

TRƯỜNG
KHOA.....



Báo cáo tốt nghiệp

Đề tài:

Nghiên cứu về ngôn ngữ được sử dụng khi đáp lại lời phàn nàn của khách trong ngành dịch vụ khách sạn

PART A: INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Together with the development of society, the demand of a common language that can serve as a means to communicate is more and more increasing. From this fact, English has been used world-wide in many aspects of life for years. It can be said that so far English has been the most popular language in aviation, business, and international trade and so on.

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In the recent years, the hotel industry has been higher and higher developed in Vietnam. People working in the hotel industry are required to be efficient in English so that they can communicate confidently with a great number of foreign visitors to Vietnam every year. They need to know what to say when dealing with sensitive situations such as dealing with customers' complaints. However, it is questioned whether their ability to communicate efficiently in English can meet the demand of the hotel industry as well as foreign visitors or not. The lack of the competence of using English appropriately to convey their goodwill in dealing with customers' complaints may lead to the misunderstanding between the serving staff and the customers. To make the matter worse, this may cause a not very nice image of Vietnamese servants in the eyes of foreign visitors.

This study is carried out with the hope to find out some patterns employed by the English speakers in the hotel industry to deal with customers' complaints. Based on the finding, the study also implies some suggestions, which might be useful for the people working in the hotel industry to be better at communicating in English.

Aims of the study

The study is carried out with the aim to:

- study the strategies to deal with guests' complaints
- find out the patterns of the verbal language used to communicate with guests in dealing with their complaints.

- give some implications as well as some suggestions to help the people working in the hotel industry better at using English language appropriately.

Research questions:

1. What are the strategies used by the English speakers to deal with guests' complaints in the hotel industry?
2. What is the verbal language employed by the English speakers in response to guests' complaints?

Methods of the study

This study uses the methods of description; analysis of the questionnaire of the structures to find out the patterns used by the English speakers in the hotel industry in dealing with guests' complaints.

A great number of materials on applied linguistics in general and pragmatics in particular which focuses on speech act and politeness strategies are treated as the theoretical background for this study.

Data used in this study is collected from the textbooks and authentic English spoken by English speakers in the hotel industry as well as from the result of the survey questionnaire.

Scope of the study

This study aims at finding out the verbal language used in dealing with guests' complaints. It looks into the language patterns employed in dealing with guests' complaints.

All the other kinds of communication including non-verbal communication and written language via such channels as letters are out of the scope of the study.

Design of the study

This study is divided into three parts as follows:

Part A is an introduction presenting the rationale of the study; the aims and the research questions; the methods, the scope and the design of the study.

Part B consists of three chapters:

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- Chapter 1 deals with the theoretical background of the study: the concept of speech acts and types of speech acts, which emphasize the politeness and face and complaints as one example of speech acts. This is believed to be the foundation for the study in chapter 2.
- Chapter 2 is the study of the structures used in the hotel industry: some strategies employed in dealing with guests' complaints and the language used in dealing with guests' complaints.
- Chapter 3 provides implications to deal with guests' complaints as well as some suggestions to help people working in the hotel industry and learners of English who are preparing to work in the hotel industry to be better at the competence of using appropriate language to deal with guests' complaints.

Part C is the conclusion of the study.

PART B

Chapter one: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Speech Acts and the act of dealing with complaints:

Speech Act theory was originally initiated by the philosopher, J.L. Austin in 1930s and was expounded in a series of his lectures at Harvard in 1955. In his book *How to do things with words*, Austin argues that when we use language, we are performing certain acts. Traditionally, philosophers have to distinguish between actions and speaking; on the basis that speaking about something is quite different from doing it. For example, when a woman says, “This beef is rather tough”, she may not want to describe the beef but she may want to make a complaint to the hearer and may hope that the hearer will make positive adjustments or have a reaction towards this.

Those kinds of actions via utterances for the purpose of communicating are called “Speech Acts”. In English, they are commonly given such specific labels as apologizing, complaining, requesting, inviting, informing, complimenting or promising etc.

Dealing with complaints is a kind of complimentary speech act: it follows the act of complaint. When speakers deal with a complaint, they are performing an act, that is the act of responding to complaints. This can be a combination of one or more than one specific acts such as explaining, apologizing, or promising, in which the aim is to cool the guests’ anger down. When a guest makes a complaint, s/he is displeased, disappointed or maybe depressed. Thus using appropriate speech acts to please the guests is very important here. For this reason, speech acts theory will do a lot in setting up the foundation for this study.

1.1.1. *Speech Acts*

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The term “speech acts” has been mentioned and studied by many philosophers such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1975, 1979). However, the most basic definition is “speech acts are the acts we perform when we speak” (Hymes, 1972). It means that in saying something, a speaker also does something and speech acts consist of such verbal acts as greeting, promising, complaining, apologizing, requesting...

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According to Austin (1962), speech acts are classified into three types:

- ❖ Locutionary act: is the act in saying something, i.e. the act of uttering a meaningful sentence. For instance, “I am married”. When responding to guests’ complaints, a speaker says “I am very sorry”, s/he has performed a locutionary act. This utterance used in dealing with complaints is meaningful because it informs the speaker’s courtesy.
- ❖ Illocutionary act: is the act functioning the utterance that the speaker has in mind, i.e. when speaking, we do not express language but perform some certain kinds of acts such as making statements, asking questions, giving directions, apologizing, thanking etc. When a speaker performs an act of dealing with complaint, the speaker thinks that this expresses his/her goodwill and the communicative purpose intended is achieved as the speaker responds to complaints in his/her utterance.
- ❖ Perlocutionary act: is the act of producing a consequential effect on the speaker’s or hearer’s feelings, thoughts or actions. This effect is known as perlocutionary effect. For example, the effect of the promise “I’ll come” on the hearer is the hearer’s expectation to meet the speaker. In uttering an act of responding to a complaint, the speaker may expect that the hearer may feel pleased or satisfied when hearing what s/he says.

Of the three mentioned acts, illocutionary act is the inherent function of speech act; therefore, it will be paid much attention to in this part. Searle (1969) claims that “illocutionary acts refer to an utterance with a communicative force.” For example, when one says “Would you like a cup of tea?” this is an act of

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offering. Similarly, when one says “I’m awfully sorry I wasn’t at the meeting this morning” this is an act of apologizing. When one says “Can you order a taxi for room 405, please?” his intention is not to ask about the hearer’s ability but he is producing an act of requesting. This act will produce a perlocutionary effect on the hearer. The hearer may accept or refuse to do the request but not say whether he can do it or not. Hence, a speaker performs illocutionary act by expressing his/her intention of offering somebody something, apologizing to somebody for something... in such a way that the listener can recognize the speaker’s intention.

1.1.2. Types of Speech Acts

Speech Acts can be classified according to how they affect the social interaction between the speakers and the hearers. Searle (1990) gave out the notion of five different types of speech acts namely assertive, commissive, directive, declarative and expressive.

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- ❖ Assertive: tell people how and what things are. An assertive can be tested either true or false as the speaker asserts, says, reports et cetera.
- ❖ Commissive: commit the speaker to do something such as promises, threats et cetera.
- ❖ Directive: get the hearer to do something by using suggestions, requests, commands...
- ❖ Declarative: bring about changes in the world.
- ❖ Expressive: express feelings and attitudes about a certain state of affairs for instance, to apologize, thank, regret et cetera.

Thus, the apology “I’m awfully sorry I wasn’t at the meeting this morning.” has an expressive illocutionary point. The request “Can you order a taxi for room 405, please?” has a directive illocutionary point, or the promise “I’ll come.” has a commissive illocutionary point.

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Studying the classification of speech acts by Searle (1990), I myself found that complaining belongs to *expressive* which expresses feelings and attitudes.

However, when one complains, s/he does not just express his/her feeling but also wants to cause the hearer to do something for him/her. Then, complaining also has a directive illocutionary point.

Similarly, when one responds to a complaint, s/he utters a sentence of expressing his/her attitude towards the other, his/her speech act may get the illocutionary point of assertive by explaining a reason, admitting a mistake. Together with this illocutionary point, the speech act may also be commissive, which means s/he promises to take action(s) to satisfy the hearer.

Along with illocutionary act, according to Searle (1979), there are felicity conditions that insure for the successful and felicitous performance of that act.

Searle identifies four different kinds of felicity conditions: propositional content conditions or rules, preparatory conditions or rules, sincerity conditions or rules and essential conditions. These conditions relate, on the one hand, to the beliefs and attitudes of the speaker and the hearer, and, on the other hand, to their mutual understanding of the use of linguistic devices for communication.

The act of making a complaint and responding to a complaint should meet the requirement of Searle's felicity conditions, if both the speakers want to have a successful and felicitous performance. Then, the felicity conditions of complaining might be stated as follows:

- ❖ Preparatory condition: - something wrong happens to speaker (S)
- ❖ Sincerity condition: - S believes that his dissatisfaction is reasonable.
- ❖ Essential condition: - S's state will be changed by the attempt to get the hearer to do an action.

(Anna, 1987)

Like making a complaint, responding to a complaint may also have the following felicity conditions:

- ❖ Preparatory condition: - speaker can or hearer believes that S is able to share with H's dissatisfaction.

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<#>Preparatory conditions: hearer is able to perform action.¶
<#>Sincerity conditions: speaker wants hearer to do action.¶
<#>Propositional content conditions: speaker predicates a future action.¶
<#>Essential conditions: counts as an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do action.¶

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❖ Propositional content conditions:

- H will reach a result by doing something else to show his goodwill.

(Anna, 1987)

These conditions are of vital importance when making and responding to a complaint. The act of responding to a complaint consists of different speech acts namely apologizing, explaining, and promising. The hearer might be considered to be satisfied with the action of the speaker. (However, it is not what is mentioned in this study.)

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In speech act theory, there are also direct speech acts and indirect speech acts which are distinguished from each other. Indirect speech acts are defined as “those cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another” (Searle, 1975). According to Searle, in direct speech acts, the speaker says what he/she means while in indirect speech acts, the speaker means more than what he/she says. When a speaker says “This steak is really overcooked”, he does not just mean to describe the steak but he may also want to make a complaint to the hearer.

1.2. Face and Politeness strategies:

1.2.1. Face and face- work

In everyday social interaction, to be respected and recognized, people try to keep their public self-image, which is called *face*.

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According to Richard (1985), “the positive image or impression of oneself that one shows or intends to show to the other participants is called *face*”

Face work:

Within everyday social interaction, people generally behave as if their public self-image, or their face wants, will be respected. By doing that way, people can maintain their face. It’s their *face-work*

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Hudson defined that face-work is “the way in which a person maintains his face”, which is carried out by presenting a consistent image to other people, so that one can gain or lose face by “improving or spoiling” this image. Hudson stated that through what one says or how to say it, the speaker presents a personal image for others to evaluate.

If a speaker says something that represents a threat to another individual’s expectations regarding self-image, it is described as a face-threatening act (FTA). Alternatively, having given a possibility that actions might be as a threat to another’s face, the speaker can say something to lessen the possible threat. This is called a face saving act (FSA).

Besides, it should be noted that some certain speech acts such as compliment, thank or offer flatter face. An act in this case is called a face-flattering act (FFA).

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Both an FTA and an FFA might be the cause of the face of losing face. To avoid this risk, either an FSA should be used or greater attention should be paid to the different use of routine and speech acts in different cultural communities.

Deriving from the theory of Goffman, Brown and Levinson (1987), we can have two related aspects of face.

Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, right to non- distraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom of imposition.

Positive face: the positive consistent self- image or “personality” (crucially including the desire that this self- image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interaction.

Face-work, therefore, proves to play an important part in making a conversation work either negatively or positively. When the face is kept, the relationship is maintained without much difficulty.

When we respond to a complaint, it might be potential for us to cause the loss of the hearer’s face. This is especially possible in the hotel industry as the rule there is to please the customers to the best of the staff’s effort. Therefore,

responding to the guests' complaints can be considered as an FTA. It risks threatening the guests' face. In the hotel industry, not all the guests' requirements can be met. Sometimes, the staffs have to turn down the guests' requirements. This may disappoint the guests, break the guests' face and cause serious misunderstanding between the guests and the staffs if the act of responding to a complaint is not carried out in such a way that it saves the guests' face. This may cause the risk of breaking the relationship between the guests and the staffs in particular and the hotel industry in general and may cause a not very nice image for the hotel industry. Thus, in order to avoid this risk, politeness strategies need to be effectively employed to maintain face, and thus, to maintain a good relationship between the guests and the people working in the hotel industry.

1.2.2. Politeness

In order to maintain each other's face, the interlocutors have to take into account the consideration of politeness.

Politeness is defined in Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary as "*things you say or do simply because it is social correct to do or say them, rather than because you mean them sincerely*". What should be discussed, then is in what standard people can judge something they (or others) do or say means politeness, or rather, in what view something is socially correct. This issue should be considered under each other's culture for judging things.

In accordance with two kinds of face in Brown and Levinson's view: negative and positive faces; politeness is divided into two types: negative and positive politeness. According to Brown and Levinson, positive politeness is concerned with the actions people take to maintain their face and that of the other people they are interacting with. Positive face has to do with presenting a good image of oneself and securing the approval of others. Positive politeness consists of acts, which are designed to preserve or restore the Hearer's positive face, by stressing the Speaker's sympathy with a social closeness to the Hearer. One

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linguistic way of doing this would be to link the Speaker and Hearer together by using the pronoun forms: we, us or our.

Negative politeness is the effort not to be coercive against imposition on others, in other words, not to poke one's nose into other's privacy. Negative politeness consists of acts which are designed to preserve or restore the Hearer's negative face, by expressing the speaker's reluctance to impose his or her wants on the hearer. One way of doing this would be to say something like: "I don't like to bother you but..." The tendency to use negative politeness forms, emphasizing Hearer's right to freedom can be seen as deference strategy.

It should be noted that neither negative nor positive politeness is thoroughly good or bad. This depends much on culture, i.e. this culture is more or less in favor of the former or later viewpoint of politeness as people in that country consider it to be appropriate to show concern for or interest in each other's business.

1.2.3. Politeness strategies in making and responding to complaints

1.2.3.1. Making complaints

In everyday conversations, people often carry out different speech acts. For example, greeting and responding, asking for information, giving directions and instructions, complaining and responding to complaint

People often complain to express pain, discontent or dissatisfaction about illness, the weather, the food, the traffic jam, money problem, poor relationship and so on. There is almost a reason for complaining and it is thought to be an action involving something akin to feeling sorry for oneself.

Complaints are divided into two kinds: direct and indirect in accordance with positive and negative politeness.

A direct complaint about someone or something is usually performed by a certain piece of language or a certain stretch of language with a particular prosody in the real world that both Speaker and Hearer are sharing. It is, in most cases, understood easily through literal interpretation. When making direct complaints, people may take the risk of being rude as in "this steak is as tough as leather", but

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very often, people try to be more tactful and polite like “this steak seems to be overdone.”

However, it is not common for Speaker to make direct complaints because the person s/he wants to address the complaint to may be someone else or because of the close relationship between participants. To avoid hurting Hearer’s feeling, in such cases, an indirect complaint is thought to be more appropriate. In making an indirect complaint, Speaker does not complain about what directly make them uncomfortable or dissatisfied, perhaps s/he expects Hearer to show further attention and sympathy towards Speaker’s situation before Speaker reveals what s/he directly complains about.

1.2.3.2. Responding to complaints

When Speaker is complaining about something wrong happening to him/her, Speaker wants Hearer to do something to show sympathy or to end what causes Speaker’s troubles in one way or another. Hearer, in such cases, may express his/her feelings and attitude by whether keeping silent, saying something, or doing something to let Speaker know that the Hearer accepts or does not accept Speaker’s complaining.

Normally, in the hotel industry, positive politeness is often used as it expresses the staffs’ goodwill to help the guests out of the trouble or at least to lessen the guests’ anger.

1.3. Complaining and dealing with guests’ complaints in the hotel industry

1.3.1. Complaining in the hotel industry

As mentioned above, complaints are what one makes saying that s/he is not satisfied. In the hotel industry, complaints are unavoidable. When a guest comes to stay in a hotel, s/he wants to get the best service there. However, everything does not always run as smoothly as one expects. Even the most pleasant guests have

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complaints now and then. The complaints may result from the faults made by the serving staff or caused by the guests themselves.

Whether the complaints are due to the serving staffs or not, the staffs are often expected to please the guests to the best of their service.

1.3.2. Dealing with guests' complaints

Complaints are unavoidable and serving staff in the hotel industry have to deal with them everyday. However, complaints concern with the face work and politeness. Then, how to deal with guests' complaints so that the guests' face will not be lost is really a big problem. In this study, the writer would like to make an investigation by conducting a survey questionnaire to serving staff in the hotel industry in Hanoi to try to find out the pattern of the verbal language used by these serving staff to deal with guests' complaints. The discussion of the research questions as well as the findings of the analysis of the questionnaire will be mentioned in chapter II.

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Chapter two: STUDY

2.1. The research questions:

The study is carried out based on the following two research questions:

1. What are the strategies used by the English speakers to deal with guests' complaints in the hotel industry?
2. What is the verbal language employed by the English speakers in responding to guests' complaints?

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2.2. The discussion of the questionnaires:

The questionnaires deal with the patterns and the verbal language employed in dealing with guests' complaints in the hotel industry.

For the patterns, the respondents were required to choose one or several questions of the given strategies to deal with guests' complaints. The content of the questionnaires are illustrated in Table 1.

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| Questions | Content |
|-----------|--|
| 1 | The frequency of complaints they have to deal with |
| 2 | Their strategies when dealing with complaints owing to their faults |
| 3 | Their strategies when dealing with complaints owing to other departments |
| 4 | Their strategies when dealing with complaints owing to the guests themselves |

Table 1.

For the language employed in dealing with guests' complaints, the respondents were required to choose one or several of the given options which express what they would say to the guests. The questions are based on the following situations

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| Situations | Content |
|------------|---|
| 1 | The language employed in dealing with a complaint due to the serving staff's fault. |
| 2 | The language employed in dealing with a complaint not directly caused by the serving staff's fault but from another department of the organization. |
| 3 | The language employed in dealing with a complaint due to the guest him/herself. |

Table 2.

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2.3. The discussion of the respondents:

The respondents participating in the questionnaires included fifty people working in the hotel industry with the equal number of both genders: 25 male and 25 female respondents. All of them are in their twenties and early thirties. Their length of working in the hotel industry is more than five years, which may lead to the consumption that the knowledge and experience they get working in the hotel industry is relevant to the analysis of the data.

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All of the respondents were assured that their information will be kept confidential. It was hoped that this assurance would help to obtain more reliable replies from them.

2.4. Data analysis procedure:

The data were analyzed by the following procedure: First, the data in questionnaire 1 were discussed to find out the patterns employed dealing with guests complaints by the serving staff in the hotel industry. Second, the data in questionnaire 2 were discussed to find out the language employed in responding to guests' complaints including the acts of apologizing, explaining, and promising through certain situations. From this, implications would be put forward to help serving staff improve their language in the hotel industry as well as for anyone who concerns about the language used to deal with guests' complaints and would like to work in the hotel industry.

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2.5. Data analysis:

2.5.1. The frequency of the complaints made by the guests in the hotel industry:

The first question in Questionnaire 1 was designed to check the frequency of the complaints made by the guests to serving staff in the hotel industry with three levels: always, sometimes and never. The finding of the first question is illustrated in Table 3.

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| Rates of frequency | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Always | 23 | 24 | 47 |
| Sometimes | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Never | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 3.

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From the data gathered in Table 3, it can be seen that complaints are unavoidable in the hotel industry. 47 respondents have chosen the highest rate *always*. This implies that they have to deal with complaints everyday, in almost every situation. The number of the respondents who have chosen the rate *sometimes* is 3. Comparing with 47 respondents who have chosen the highest rate, this is a small number, but it also conveys the idea that being a serving staff, especially in the hotel industry, one is always expected to deal with the

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complaints. As complaints are what unavoidable in the hotel industry, no respondents have chosen the lowest rate *never* in question 1.

Because complaints always appear in the hotel industry, the serving staffs always have training lessons on how to deal with complaints. However, what are the strategies employed in dealing with complaints? Let us study the following situations.

2.5.2. Patterns used in dealing with guests' complaints

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2.5.2.1. When it is due to serving staffs' fault.

The options for the pattern are designed as follows:

- A. apology + explanation + promise
- B. apology + explanation
- C. apology + promise
- D. apology only
- E. turning down the complaint(s)
- F. ignoring the complaint(s)
- G. Your own opinion (please specify) _____

Table 4 will illustrate the findings for strategies employed by the serving staff when the complaint is due to their fault.

| Patterns | Male respondents | Female respondents | Total |
|----------|------------------|--------------------|-------|
| A | 15 | 16 | 31 |
| B | 6 | 6 | 12 |
| C | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| D | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| E | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 4

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To deal with guests' complaints, the serving staffs in the hotel industry tend to gather different speech acts to express their attitude. Study Table 4, it can be implied that the structure which is most employed by the serving staffs is apology + explanation + promise. 31 out of 50 respondents have chosen this structure in responding to guests' complaints. The number of respondents choosing the second structure apology + explanation is 12. 8 respondents have chosen the structure apology + promise to deal with guests' complaints. Only 1 male respondent has employed the speech act apology only. With no checks for options E and F, it can be seen that these are not what the serving staff can employ in dealing with guests' complaints. None of the respondents has expressed their own opinion in responding with complaints due to their own fault.

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2.5.2.2. *When it is owing to another department in the organization.*

The options for the pattern are designed as follows:

- A. apology + explanation + promise
- B. apology + explanation
- C. apology + promise
- D. apology only
- E. turning down the complaint(s)
- F. ignoring the complaint(s)
- G. Your own opinion (please specify) _____

Table 5 will illustrate the findings for strategies employed by the serving staff when the complaint is not due to their fault but from another department in the organization.

| Patterns | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 12 | 14 | 26 |
| B | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| C | 6 | 5 | 11 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 5.

In responding with guests' complaints when the fault is not caused by himself/ herself but from another department in the organization, both male and female respondents still show their preference to the first structure apology + explanation + promise. For them, whether it is due to their fault or from other departments in the organization, they have to give an apology first, this is often then followed by an explanation and a promise, which could drive the guests' anger away and help them get a feeling that whenever they enter an organization in the hotel industry, they will be well served by the helpful serving staffs. Besides using a full pattern of an apology together with an explanation and a promise, the serving staff can also just use an apology and an explanation or an apology and a promise in responding to guests' complaints. With this choice, it can be implied that either an explanation or a promise can be used alone here to deal with guests' complaints. None of the respondents have chosen pattern D, which is an apology only in responding to a complaint not due to their fault. This is quite common in the hotel industry for the serving staffs to express an apology whenever there appears a fault even not made by them. However, an apology is often accompanied by an explanation or a promise. An apology only does not seem reasonable as it is not really due to their fault. The number of the respondents choosing pattern E is quite small (7 out of 50), but it can still be seen that some of the serving staffs do not want to take responsibility for the fault not made by them. If this is in another setting, it may be accepted. However, in the service industry in general, and in the hotel industry in particular, it is quite unaccepted as their duty is to make guests pleased. An act of turning down the complaint may lead the

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guests to be more furious. The consequence of this seems to be predictable. For the question to express their own opinion, no answer was found.

2.5.2.3. *When it is due to the guests themselves.*

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The options for the pattern are designed as follows:

- A. apology + explanation + promise
- B. apology + explanation
- C. apology + promise
- D. apology only
- E. turning down the complaint(s)
- F. ignoring the complaint(s)
- G. Your own opinion (please specify) _____

Table 5 will illustrate the findings for strategies employed by the serving staff when the complaint is not due to their fault but from the guests themselves.

| Patterns | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 12 | 12 | 24 |
| B | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| C | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 6

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In the serving area, dealing with guests' complaints seems to be an every day activity. When the fault is made by the serving staffs, it will be repaired by an apology, an explanation and a promise to the guests. However, it is not the staff themselves who always have faults, sometimes; the faults may be due to the guests: a drunken guest asking for further drinks, a customer forgetting to confirm

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her stay at the hotel before checking in...To deal with these kinds of complaints, it is quite obvious that the strategy most employed by the serving staffs is still the one that they use when the fault is due to themselves: an apology + an explanation + a promise. It might be said that they always make an act of apology for whatever complaints from the guests together with an act of explanation to make the situation clear, and to solve the problem, an act of promise might be employed. 24 respondents have chosen this pattern to deal with guests' complaints for what caused by themselves. Only an explanation or a promise after the apology is also what the serving staffs probably use to respond to the guests. An apology only seems not enough and not chosen by the respondents. For the pattern of turning down the complaint, the number of respondents choosing this is higher comparing with the two previous situations when the fault is due to the serving staffs. This can be explained that since it is not their faults, they do not want to take any responsibility for these. However, avoiding taking responsibility is not what they learn to deal with guests' complaints. Thus, for any respondents who have chosen this pattern, they should reconsider about rules in dealing with guests' complaints. The strategy of ignoring the complaints is not chosen by any respondents. They are in the service area and as for them at least they have to say something to the guests. Finally, no respondent has added any other strategies to the list about this situation.

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2.5.2.4. *The findings:*

After studying three situations in which the complaints are made due to different agents from the serving staffs, the other departments in the organization to the guests, the writer has come to a conclusion about the strategy pattern employed by the serving staff. To deal with guests' complaints, the staffs tend to employ the order of speech acts as follows: an apology + an explanation + a promise. Whether the faults are due to the serving staffs or the guests, it is the rule in the service area for the staffs to give an act of apology. To make the situation

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obvious, an act of explanation is given and finally, to show the serving staffs willingness to help the guests, an act of promise is given.

However, from the study, there are still some findings which show the inappropriateness in using a standard strategy in responding to guests complaints. With a speech act of turning down the complaints, this may lead to an FTA to the guests. As mentioned in the chapter one, a face – threatening act is what a speaker says that represents a threat to another individual’s expectations regarding self-image. When a guest makes a complaint, s/he wants to be served in a way that makes him/her pleased. Turning down the complaints, the staffs seem to refuse to make the guest satisfied, which probably spoils the guests’ self-image, or in other words, which makes the guest lose face.

2.5.3. The verbal language employed in responding to guests’ complaints

In accordance with the strategy patterns employed, the respondents are asked to choose one or several of the patterns of the verbal language employed in dealing with guests’ complaints. This part will have an insight into the language used by the serving staffs when dealing with guests’ complaints due to their faults, the faults made by another department in the organization and the faults caused by the guests themselves.

2.5.3.1. When the fault is owing to the serving staffs:

When we make mistake, it is expected that we will do something via action or utterance to rectify the mistake. Working in the hotel industry, serving staff have to face with guests’ complaints everyday. To deal with the complaints successfully, an appropriate language pattern should be employed. This part will have an investigation in to the language employed in response to guests’ complaints when it is due to the serving staffs’ fault.

The language patterns are designed basing on the following situation:

Suppose you are a waiter/ waitress. What would you say if the complaint was “I asked for my steak rare __ this steak is so well done, it’s almost uneatable”? and you know that you have written down the wrong order.

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- A. I'm very sorry about this. There's obviously a misunderstanding. I'll have it changed for you right away.
- B. I'm very sorry about this. There's obviously a misunderstanding.
- C. I'm very sorry about this. I'll have it changed for you right away.
- D. Sorry, Sir/ Madam.
- E. Really? I've checked with the chef and he made sure that this steak has been cooked the same as your order.
- F. You ignore the complaint.
- G. Your opinion (please specify): _____

The result of the questionnaire is illustrated in Table 7

| Patterns | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 12 | 14 | 26 |
| B | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| C | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 7

Study Table 7, it can be seen that pattern A is most chosen by the respondents. Together with the strategy pattern, the language pattern also follows the order of an apology, an explanation and a promise. 10 out of 50 respondents have chosen pattern B, which consists of an apology and an explanation. The number of respondents choosing the act of apology and a promise is 11. Seven

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respondents have chosen to turn down the complaint although it is due to their faults. No one has chosen to say sorry only for their faults or say nothing.

Study the language pattern, it can be seen that to give an act of apology, the language used by the serving staff is quite formal with “I’m very sorry about this”. This might be shown that there is a distance between the serving staffs and the guests; therefore, a formal style of language can be used to imply the politeness of the serving staffs to the guests. The explanation is not too detailed but quite general with “There’s obviously a misunderstanding.” To promise to take action for the complaint, the structure “have something done” is employed. With this structure employed, it seems that the serving staffs do not directly admit their fault but try to blame for another person or another department. Although the fault is made by the serving staff, in this case, s/he has written down the wrong order, they still choose to blame for another department with “Really? I’ve checked with the chef and he made sure that this steak has been cooked the same as your order.” to turn down the complaints. This might be a surprise as normally when one makes mistake, it is expected for him/her to admit the mistakes and take action to repair the mistakes. This is still true in the hotel industry. However, studying this situation, there are still a number of respondents choosing not to admit the faults.

2.5.3.2. *When the fault is owing to another department in the organization*

The hotel is an organization in which departments are well related to one another and waiters and waitresses are the people who directly contact with the guests. Consequently, whenever there is a complaint from the guests. It is directly towards the waiters or waitresses. However, it is not always the fault made by the waiters or waitresses but from another department in the organization. In such cases, how the waiters and waitresses respond to the guests’ complaints. Let us study the following situation.

Suppose you are working as a waiter/ waitress. What would you say if the complaint was “I asked for my steak rare __ this steak is so well done, it’s

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almost uneatable” and you know that this fault is due to the staff in the kitchen section?

- A. I’m very sorry about this. There’s obviously a misunderstanding. I’ll have it checked for you right away.
- B. I’m very sorry about this. There’s obviously a misunderstanding.
- C. I’m very sorry about this. I’ll have it checked for you right away.
- D. Sorry, Sir/ Madam.
- E. Really? I’ve checked with the chef and he made sure that this steak has been cooked the same as your order.
- F. You ignore the complaint.
- G. Your opinion (please specify): _____

| Patterns | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 12 | 14 | 26 |
| B | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| C | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 8

With the data gathered in Table 8, it is quite interesting to find out that the number of respondents choosing the language pattern in responding to guests’ complaints is the same as one in the first situation. It can be implied that although it is not due to their fault, the serving staffs have still chosen to say sorry for the

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fault, generally explain the fault and promise to take an action to repair the fault. 7 is the number of respondents choosing pattern E, which sounds like a blame on the guest himself, or can be taken as an explanation.

The language pattern used here is also quite formal which implies the courtesy from the serving staffs to the guests. However, with blame on the guest, the language seems not to be appropriate and may cause dissatisfaction to the guests.

2.5.3.3. *When the faults are due to the guests themselves:*

Paying a visit to a hotel, a guest seems to always be given the best service to his or her satisfaction. If there is a mistake from the hotel, the staff seem to try to repair it right away. However, in some cases, it is the guest who makes the mistake. Then, what the staff will say to deal with such situation. The following questionnaire will give a thorough insight in to the language employed by the serving staff in dealing with the guest when the fault is not caused by themselves.

The language patterns are designed basing on the following situation:

What would you say if the guest's complaint was "*I made the booking weeks ago but you've let the room to another one.*" and you know that it is due to the fact that he/she has not confirmed the booking?

- A. I'm really sorry, It's nearly ten now. There's a six p.m. release on all our room. It was in the letter of confirmation. Let me see if I can book you another room in a nearby hotel, and we'll arrange the transfer.
- B. I'm really sorry, It's nearly ten now. There's a six p.m. release on all our room. It was in the letter of confirmation.
- C. I'm really sorry. Let me see if I can book you another room in a nearby hotel, and we'll arrange the transfer.
- D. I'm sorry, Sir/ Madam
- E. You should have confirmed your booking before you come here.

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F. You ignore the complaint.

G. Your opinion (please specify): _____

Table 9 will show the result of the study:

| Patterns | Male respondents (25) | Female respondents (25) | Total (50) |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| A | 12 | 12 | 24 |
| B | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| C | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| G | 1 | 1 | 2 |

Table 9

The setting for the situation in which the fault is made by the guests is different from the two previous ones. With a setting of a guest who has forgotten to confirm his/her staying before checking in the hotel and now there is no room left for him/her, the respondents were asked to choose the language pattern(s) they employ to deal with this matter. 24 out of 50 respondents have chosen to say “I’m really sorry”, and give a clear explanation “It’s nearly ten now. There’s a six p.m. release on all our room. It was in the letter of confirmation”. This is because they want to let the guests know that they have not done anything wrong here. With the goodwill to help the guests solve the matter, 13 respondents have chosen to make a promise of looking for another accommodation for the guests. In expressing their own opinion, one male respondent and one female respondent have written down the language they would use, which is “You should have confirmed your booking.”

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The language used in responding to guests' complaints when the faults are made by themselves is quite formal, coherent and firm to show the guests that this is not due to the serving staffs' faults but they are still very helpful and try to make the guests as pleased as possible.

2.5.3.4. *The findings:*

With the three given situations, the results are found as follows:

The language patterns employed by the serving staffs are rather formal to show the politeness of the serving staffs to their guests. With the faults caused by different interlocutors among the serving staffs, the language pattern found is the same: "I'm very sorry about this. There's obviously a misunderstanding. I'll have it checked for you right away." This can be implied that there are certain rules for the serving staffs to follow in response to guests' complaints whether the faults are made by themselves or from another department. However, the language pattern used to blame for another department is still employed (though the number is not high). This should be reconsidered as it will not only lessen the guests' dissatisfaction away but may also cause them more furious.

_____ With the faults made by the guests, the language should be appropriate. Otherwise, it may cause the face loss to the guests as in the hotel industry to respect guests' self-image is very important. In the study, it is found that the language employed by the serving staff in response to guests' complaints is formal, coherent and firm. The employment of the language is reasonable here as there is a distance between the serving staff and the guests. However, studying the questionnaire, it is also found that two of the respondents making a blame on the guests. This will cause an act of face threatening to the guests and will damage the image of the hotel industry.

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Chapter three: IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

3.1. The implications of the study:

With the development of the human beings, language has been playing a more and more important role in the human life. It is not only used to exchange information but also takes part in building the relationship among people in the society. Speech acts, an important function of language, also have a great effect in making a relationship better or worse. With different kinds of speech acts, they have helped us to vary our communications, yet have caused a lot of difficulties about when, where and to whom to say what.

This study has been carried out to have an insight into investigating the strategy patterns and the language patterns employed by serving staffs in the hotel industry in response to guests' complaints. With the findings, it can be said that once again, the roles of language and speech acts are highly appreciated in maintaining and developing the relationship between interlocutors.

Working in the hotel industry, one has to be sure that s/he has to try hard to give the guests the best service. Otherwise, they have to deal with guests' complaints. However, this does not mean that if they work hard, they can avoid complaints. Even the best service can involve receiving some complaints from their clients. Hence, how to deal with guests' complaints and how to use appropriate language in response to the complaints are what serving staffs should take into consideration.

A survey has been carried out to find out the strategy patterns and the language patterns employed by the serving staffs in the hotel industry in response to guests' complaints. It has been found that the strategy most employed by the serving staffs is apology + explanation + promise. From this, it can be implied that the serving staffs have employed three different speech acts in response to

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complaints. First, an act of apology is given out, whether the fault is made by the staffs or from the guests. With this kind of speech acts, it is aimed at helping the guests to drive their anger away. Second, the act of explanation is used to make the situation clearer and lead to the solution for the matter. With an act of promise, it will make the guests a feeling of being well concerned. Thus, with the pattern “apology + explanation + promise”, the staffs have dealt with the complaints thoroughly, satisfied the guests and developed a good relationship with the guests as well as maintained a good image for the hotel industry in particular and in the service area in general.

From the above pattern, the study has also found out the language employed in responding to complaints. The language here is formal, coherent to show the politeness of the serving staffs towards their customers. There is a distance in the relationship between the serving staffs and the guests. Hence, a use of appropriate language is very important in showing the respect as well as the serving attitude to the guests.

However, from the findings, it is also found that there are some respondents with wrong choice of an appropriate strategy pattern and language pattern although their time working in the hotel industry is quite long. With the hope to help the serving staffs as well as the learners in service area to have a thorough understanding of the strategy patterns and language patterns employed in responding to guests’ complaints, some suggestions will be introduced as follows.

3.2. Some suggestions for teaching and practicing the strategy and language patterns

3.2.1. Some teaching suggestions

*** Introducing the functions of language or speech acts:**

Before introducing the patterns, teachers should give learners some concepts about the appropriate language in communicating with other people, especially with guests in the hotel industry. This will help the learners to acquire

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the patterns actively. Students should be aware of using appropriate language, not just something grammatically correct but inappropriate or incorrect in certain situations. For example, with a complaint “this steak is almost uneatable.”, learners should have an appropriate speech act such as giving an apology, giving an explanation or making a promise.

*** Giving learners chances of interaction:**

Only in communication can the learners be aware of the language and get the habits of using it. Communicative competence can be developed only through practice. Therefore, free practice can help the learners expose themselves to the real- situations. The teachers’ feedback later is valuable as the learners can figure out their mistakes and can avoid them when working later.

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3.2.2. Some suggestions for practicing the strategy and language patterns

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*** Putting oneself in real situations:**

Practicing makes perfect. Learners can produce correct patterns when they have chances to practice them. Here are some suggested situations for them to practice.

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What would you say in the following situations?

Situation 1: You are a receptionist; a guest finds that some items of clothing are missing from returned laundry and complains to you.

Situation 2: You are a receptionist; a guest comes to you and complains about being disturbed by a chambermaid coming to clean the room.

Situation 3: You are a receptionist; a guest complains about not having been attended quickly at the reception desk.

Situation 4: You are maintenance department manager; a guest complains about water leaking through a ceiling has damaged his property.

Situation 5: You are a receptionist; a guest is complaining you have let his reserved room to someone else.

Situation 6: You are a head waiter; a guest says there is no coffee in her room.

Situation 7: You are an assistant manager; a guest is complaining loudly in the restaurant about badly cooked meat.

Situation 8: You are a head waiter; a guest says that he finds the floor waiter very rude.

Situation 9: You are a deputy manager; a guest is very annoyed about the loud music and voices from the neighboring room.

Situation 10: You are the head receptionist; a guest is most upset that her usual suite of rooms is not available.

*** Practicing the structure “have/get things done”:**

To make an act of promise, the structure “have/get things done” is often used. Study the following situation:

Complaint: There isn't any instant coffee in my room.

Promise: I'll have some sent up right away.

In a similar way, say that you will have the following things done.

1. The T.V doesn't work in room 301.
2. There aren't any towels in my room.
3. My shower still isn't right.
4. You said you'd get me that prescription.
5. Are you sure this bill is correct?

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PART C: CONCLUSION

Like other speech acts, complaining and dealing with complaints are the two parts which play important roles in everyday conversations. One often uses an act of complaint to express his/ her pain, dissatisfaction... and expects the hearer to have an appropriate speech act. The hearer, responding to a complaint, may have some actions to show his/her sympathy to the speaker. S/he may keep silent, say something or do something to express his/ her feeling as well as attitude towards the speaker's complaint.

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In the service area in general and in the hotel industry in particular, no one can expect that s/he can avoid the complaints made by guests. Hence, being aware of the complaints and getting the knowledge of using appropriate language to deal with guests' complaints are two of the many important factors that one can take into consideration when starting his/her career in the hotel industry.

With the hope to find out some certain patterns as well as the verbal language used in dealing with guests' complaints, this study has been carried out. Through the situations in the two questionnaires, the writer has collected the data which helps her to give out the patterns used in dealing with complaints. From the perspective of hotel industry, which is part of serving area, to please guests is one of the most important things and is always given priority. No matter whom to blame for the faults, serving staff and guests, what a serving staff should do is to apologize. The more sincere the apology is, the more polite s/he is, which leads to the more pleasant feeling a guest gets. In dealing with complaints, apologizing is not usually enough. Together with an act of apologizing, serving staff are also expected to give an explanation or to make a promise of action to be taken.

To convey these patterns, an appropriate language is also employed. The language used is rather formal with such words as "I'm really sorry" or "I must apologize" when giving an apology, "a problem may be that..." when giving an

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explanation or “I’ll have it done right away” when making a promise to show the politeness of the serving staff to their guests.

However, from the study, the writer also has found out that not all of the staff use the correct patterns as well as the appropriate language although the length of their career in the hotel industry is quite long. It seems that they need more training to meet the requirements in the hotel industry.

With the limitation of time and the format restriction, the writer has just stopped at finding out the patterns as well as the language used to express the patterns in the hotel industry. It is the writer’s wishes that she could have more chances to have more studies on this matter, one of the most important and sensitive ones in the hotel industry. The data, in that case, would not only be gathered from the questionnaires but also with tape recording to show the feeling of the guests making complaints and the voice of the serving staff when dealing with complaints. The writer also wishes that she could have chance to make a comparison between the English language and the Vietnamese language used by the serving staff for a more thorough study. After all, it is her hope that all her mistakes would be considered in an understanding and generous view.