texts and the rapport management strategies manifested in apologies and its accompanying moves.

5.1. The number and frequency of rhetorical moves

All in all, we identified a total of 448 moves in our data, which means there was an average of around 4.5 moves in each response text. Table 2 shows the frequency of moves and the number of texts in which each move occurred.

Table 2: The Frequency of Moves and Number of Texts

Move	Chinese Texts	
	Frequency(%)	Texts
Openings	58(12.8)	58
Thanks	78(17.2)	68
Apologies	77(17.0)	63
Explanations	49(10.8)	45
Repairs	66(14.6)	58
Further Contact	22(4.9)	20
Invitations	51(11.3)	50
Closings	37(8.2)	37
Other	15(3.3)	12
Total	448(100.0)	

As is shown in Table 2, apologies are the second most frequent move in the Chinese texts; specifically, there are 77 apologies, accounting for 17.0% of the total moves. Of all the 100 selected response texts, 63 of them contain at least one Apology. According to Wagatsuma & Rosett (1986), the primary function of apology is to repair a harmed relationship. In the rapport management framework, apologies are regarded as post-event speech acts, often used when people's sociality rights have been infringed in some way (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 19). Sociality rights and obligations are implicitly associated with certain roles (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 15-16). In our research, sociality rights and obligations are associated with customer and restaurant owners or managers. When a customer purchases a food service, s/he is entitled to a right to receive the service and the service provider (restaurant) is obligated to provide it. If the restaurant fails to provide satisfactory food service, then an obligation-omission behavior occurs on the part of the restaurant, which would lead to an infringement of the customer's rights, thus posing a threat to mutual rapport. Therefore, when faced with the customers' complaints expressed in their negative reviews, the restaurant response writers often rely on Apologies, accompanied and supported by other moves, to function as remedial responses to restore rapport or harmony. In the following section, we shall discuss some notable

characteristics of the linguistic domain of apologies in the data and their possible contribution to the management of rapport.

5.2. The Linguistic Domain of Apologies and Rapport Management

In this part, we shall first look into the frequently-used expressions in the restaurant's apologies. We then describe the use of intensifiers with Apology expressions in the data, and the use of causative expressions and repetition. Also, we shall describe how honorific language are used to encode the relationships and observe how this contributes to the rapport-maintaining function of these response apologies. We also examine how response writers indicate their role as restaurant representatives through the use of pronouns and self-referring expressions.

5.2.1 The Use of Apologetic Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices

In early Speech Act Theory, Austin identified the use of apologize in its present indicative active form with a first person subject as the explicit way of expressing an Apology in English, and I am sorry was an indirect form of Apology (Yuan, 2009). It is also generally agreed in the area of pragmatics that various expressions can be used to apologize (Fu, 2010). The CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) Coding Manual (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), developed from Olshtain & Cohen (1983), lists seven Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) that make an Apology explicit in English: *sorry, excuse me, I apologize for. . ., forgive me, pardon me for. . ., I regret that. . ., and I'm afraid*. On the basis of this list, we searched in our data for Chinese tokens of the corresponding lexemes like 抱歉(sorry)、遗憾(regret)、歉意(being sorry)、道歉(apologize)、谅解(excuse and understand)、对不起(pardon)、不好意思(embarrassed)、愧疚(remorseful)、致歉(express apology)、请原谅(please forgive) etc., and classified moves containing them as Apologies. As Table 3 shows, most of these IFIDs occurred in the Chinese data, with 抱歉(sorry) being the most frequently used one.

Table 3: Chinese IFIDs: Number and Frequency

Chinese Response Texts		
IFID	Number	Frequency
抱歉(sorry)	57	61.96%
遗憾(regret)	8	8.70%
歉意(apology)	7	7.61%
道歉(apologize)	5	5.43%
谅解(excuse and understand)	4	4.35%

对不起(pardon)	3	3.26%
不好意思(embarrassed)	3	3.26%
愧疚(remorseful)	2	2.17%
致歉(excuse)	2	2.17%
请原谅(please forgive)	1	1.09%
	92	100.00%

The figures in Table 3 indicate that there is one IFID (抱歉[sorry]) that accounts for around 62% of the IFIDs used in the Chinese response texts. A few other forms are also occasionally used in the response texts, which frequently occurred in phrases or in patterns that added to their apologetic force. In particular, they were often used with intensifying expressions and, in phrases that were repeated within the response text and sometimes within the same move.

Careful examination shows that the IFIDs in Chinese response texts showed a tendency for them to be used with adjectives, adverbs and adverbial phrases that had an intensifying effect (e.g., 真诚地[sincerely], 非常、十分、实在[very much], 真诚地[sincerely]). The forms and frequency of the intensifiers used with IFIDs include: 非常抱歉(very sorry) 17 times, 很抱歉(very sorry) 18 times, 十分抱歉(extremely sorry) twice, 非常遗憾(very regretful) twice, 实在抱歉(extremely sorry) once, 真诚地道歉(sincerely apologize) five times, 深感抱歉(deeply sorry) five times, 深表歉意(express [our] deep regret) once, 实在对不起(extremely sorry) once, 万分地抱歉(sorry a million) twice, adding up to 54 three times in total. That is to say, in our data, 58.7% of the IFIDs (54 out of 92) in the data have been used with intensifiers, which is in the middle between English and Japanese as has been reported in Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020). In their study, intensifiers were used 40% of the time with apologize and sorry in English, and 68% of the time with owabi suru and moshiwake nai in Japanese. With 抱歉([sorry]), the tendency to use an intensifier was particularly strong: 45 out of 57 instances (78.9%) of 抱歉(sorry) were preceded by an intensifier, including adverbs like 非常、十分、实在、很、真诚地、万分地 ([very much], [very], [really], [very], [sincerely], [a million]) and verbal phrases like 深感([feel deeply]).

In the Chinese Apologies causative verb forms or expressions with a causative meaning were also found to be used to express regret. They are most often used in Apologies for a guest's discomfort or unpleasantness, as in (1):

(1) 让您有了不愉快的用餐心情我们感到十分抱歉。

([To have caused you unpleasant feelings while dining, we are very sorry.])

(2) 很抱歉给您带来不愉快的用餐体验。

([We are very sorry to have caused your unpleasant dining experience.])

This is similar to Japanese responses as revealed in Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020) but with a much lower rate. The Japanese Apologies causative verb forms or expressions with a causative meaning were frequently used to express regret. They were most often used in Apologies for a guest's discomfort or unpleasantness. 77 out of 100 of the Japanese texts included Apologies for unpleasantness and 62 (80%) of them included a causative expression, in most cases a form of *kakeru* (cause) or *saseru* (make).

Apart from that, Chinese response writers also used repetition to add force to their apologies. In our data there were 92 IFIDs in 77 Apologies (averagely 1.19 IFIDs for every apology). Thus, some responses contained multiple Apologies, and some Apology moves included multiple IFIDs, as in (3):

(3) 感谢亲爱的贵宾到店用餐，感恩您提出来的宝贵意见，我们马上去向厨师长反映您提出来的问题。非常抱歉在餐中没能发现您所说的这些问题及时帮您解决，我们一定积极整改让你有更好的用餐体验！对于服务不周的地方，我们再次深表歉意！期待您的下次光临，见证我们的进步！

(Thank you for your patronage, thank you for your advice, we will immediately pass your suggestions to our chief chef. We are very sorry for having not found out these problems and resolved them for you, we will definitely improve our service and provide you with a better dining experience! Once again we are deeply sorry for the insufficient service! Looking forward to your future presence, we will definitely make improvements!)

This is similar to Japanese response texts in which the response writers also used repetition to add force to their apologies, but with a higher rate. In Japanese there were averagely 1.46 IFIDs for every apology. In Chinese culture, people tend to use repetition to express their sincerity when making apologies (Jiang, 2004).

5.2.2 Addressing Terms, Self-referring Expressions and Rapport Management

Careful analysis shows that honorific and endearing addressing terms, pronouns and self-referring expressions have been used to manage rapport in our Chinese data.

The frequent use of honorific expressions in communication is a distinctive feature in Chinese language (Liu & Chen, 2013; Zhang & Wei, 2017). Spencer-Oatey holds that honorifics, as a linguistic option, can be used for managing face and sociality rights, and hence for managing rapport (2008: 21). Honorific expressions have been used frequently in the Chinese responses, among which 26 of them contained honorific expressions like 尊敬的宾客、贵宾、尊敬的领导 ([respected guest], [honorable guest], [respected leader]) etc. to address their customers. Review writers are accorded high status due to their role as a customer, and honorific expressions furnish a linguistic means for acknowledging the customer's elevated status and encoding the relationship between the response writer and the customer. Thus, in the following examples, the customer was referred to as 尊敬的宾客 (honorable guest), and honorific forms of some adjectives, nouns and verbs were used (underlined):

(4) 尊敬的宾客您好, 感谢您选择[restaurant name]餐厅! 请允许我们集体弯腰90度向您道歉!

(Respected guest, thank you for choosing [restaurant name] Restaurant! Please allow us to bow 90 degrees to apologize to you!)

(5) 亲爱的贵宾您好, 感谢您用心为我们写点评!

(Dear distinguished guest, thank you for writing this review for us!)

Other texts used similar expressions like 领导 in their responses. For example:

(6) 尊敬的领导, 非常不好意思没有让您满意, 感谢您提出宝贵意见, 有您的监督我们会做得更好! 我们期待您下次的光临。

(Respected leader, we are very sorry to have dissatisfied you, thank you for your valuable advice, with the help of your supervision we will definitely do a better job! We look forward to your future patronage.)

In modern Chinese culture, people tend to use 领导 (leader) to address their customers as a way to elevate their status even if he or she is not a leader in any sense. This is a distinctive cultural feature of Chinese language of honorifics, and the purpose is to manage rapport between the business and the customer. In terms of the frequency of the use of honorific expressions, Chinese texts had a lower rate than the Japanese ones. According to Morrow & Yamanouchi (2020), almost all of the Japanese texts have used honorific expressions, which make the responses become longer, because using honorific language involves using not only different words, but more words.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2008:14), face is concerned with “people’s sense of worth, dignity and identity”, and is associated with such aspects as “respect, honour, status, reputation and competence”. Therefore, the management of face should concern the acknowledgment (or emphasis) of people’s positive attributes. The honorific addressing terms and expressions in our data is used with the intention of paying respect to the customers, thus protecting their sense of worth and dignity. In this way, the use of honorifics contributes to the overall goal of Apologies, which is not just to admit or redress a wrong, but to manage rapport by restoring and enhancing a relationship.

In our data, we also found that the response writers tend to use endearing addressing terms to address their customers, including亲爱的, 亲, 亲亲, 亲爱的朋友 (dear, dear-dear, dear friend)etc., and up to 48 of the Chinese response texts contained these addressing terms(nearly half of all the responses). In Chinese online communication and daily oral communication, this kind of endearing addressing terms are very commonly and popularly used. According to He & Chen (2017), these endearing addressing terms are frequently used by online shop-owners in their communication with their customers, the purpose is to construct a close relationship with them, hence contributing to rapport management in business and customer online communication.

Another interesting finding is that, although the review responses are written by individuals, there is a tendency for writers to adopt a corporate voice reflecting their role as representatives of the restaurants. The corporate voice is manifested in the frequent use of the plural forms of first person pronouns. In our Chinese data, we found 252 tokens of first person plural pronoun forms (我们) but only 145 tokens of first person singular pronoun forms(我).

Zhang & Vásquez (2014) and Morrow & Yamanouchi(2020) both noted the same tendency in their analysis of the generic structure of replies to negative TripAdvisor reviews. While there was a general tendency for review response writers to use plural first person forms, we found that some writers actually switched within the text from plural to singular ones, perhaps to sound more sincere by taking personal responsibility (e.g., “我们没有能提供令您满意的服务, 实在是非常抱歉, 下次过来有什么问题可以直接打我电话哦139XXXXXXXX! ” [We are very sorry for having failed to provide satisfactory service, next time when you come please feel free to call my mobile number 139XXXXXXXX]).

While there was a general tendency for review response writers to use plural first person forms, we found that some writers switched within

the text from plural to singular ones, perhaps to sound more sincere by taking personal responsibility (e.g., “对于我们服务不周的地方，在此我向您郑重致歉！”[As for the insufficient service we have provided, I'd like to express my sincere apology!]) .

Morrow and Yamanouchi(2020) found that the corporate voice was also observable in signatures in closings of the responses. In our Chinese data, very few responses is attached with a signature, and only one examples has been found. But in this one example, [restaurant name]敬上庚子鼠4月, the response writer uses the restaurant name as a signature, instead of his or her own name, which is similar to the practice in the English texts.

What's more, our Chinese data also shows that sometimes, when making apologies, the response-writer, instead of using a plural pronoun, chooses to use third-person endearing nickname to refer to themselves. Look at the following example:

(7) 在这里楠楠向您真诚道歉！

(Here Nannan sincerely apologize to you!)

(8) 很抱歉给您带来不愉快的用餐体验，在这里小妍向您说声对不起啦！

([We're] very sorry to have brought you unpleasant dining experience, here Xiaoyan would like to say sorry to you!)

In modern Chinese culture, repetitive names like “楠楠”(Nannan), “素素”(Susu) and nicknames with “小”(little) plus a girl's name like 小妍 (Xiaoyan)、小蕊(Xiaorui), are capable of sending out an image of a young, beautiful girl who lives next door or in your neighborhood, which could arouse endearing feelings in the reviewers or the prospective customers. When apologizing to the customers, by using this kind of endearing repetitive names or nicknames, the response writer is trying to shorten the social distance between her and the customers and intend to repair the relationship and enhance rapport with them.

In this section we have described some linguistic domain involved in the restaurants' online apologies and their potential rapport building functions. We identified the expressions used to apologize, described their use with intensifiers, and noted how causative expressions and repetition were used to reinforce Chinese apologies. In addition, we have shown how response writers used plural pronouns and self-referring expressions to create a corporate voice, and how response writers' use of honorific

language and endearing addressing terms , as well as repetitive or cute girl's nicknames served to encode their close relationship with customers, thereby contributing to rapport management.

5.3. The Content of Apologies and Rapport Management

Apologizing usually involves taking responsibility for having done something wrong; but sometimes, the apology maker may not seem willing to take responsibility explicitly for some special purposes. In the following we shall describe how the issue of responsibility was handled, and discuss how other accompanying moves such as Openings, Closings, Thanks, Explanations, Repairs, Invitations, were used with Apologies to manage rapport.

5.3.1 Strategies in Dealing with Responsibility and Rapport Management

Accepting responsibility has been considered an essential component of a corporate Apology (Pace, Fediuk and Botero, 2010). In our Chinese data, among 63 responses that contained apologies, over 50% (36 out of 63, accounting for 57.1% of the total) of them were unclear whether or not the writers were actually taking responsibility for the issue that gave rise to the complaint. Only 42.9% (27 out of 63) of the responses show clear evidence of accepting responsibility by acknowledging a service failure on the restaurant's part and apologizing for a specific issue without mitigating factors or presenting the issue in a way that diminished the restaurant's responsibility. Example:

(9)很遗憾因为我们的店员服务不周影响了您的用餐体验，内心深感不安。

([We are] very sorry for our staff's inconsiderate service which led to your unpleasant dining experience, we are deeply sorry.)

This is similar to the results reported in Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020), but the percentage of accepting responsibilities is much higher than in English and Japanese responses. (Chinese 42.9% > English 34% > Japanese 32%).

In Chinese there are also instances in which a response writer accepts responsibility for having caused the guest discomfort, unpleasantness or disappointment, but without acknowledging responsibility for a specific service failure. In these cases causative forms of verbs or expressions with a causative meaning (e.g., 让您 ([we] caused [you]. . .), 给您、导致了 ([we] made [you]. . .) were frequently used, as in the examples below:

(10)很抱歉让您这么生气!

([We are] very sorry to have caused so much anger!)

(11)很抱歉给您带来了这么不愉快的消费体验!

(We are very sorry to have brought you such an unpleasant dining experience!)

In the above examples, the apologies is tactfully targeted at the customers' unpleasantness or disappointment instead of the specific service failures complained by the customers, so that it allows for the possibility that the restaurant was not at fault: it might have been the customer's unrealistic expectations or there may have been circumstances beyond the restaurant's control, which means the restaurant may not have to take the whole responsibility.

The strategy of apologizing for a guest's unpleasant or disappointed feelings rather than for the restaurant's service failure was found to be frequently employed in our data. More than 50% of the texts with Apology moves contained apologies of this type. Apologies for the guest's discomfort or disappointment show respect for the guest's sociality rights, in particular, their equal right to be treated fairly as a customer. In the meantime, shifting the focus from the restaurant's service failure to the guest's disappointment is face-saving for the restaurant, because it enables the restaurant to avoid explicit acceptance of responsibility; otherwise, it could be damaging to the restaurant's reputation. However, this doesn't mean that the restaurant are actually denying their responsibility, but rather, they are just trying to deal with this embarrassing situation in a tactful way to avoid damaging the reputation of their restaurant while repairing the relationship.

Similarly, conditional apologies can also have the effect of blurring the issue of responsibility. Among the Chinese response texts, eight conditional Apologies using “如果”(if) have been found. The use of these forms may harbor the illusion that there wasn't anything serious or specific to apologize for. Here's an example:

(12)因为过节期间顾客较多, 如果我们有服务不到位的地方, 还请您多多原谅!

(We can be very busy during the festival, so if there's anything we haven't served well enough, please forgive us!)

Besides shifting the focus of Apology and using conditional apologies, response writers have also been found to use other accompanying moves to

repair the relationship and manage rapport. In the next section, we shall take a look at those accompanying moves and see how they collaborate with the act of apologizing and contribute to the rapport-repairing process.

5.3.2 Accompanying moves and rapport management

Rapport concerns “people’s behavioral expectations in relation to their perceived sociality rights and obligations” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:15). In business-owner’s online negative-review response texts, most apologies are used together with other moves in order to cooperatively manage rapport (Ho, 2017; Morrow and Yamanouchi, 2020). Generally speaking, Explanations and Repairs are most directly related to the issue that cause the complaint, while other moves mainly cater to customers’ face needs.

Explanations were used with 42.9% (27 out of 63) of the Chinese responses that contained Apologies, which is much higher than in English (25%) and Japanese (20%) as reported by Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020). Here are some examples:

(13) 感谢亲的光临! [Thank] 接待过程中如有照顾不周的地方请多多包涵! [Apology] 如果当日套餐销量太多的情况下, 也可能会造成少数鸳鸯锅顾不过来, 请多多理解! [Explanation] 期待您的下次光临! [Invitation]

(Thank you for coming! [Thank] If there’s anything we haven’t done well enough, please forgive us! [Apology] If there are too many orders for our set meals, it can always happen that some hotpot tables are not serviced well enough, please understand! [Explanation] Looking forward to seeing you next time! [Invitation])

In other Explanations, the problem is depicted as an isolated incident:

(14) 由于系统临时出现故障, [Explanation] 给您带来不便, 非常抱歉! [Apology]

(The system happened to be malfunctioning these days, [Explanation] we are very sorry for the inconvenience we have caused you! [Apology])

According to Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020), a Repair could be seen as an implicit admission of service failure. In our Chinese data, Repairs occurred in 58.7% (37 out of 63) of the texts with Apologies, which is a bit higher than in English (50%) as reported by Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020). 26 out of 66 (39.4%) of Chinese Repairs did contain specific information. A Repair can make an Apology seem more sincere since it expresses a resolve to improve the service and prevent a recurrence of the problem, especially those with specific information. A typical example is as follows:

(15)我们会改进菜品的口味，提升我们的服务。
(We will improve our flavor as well as our service.)

The frequency of Repairs in Chinese is also higher than that reported by Page (2014: 38): 30% of the apologies in her data contained offers of repair. On the other hand, Page reported that only 10% of the apologies by companies on Twitter were accompanied by Explanations, which is much lower than that in our data (32.6%). On the one hand, the higher frequency of Explanations in the Chinese Dianping texts may be related to the fact that, different from Twitter rules, there's no word limit rule to the responses on Dianping, so it's easy to include Explanations with more details. On the other hand, the higher frequency of both Repairs and Explanations may also suggest that Chinese restaurant response writers tend to use more explanations to show more sincerity in their attitude to repair the relationship with their customers.

Other moves—Thanks, Further Contact, Invitations, Openings and Closings—all collaboratively contributed to the overall goal of restoring rapport(harmony) by catering to customers' face needs. An Apology is usually preceded by Thanks in our Chinese data; and thanks is also the most frequent type of move (17.2%) in the selected texts, which is similar to the results in Morrow and Yamanouchi (2020) and Ho (2017). By thanking reviewers for taking the time and trouble to write reviews, and by framing them as valuable feedback, response writers expressed positive regard for the customers and their opinions, which contribute to rapport management by paying respect to the association rights of the reviewers.

Apart from that, many responses also included Openings and Closings, which contribute to rapport management by attending to the association rights of the reviewers. In our Chinese data, 57 of the responses contained openings and 37 of the responses included closings. Which is just in the middle between English (63 Openings and 58 Closings) and Japanese (16 Openings and 29 Closings in Japanese). This might indicate that Chinese response writers have a moderate concern for customers' association rights between English and Japanese.

To make an Apology sincere, an apologizer needs to walk in the other person's shoes and show concern for their feelings. This could account for the expressions of sympathy, disappointment or embarrassment which occurred in Chinese responses. There were numerous occurrences of expressions such as 我们非常痛心 (it pains my heart), 心痛 ([my] heart aches), and 不安 ([I am] remorseful), as in (16):

(16)看到您的评价，我们心中深感不安。
(Seeing your comments, we are deeply remorseful.)

In adopting the customer's perspective and in their use of accompanying moves, response writers in Chinese texts displayed some similarities with English and Japanese in their ways of managing rapport. However, as the move analysis showed, there are also differences in the frequency of accompanying moves and in the manner in which they were used.

6. Conclusion

In an era of increasing use of digital communication, it is of great importance to investigate the speech acts on consumer websites. The present study draws upon Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework and presents an analysis of restaurants' apologies to customers in Chinese CMC. We collected 100 responses by restaurants to customers' negative reviews on Dianping.com (a Chinese independent third-party reviewing website similar to TripAdvisor) for our study, using the method of Rhetorical Move Analysis to identify Apologies and other accompanying moves in our data. The findings show that apologies and other moves (such as Thanks, Explanations, Repairs, Openings, Closings, Invitations etc.) serve as remedial responses to restore rapport or harmony. Considering the public nature of the open online communication, the linguistic domain of apology (including apology expressions, intensification, repetition, honorifics, endearing addressing terms, pronouns and self-referring expressions) and content of apology (Accepting or not accepting responsibility) are properly employed by the restaurants' response writers in order to repair the relationship with the dissatisfied individual customer on the one hand, while protecting the restaurants' good reputation with the prospective customers online on the other hand. We also compared our results with those in the previous studies (e.g. Page, 2014; Ho, 2017; Morrow & Yamanouchi, 2020) in order to reveal some cross-cultural similarities and differences. Further study is needed to reveal more cross-cultural similarities and differences, or to clarify how effective the various forms of apologies are in restoring business-customer rapport, and whether they are equally effective across cultures, which would be valuable to business professionals who increasingly interact with consumers cross-culturally through internet.

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