

Language Functions and Expressions Used in Handling Guest Complaints in Emails at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort

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Abstract

Guest complaints were unavoidable in the hospitality industry, requiring appropriate language functions and expressions in handling guest complaints. This research aims to identify the language functions and expressions used to handle guest complaints in emails at the New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort. It focuses on how language functions and expressions are used. It used a qualitative document study, and data was collected through identification by taking multiple samples of complaint emails from New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort. This research showed that the staff at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort used six types of language functions in responding to guest complaint emails, such as thanking, apologizing, giving a reason, offering something, suggesting, and showing sympathy. These language functions were realised through various language expressions in the staff's responses. From 18 emails, the data were grouped into eight representative cases due to similarities in the type of complaint and staff responses. This research contributed to examining the handling of guest complaints via email at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort.

Keywords: Complaint Emails, Guest Complaints, Language Expressions, Language Functions.

INTRODUCTION

In the hospitality industry, guest satisfaction is a top priority, and handling complaints is crucial to maintaining guest satisfaction. Guests who complain not only through the front office, but also give their complaints through the hotel's email. In New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort, handling guest complaints via email comes not only from the guest's email but also from intermediaries such as online travel agents or travel agents who forward the guest's complaint to the hotel.

In handling guest complaints via email, using language functions and expressions is crucial to maintaining professionalism and creating an impression of empathy. Resolving guest complaints with proper language selection is vital to maintaining guest satisfaction. Identifying the language functions and expressions used by staff in handling complaints will provide insights to improve communication and increase guest satisfaction.

While several studies have investigated language functions and expressions in hospitality communication, most have focused on spoken interactions at the front office or complaint handling in travel agencies. There is limited research that examines explicitly how hotel staff handle guest complaints through email communication using language functions and expressions.

This research aims to identify the language expressions used by staff in complaint emails to improve communication skills and provide a deeper understanding of the

functions of language in handling guest complaints in emails at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort.

Language function theory by Blundell et al. (1982) is applied to identify and classify the language functions found in the guest complaint responses. Supporting theories from DeWitt and Brady (in Lestari, 2024) and Wantah (in Barustyawati, 2014) are used.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative method to identify the language functions and language expressions used to handle guest complaints in emails at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort. The qualitative document study method was chosen because this research focused on language function and expressions, especially when handling complaints in emails at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort.

The data source for this study consisted of emails containing guest complaints handled by staff at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort. These emails include interactions where staff responded to guests' dissatisfaction with a booking. During the internship period from January to July 2024, the reservation and sales marketing staff received 18 complaint emails, such as complaints about product and service quality, forgetting to set up the extra bed, room facility, refund requests, luggage mishandling, delayed pick-up service, and missing guest belongings.

The writer collected the data using a qualitative observation table in this research. This table helped organise the language functions and expressions used in handling complaints. Below was the structure of the table.

This study applied the leading theory of Language Function by Blundell et al. (1982), which identified and classified the types of language functions found in the guest complaint responses. Supporting theories from DeWitt and Brady (in Lestari, 2024) and Wantah (in Barustyawati, 2014) were used.

Table 1. Language Functions and Language Expressions Used
in handling complaints in emails at New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort

No	Source	Type Complaint	Complaint Handling Step	Language Functions	Language Expressions

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were obtained from eight email samples containing guest complaints. These complaints came from online travel agents (OTA), travel agents (TA), and direct guests. The staff responses were examined to identify the types of language functions and expressions used by the staff.

Table 2. The Results of Language Functions and Expressions Used in Handling Complaint Emails

No	Source	Type Complaint	Complaint Handling Step	Language Functions	Language Expressions
1.	Data 1 from OTA	Product and service quality	Acknowledging	Thanking	<i>I want to thank you for your email.</i>
			Identifying the root cause	Giving Reason	<i>After we discussed this with New Sunari Management, we made the following decisions.</i>
			Offering solution	Offering Something	<i>We agree to do a financial refund for one night's stay from their two-night stay at New Sunari.</i>
			Offering solution	Suggesting	<i>To avoid potential complaints in the future, New Sunari will try to improve the quality of its products and services.</i>
			Acknowledging	Thanking	<i>Thank you very much for your excellent attention, support, and cooperation.</i>
2.	Data 2 from TA	Missing an extra bed service	Acknowledging	Thanking	<i>Thank you for your email.</i>
			Apologizing	Apologizing	<i>We apologize for our mistake.</i>
			Offering solution	Offering something	<i>We are pleased to confirm the overpayment for the extra bed as a floating deposit.</i>
			Acknowledging	Thanking	<i>Thank you for your kind attention.</i>
3.	Data 3 from OTA	Room facility	Acknowledging	Thanking	<i>Thank you for the email.</i>
			Apologizing	Apologizing	<i>We are sorry to inform you that we cannot refund the money because this reservation was running for 2 nights in our system.</i>

No	Source	Type Complaint	Complaint Handling Step	Language Functions	Language Expressions
			<i>Identifying the root cause</i>	<i>Giving reason</i>	<i>Yesterday, the guest requested an early checkout because the guest said they were feeling unwell and were not complaining about the room or anything.</i>
			<i>Offering solution</i>	<i>Suggesting</i>	<i>If the guest complained about the room, we would move the guest to another room.</i>
			<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you.</i>
4.	Data 4 from OTA	Room facilities and refund requests	<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for the email.</i>
			<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>We do apologize for that.</i>
			<i>Identifying the root cause</i>	<i>Giving reason</i>	<i>We cannot confirm the refund or waive the cancellation fee, so we will charge the full payment for this booking.</i>
			<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you, and should you have any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.</i>
5.	Data 5 from Guest	Room facilities and refund requests	<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for the email.</i>
			<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>We are sorry, but we cannot refund your booking because it is non-refundable.</i>
			<i>Offering solution</i>	<i>Offering something</i>	<i>But we can upgrade your room to another room.</i>
			<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you, and should you have any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.</i>
6.	Data 6 from Guest	Luggage Mishandle	<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for your email.</i>
			<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>We apologise for the mistake regarding your luggage.</i>
			<i>Identifying the</i>	<i>Giving</i>	<i>Our staff mistakenly informed</i>

No	Source	Type Complaint	Complaint Handling Step	Language Functions	Language Expressions
			<i>root cause</i>	<i>reason</i>	<i>your luggage.</i>
			<i>Taking action</i>	<i>Offering something</i>	<i>We will immediately deliver your luggage to the airport.</i>
			<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for your information.</i>
7.	Data 7 from a guest	Delayed pick-up service	<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for your email.</i>
			<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>We apologise for the delay in your pick-up service.</i>
			<i>Taking action</i>	<i>Offering something</i>	<i>We will immediately send our driver to pick you up.</i>
8.	Data 8 from TA	Missing guest belongings	<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you for your email.</i>
			<i>Apologizing</i>	<i>Showing sympathy</i>	<i>We are sorry to hear about the missing item.</i>
			<i>Identifying the root cause</i>	<i>Giving reason</i>	<i>We have checked with our housekeeping, and nothing was left in the room after check-out. Our hotel is equipped with CCTV and has no suspicious activity.</i>
			<i>Acknowledging</i>	<i>Thanking</i>	<i>Thank you.</i>

The language function thanking is used most in the data and is used both at the opening and closing of the emails. This language function supported the step of acknowledging:

At the opening of the email, there are expressions like :

1. I would like to thank you for your email.
2. Thank you for your email.

While at the closing, there are phrases such as:

1. Thank you for your excellent attention, support, and cooperation.
2. Thank you for your kind attention.
3. Thank you.
4. Thank you, and should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.
5. Thank you for your information.
6. This function was found in all eight data samples.

The apologizing function is used to express regret and take responsibility for any inconvenience experienced by the guest. This language function supported the step of apologizing. Below are the examples:

1. We apologise for our mistake.
2. We are sorry, we cannot refund your booking.
3. We do apologise for that.
4. We apologise for the mistake regarding your luggage.
5. We apologise for the delay in your pick-up service.

These are examples of how staff respond to complaints. This function was found in six datasets: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Giving a reason helps the guest understand the situation and reduce potential dissatisfaction. This language function supported the step of identifying the root cause. The expressions are like:

1. After discussing this with New Sunari Management, we decided on the following:
2. Yesterday, the guest requested an early check out because the guest said the guest was feeling unwell and the guest was not complaining about the room or anything.
3. We cannot confirm the refund or waive the cancellation fee, so we will charge the full payment for this booking.
4. Our staff mistakenly informed your luggage.
5. We have checked with our housekeeping, and nothing was left in the room after check-out.

This function appears in data 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8.

Function offering something reflects the hotel's willingness to make amends or provide compensation. This language function supported the step of taking action. The language expressions include:

1. We agree to do a financial refund for one night's stay.
2. We can upgrade your room to another room.
3. We have immediate delivery of your luggage to the airport.
4. We are pleased to confirm the overpayment as a floating deposit.

Data 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 offered a solution.

Language function suggestion is used to propose ideas or actions to solve complaints. This language function supported the step of offering something. The staff used language expressions like:

1. To avoid potential complaints in the future, New Sunari will try to improve the quality of its products and services.
2. If the guest complained about the room, we would move the guest to another room.

This function appears in data 1 and 3.

The sympathy function is used to express empathy to the guest. This language function supported the step of acknowledging. Language expressions like "We are sorry to hear about the missing item " show empathy to the guest. This function was found only in Data 8.

The analysis shows staff applied five steps in handling complaints: acknowledging, apologizing, identifying the root cause, offering a solution, and taking action. These steps align with DeWitt and Brady's theory of handling complaints (in Lestari, 2024) and Wantah (in Barustyawati, 2014). This research finds six language functions: thanking, apologising, giving a reason, offering something, suggesting, and showing sympathy. This research provides a clearer understanding of how staff respond to guest dissatisfaction through email.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify the types of language functions and expressions used by New Sunari Lovina Beach Resort staff in handling guest complaints through email. The analysis was conducted based on eight samples of complaint emails. The study results show that the staff used six language functions: thanking, apologising, giving a reason, offering a solution, suggesting, and showing sympathy. Staff applied five steps in handling complaints: acknowledging, apologizing, identifying the root cause, offering a solution, and taking action.

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