

Maxims of Politeness by *InterContinental LA Downtown Hotel* in Responding One Star Reviews on Google Reviews

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness in written feedback by Matthias Kaiser (MK) and David Valencia (DV) in responding to guests' one star reviews at InterContinental LA Downtown Hotel. Using a qualitative method, the study analyzes how maxims of politeness are consistently applied despite differences in positions. The findings reveal that both MK, the Hotel Manager, and DV, the Director of Front Office, use all types of maxims of politeness, with approbation maxim being the most frequent, particularly in opening sentences to maintain the hotel's image and expected guest relations. A combination of tact maxim and generosity maxim also appears frequently to address guests' concerns while highlighting the hotel's efforts to improve. However, differences are identified in the ways MK and DV apply the same types of maxims of politeness through various sentences according to the main focus of their positions. They are also observed from the uses of different various and template sentences that both applied in their feedback. Differences clarify how MK's is responsible for the hotel's general operation, and DV is in charge of directly dealing with guests, showing maxims of politeness is crucial in the hospitality industry and influenced by high and low positions.

Keywords: Director of Front Office, Feedback, Higher and Lower Positions, Hotel Manager, Maxims of Politeness

INTRODUCTION

Politeness in communication plays a vital role in maintaining respectful and harmonious interactions, especially in professional settings, such as the hospitality industry. This study discovers the application of Leech's maxims of politeness in the context of InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown Hotel, a prestigious and award-winning establishment known for its high service standards. Focusing on written feedback to one star Google Reviews, the study analyzes how Matthias Kaiser (MK) as the Hotel Manager and David Valencia (DV) as the Director of Front Office respond to guest complaints. Considering their difference in higher and lower positions, the study explores whether their positions influence the use of maxims of politeness in their communication. Furthermore, the writer analyzes 30 written responses with 15 from MK and 15 from DV by using a qualitative approach to identify and compare the use of maxims of politeness. Therefore, the research questions of this study are to identify the types of maxims of politeness that MK and DV use when responding to guests' one star reviews on Google Reviews, and to discover the similarities and differences in maxims of politeness used by MK and DV.

The main theory of this study is the maxims of politeness by Leech (1983). Leech (1983) introduces six types of maxims of politeness, which are tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. These six types of maxims of politeness serve as approaches for promoting respectful communication and avoiding confrontation. This study is also supported by higher and lower positions theory by Jack Welch from Luntz (2007).

METHOD

This study applied Creswell and Creswell's (2018) qualitative method. The writer served as the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis. The data consisted of written feedback provided by MK and DV in response to one star guest reviews on Google Reviews. 15 feedback from MK and 15 from DV were collected in the first week of February 2025. Each sentence from the feedback was analyzed using Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative studies often rely on 20 to 30 data points for thorough analysis, making 30 feedback a suitable amount for valid identification of language uses in maxims of politeness. The selected feedback contained clear and varied expressions, allowing for a richer and more meaningful analysis compared to others that were brief or repetitive. An equal number of samples from MK and DV was selected to ensure a balanced comparison, which, according to Denscombe (2010), Bridges and Woolcock (2022), and Patton (2002), could improve the validity and fairness of qualitative analysis.

The data were gathered by reading and selecting the feedback directly from Google Reviews, then copying and pasting them into a Google Document to maintain their original wording and structure. To support a systematic and balanced analysis, the writer applied a three-digit numbering system to each sentence in the feedback. In this system, the first digit (1) refers to MK and (2) refers to DV. The second digit indicates the feedback number (1–15), and the third digit refers to the sentence number within the specific feedback. For instance, (1.3.2) refers to the second sentence in MK's third feedback, while (2.5.1) refers to the first sentence in DV's fifth feedback. This system helped the writer to maintain clarity in identifying and analyzing data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Maxims of Politeness Used by MK and DV

A. Tact Maxim

Sentence 1.9.3

"Your comments will be reviewed carefully to ensure improvements."

The sentence reflects the tact maxim as it prioritizes the guest's benefit by showing that their concerns are acknowledged and will be addressed. The phrase "your comments will be reviewed" highlights the hotel's effort to value and prioritize the guest's preferences for future improvement.

Sentence 2.3.3

"If you would like to discuss your experience further, please contact us at 1 213-688-7777 and ask for our Security Department to assist regarding your claim."

The sentence reflects the tact maxim as DV politely invites the guest to discuss the issue further, emphasizing the guest's autonomy and willingness. Phrases like "if you would like to discuss" and "please contact us" show respect for the guest's consent while aiming to find a beneficial resolution for their future stay.

B. Generosity Maxim

Sentence 1.4.4

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“Check-in procedures and service priorities are consistently being evaluated for improvement, and we're committed to offering efficient service.”

The sentence reflects the generosity maxim as it emphasizes the hotel's ongoing efforts to improve its service for the guest's benefit. MK highlights the hotel's commitment to enhancing check-in procedures and service efficiency, aiming to assure the guest of the hotel's dedication and regain their trust.

Sentence 2.7.5

“Our hotel is on par with the current market rates of local hotels and our incidental amount hold is also quite standard for hotels.”

The sentence reflects the generosity maxim as DV emphasizes the hotel's commitment to maintaining high standards for the benefit of the guests. By stating “our hotel is on par with the current market rates” and “our incidental amount hold is also quite standard,” DV aims to reassure the guest of the hotel's efforts to prioritize their comfort and satisfaction, encouraging trust and a potential future visit.

C. Approbation Maxim

Sentence 1.3.3

“Your feedback is invaluable in helping refine service offerings and address any inconsistencies.”

The sentence reflects the approbation maxim as it shows the hotel's gratitude and appreciation for the guest's feedback. By describing the feedback as “invaluable,” MK offers a positive remark, emphasizing its role in helping the hotel improve service consistency.

Sentence 2.13.1

“Dear Tami Mil, Thank you for staying at the InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown and for taking a moment to share your experience.”

The sentence reflects the approbation maxim as DV expresses gratitude through “thank you for staying,” showing appreciation for the guest's visit and feedback. This conveys that the guest is valued, aiming to make them feel acknowledged and encouraged.

D. Modesty Maxim

Sentence 1.11.7

“We hope you give us another chance to host you soon so we can share a more positive experience.”

The sentence reflects the modesty maxim as it shows the hotel's humility in acknowledging its shortcomings and respectfully requesting another chance to serve the guest. MK expresses a hopeful and humble desire to improve the guest's next experience, emphasizing consent and better service.

Sentence 2.15.2

“We do apologize your stay was not as memorable as we would have liked.”

The sentence reflects the modesty maxim as DV openly acknowledges the hotel's shortcomings by stating “we do apologize,” showing humility and responsibility for the guest's negative experience.

E. Agreement Maxim

Sentence 1.6.3

"The situation with the elevators is indeed unique to the architecture of our establishment."

The sentence reflects the agreement maxim as it shows the hotel aligning with the guest's concern about the elevator's unusual design. By stating that "the situation with the elevators is indeed unique," MK expresses shared understanding to validate the guest's feedback.

Sentence 2.12.3

"While our parking rate may seem high, I assure you that it is competitive with surrounding hotels for a metropolitan city such as Downtown Los Angeles."

The sentence reflects the agreement maxim as DV partially agrees with the guest by acknowledging that the hotel's parking rate "may seem high." This shows alignment with the guest's concern while still offering clarification.

F. Sympathy Maxim

Sentence 1.14.2

"It's unfortunate that you weren't fully satisfied with the cleanliness and room amenities."

The sentence reflects the sympathy maxim as MK expresses empathy toward the guest's dissatisfaction, particularly regarding room cleanliness and amenities. By stating "it's unfortunate that you weren't fully satisfied," MK acknowledges the guest's disappointment and validates their complaint with understanding.

Sentence 2.9.2

"I am sorry to hear that your stay was not as enjoyable as we would have liked."

The sentence reflects the sympathy maxim as DV expresses regret for the guest's poor experience. The phrase "I am sorry to hear" shows empathy and concern, indicating his disappointment with the unsatisfactory stay.

Similarities in the Use of Maxims of Politeness by MK and DV

Firstly, both MK and DV consistently apply all six of Leech's maxims of politeness, namely tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. This shows that politeness is a shared professional standard in hospitality, not based on staff hierarchy. Their responses aim to resolve conflict, show empathy, and maintain harmony with guests.

Secondly, the most frequently used maxim by both MK and DV is approbation maxim. They often express appreciation or gratitude to guests, especially in opening lines like "Thank you for sharing your feedback." This approach helps ease negative reviews and maintain a respectful, positive tone.

Thirdly, MK and DV consistently apply the approbation maxim in both opening and closing lines of their responses. Beginning and ending with gratitude or positive remarks helps frame the feedback politely, softens the complaint, and encourages ongoing guest trust.

Lastly, both often combine tact and generosity in one sentence to show concern for the guest while highlighting the hotel's effort to resolve issues. This dual strategy reduces the guest's discomfort and reinforces the hotel's dedication to service improvement.

Differences in the Use of Maxims of Politeness by MK and DV

Firstly, both MK and DV use all six maxims of politeness (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy), but they express them differently due to their positions. MK uses general, company-oriented language that reflects his high-level role overseeing hotel operations. DV, on the other hand, uses more specific and personalized language, aligning with his guest-facing role.

Secondly, MK varies his opening sentences based on the complaint, resulting in a more flexible application of different maxims of politeness (e.g., sympathy, agreement). This reflects his role in addressing issues in a broader operational context. Conversely, DV frequently uses the same opening line that reflects the approbation maxim, such as thanking the guest for their stay and feedback. This repetition supports his role in ensuring consistent guest acknowledgment and satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the use of Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness in written feedback by MK and DV from InterContinental LA Downtown Hotel in response to one star reviews. Using a qualitative method and three-digit numbering system, the findings revealed that both applied all six maxims, with the approbation maxim being the most frequent, especially in opening and closing sentences. Both also often combined tact and generosity maxims to acknowledge guests' dissatisfaction while expressing efforts to improve, reflecting the shared expectations of politeness in hospitality.

However, higher and lower positions influenced how each applied maxims of politeness. MK's feedback were broader and company-oriented, with varied sentence structures, while DV's were more guest-focused and often repetitive. These differences reflect their main responsibilities. Overall, the study shows that while maxims of politeness are consistently applied, positions shape its expression. The writer hopes this research supports further discovery of maxims of politeness in professional communication and further contributes to the field of pragmatics.

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