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Plenary Talk

Valerie Creelman (Saint Mary's University)

“Thank you for reaching out”: Re-visiting Invitational Rhetoric in Webcare a Decade Later

With the advent of webcare, invitational rhetoric has enjoyed a resurgence as a critical concept for those scholars studying Conversational Human Voice (CHV) and how it's operationalized in digital communications and customer care discourse. In their early efforts to define what communication style to use when delivering webcare, van Noort, Willemsen et al. (2015) identified invitational rhetoric (along with message personalization and informal speech) as one of three pervasive tactics contributing to a perceived conversational voice that organizations could enlist when participating in online customer care. By adopting an invitational approach, organizations could communicate their openness to customers' thoughts and experiences and signal that they valued that feedback in a non-judgemental way.

When it was first integrated into discussions of webcare, invitational rhetoric was not a new concept. In this presentation, I re-visit the pillars of Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's (1995) groundbreaking work on invitational rhetoric to examine to what extent the external conditions of safety, value, and freedom that defined their framework for social interaction continue to find expression in online customer care and engagement today. In doing so, this discussion invites us to evaluate what role invitational rhetoric presently performs in initiating social interaction and establishing trust in the face of increasingly AI-mediated interactions and whether it needs to be re-articulated.

Designed to prompt reflection and invite audience members to share their perspectives, this session offers us the opportunity to re-examine invitational rhetoric in the era of Webcare 3.0 and how it is operationalized in a constantly evolving digital landscape populated not only with human webcare agents but also with AI ones, too.

Griet Boone (University of Antwerp)

The perception of self-serving mitigation in Dutch hotel responses to online guest reviews: Two experimental studies

In the current digital era, people have ample opportunities to share both positive and negative feedback online. The tourism industry is especially impacted by this customer feedback, with thousands of online reviews posted daily on platforms such as TripAdvisor or Booking.com (Mariani et al., 2019). Since negative feedback can affect a hotel's reputation and customers' booking intentions (e.g., Roozen & Raedts, 2018), writing an effective response to a guest review is crucial for hotels to maintain a positive reputation. In their responses, hotels might make use of speaker-oriented, self-serving mitigation (Albelda Marco & Estellés Arguedas, 2021; Fraser, 1980; Thaler, 2012) in order to diminish a guest's negative feedback. However, how this type of mitigation is perceived by potential hotel guests has – to the best of our knowledge – not yet been investigated. In this talk, two experimental studies will be presented. In the first study, employing a between-subjects design, participants (N=150) rated five hotel responses on a 7-point scale in terms of professionalism, appropriateness and customer friendliness. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: in the first condition, hotel responses contained mitigation, in the other one not. The second experiment used a within-subjects design to verify whether different mitigation categories (i.e., downtoners, negation preceding a positive expression, understaters, diminutives and subjectivizers) elicited a different effect on the same variables. Fifty-three (other) participants were required to rate the hotel responses, and to justify their ratings. In the first experiment, no significant differences between conditions were detected. In the second one, understaters (e.g., 'a little', 'somewhat') and subjectivisers (e.g., 'it seems to me that', 'it might be that') received significantly lower scores compared to the other mitigation categories. The findings of both experiments indicate that self-serving mitigation might go unnoticed at first sight, but that significant differences between categories exist.

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Marie-Louise Brunner (Hochschule Trier)

More than complaint management: Webcare in a corpus of Instagram business accounts – from information exchange and sales talk to encouragement and entertainment

In this study, I analyze how webcare is used on Instagram business accounts. While webcare has long been connoted with and analyzed in the context of complaining and dissatisfied customers (see e.g. van Noort & Willemsen 2012, Decock 2022, Liebrecht et al. 2022), other studies show that positive customer experiences on social media enhance stable customer relationships, increasing purchase intention, loyalty, participation (Wibiwo et al. 2021), the number of customer interactions, positive tonality, as well as customer liking and sharing (Wu et al. 2019). By analyzing webcare in the context of positive customer experiences, the current study therefore expands on van Noort et al.'s (2015) conceptualization of webcare as incorporating not only customer care, but also public relations and marketing. I use a multimodal discourse analysis approach (O'Halloran 2011) to analyze data from 20 Instagram business accounts from the sustainable food industry. The corpus contains 500 posts in total, 25 posts from each of the accounts. While there is also complaint management or dealing with dissatisfied customers involved in the data, the majority of interactions serve other purposes. Some simply provide further information in response to customers' questions or feedback. Other instances of webcare encourage and further reinforce customers' positive comments (sometimes with multimodal resources like emojis instead of verbal reactions) or even go beyond that in praising and supporting suggestions and ideas that customers bring up in the comments. Finally, some instances showcase humorous responses that seem to be used to entertain rather than to serve other purposes. To conclude, various specific forms of webcare can be identified in the analyzed dataset: Information exchange, encouragement, support, sales talk, and entertainment. All contribute to enhancing the relationship with customers in contexts where complaints are the exception and positivity is at the center of the interaction.

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Marc Croes (KU Leuven) & Nicolas Ruytenbeek (KU Leuven)

Beyond Positive and Negative: Exploring Emotional Expression in Google Maps Coffee Shop Reviews

Emotions in online consumer reviews (OCRs) influence consumer behaviour (Guo et al., 2020). Emotions experienced by reviewers can be reflected through evaluative language, including both linguistic and paralinguistic cues (Vasquez, 2014). However, few studies have systematically examined how these emotional expressions are realized in OCRs. Furthermore, research has predominantly concentrated on negative reviews (e.g., Vasquez, 2011), with some exceptions (Cenni & Goethals, 2020). This study will address this gap by adapting the coding framework developed by Decock and Depraetere (2018) and extended by Ruytenbeek et al. (2021) to a new platform, Google Maps, and a new review genre, coffee shops, in the Flanders region of Belgium. The corpus will comprise 800 Dutch-language coffee shop reviews from Antwerp and Brussels, evenly split into 400 positive and 400 negative reviews, and balanced between coffee shop chains (e.g., Starbucks) and independent specialty coffee shops. Each review will be annotated for the coding scheme's core components: features, evaluations, and recommendations, each marked as positive or negative, as well as references to responsible entities and wishes for action. Additionally, these reviews will be coded for their (para)linguistic realizations (e.g., adjectives, adverbs, emojis) and modifications (mitigation or intensification). Statistical analyses, such as Chi-square tests, will be conducted to identify significant differences across review polarity and coffee shop type. In the presentation, I will discuss the preliminary results of these analyses. This research aligns with the symposium's interdisciplinary aims by combining discourse pragmatic analysis with corpus-based linguistic methods to examine digital consumer interactions. It will advance understanding of how emotions are linguistically expressed and modulated in OCRs by comparing both positive and negative reviews. In addition, the study will offer a nuanced understanding of how chain versus independent status may shape emotional expression in OCRs. The findings will provide actionable insights for webcare strategies, such as indicating which reviews require the most attention, and lay a foundation for future experimental research on emotional perception in consumer reviews.

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Luna De Bruyne (University of Antwerp)

Webcare through the eyes of the bystander: A cross-linguistic comparison of pragmatic-rhetorical features in hotel review-response interactions

Webcare, as a manifestation of digital reputation management, has become ubiquitous within the tourism industry. The significance of this online customer service communication, accessible to all, cannot be overstated. It demonstrates a commitment to guest satisfaction, thereby positively influencing the hotel's image and persuading prospective clients who, as bystanders, follow these interactions (Lopes et al., 2023). Although recent studies suggest that guest reviews and hotel responses are influenced by cultural factors (e.g., Cenni & Goethals, 2017; Morrow & Yamanouchi, 2020; Van Herck & Vangehuchten, 2024), cross-cultural analyses of hotel interactions remain scarce, with most studies focusing on English-language data and neglecting the linguistic and cultural variability that influences perceptions of appropriateness, politeness, and credibility (cf. House & Kádár 2021). In this presentation, we will introduce a recently funded interdisciplinary research project that addresses this gap by conducting a large-scale, cross-linguistic study of hotel webcare. Drawing on a multilingual corpus consisting of 80,000 Booking.com reviews and corresponding hotel responses in German, French, English (UK/US), Italian, Dutch, and Spanish (ES/MX), the project explores the cross-linguistic characteristics of hotel interactions and identifies which of these characteristics are perceived as positive or negative by the bystander. The project combines theories and methods from pragmatics, marketing communication, and computational linguistics to pursue three main research objectives: (1) analysing cross cultural differences in webcare strategies and their rhetorical realisation; (2) examining bystander evaluations across linguacultures; and (3) providing a proof of concept for an automatic response generation tool that incorporates linguaculture-specific pragmatic insights. Two PhD researchers have recently started working on this four-year project. This presentation will outline the project's rationale, research objectives, and methodological design, thereby contributing to the interdisciplinary discussion on multilingual webcare and paving the way for the next phase of webcare 3.0.

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Bridgit Fastrich (Ghent University), Sofie Decock (Ghent University), Rebecca Van Herck (Radboud University), Chloé Vincent (Ghent University)

Perceived (Im)personalization in Online Hotel Reviews: An Experimental Study Across German and English

Online consumer reviews play a central role in digital business communication, particularly for experience goods such as hotels, whose quality cannot be verified prior to consumption (cf. Qiu & Zhang 2024). In this context, linguistic construal—how reviewers conceptualize and present their experience—shapes perceived credibility and thus influences booking decisions (Zhao et al. 2024; Xu 2014). While cross-linguistic studies have described systematic differences in communicative styles, particularly between German and English (e.g., House 2006; Kranich 2016), perceptual research investigating how readers actually evaluate such differences remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining whether variation in pronoun use, as a key marker of (im)personalization, leads to different perceptions of personalization and credibility among German and English first-language users. We report on a 2 × 5 between-subjects experiment comparing perceptions of an equivalent review written in German and English, with variation across five linguistic strategies: first-person pronouns (I/ich), interpersonally used second-person pronouns (you/du), impersonally used second-person pronouns (you/du), dedicated impersonal pronouns (one/man), and pronoun omission. Participants read a negative hotel review modeled on authentic Booking.com discourse and rated perceived (im)personalization (including self- and addressee-focused subdimensions) and review(er) credibility. Based on prior corpus-based findings indicating more impersonal constructions in German and greater use of personal pronouns in English (Fastrich 2024a, 2024b), we expect that German and English users will differentially evaluate pronoun strategies in terms of perceived personalization and credibility. We further test a moderated mediation model predicting that linguaculture moderates the relationship between personalization perception and credibility. By integrating contrastive pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, the study contributes novel experimental evidence to research on review language across linguacultures. We discuss implications for platform design and response strategies (cf. Cenni & Goethals 2020), highlighting how subtle linguistic cues may differentially shape credibility judgments across linguacultures.

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Clemens Hutzinger (Seeburg Castle University), Ursula Lutzky (WU Vienna), Wolfgang Weitzl (University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria)

Apology or empathy? Discerning differences in customers' perception of corporate language use

For more than a decade, research on webcare has been examining how to properly react to customers' online complaints (van Noort and Willemsen 2012). However, this question has been approached differently by diverse fields, such as marketing (Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017) and linguistics (Lutzky 2021a). Therefore, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach and focusses on the separate and interactive role of empathy and apologies in webcare responses. Instead of regarding apologies purely as illocutionary force indicating devices (e.g., sorry), we consider additional elements of the apology speech act set (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984), specifically, explanation, confirmation, and redress.

We ran an online experiment with 785 respondents imagining a delayed flight ($M_{age} = 31.64$, $SD_{age} = 11.37$; female = 60%) with a 2 (response empathy: no empathy vs. empathy) x 4 (response accommodativeness: apology vs. apology & explanation vs. apology & explanation & confirmation vs. apology & explanation & confirmation & redress) between-subjects design, since research of the airline industry's customer communication on Twitter has shown a respective gap (Lutzky, 2021b). Our results show that the empathy only group triggered significantly more response attentiveness and repurchase intention than the apology only group. Receiving an empathetic – as compared to unempathetic – response, makes respondents perceive it as more attentive and they develop a stronger desire to book the airline again. In addition, with rising levels of accommodativeness, response attentiveness increases. This holds for repurchase intention, while offering redress has no additional effect. Furthermore, our results show that empathy increases the effect of the lowest two levels of accommodativeness, however its effect vanishes when explanations and confirmations are provided.

Our work explores the effect of combining different webcare strategies, which has not received sufficient attention (Lopes et al. 2023). Overall, our findings reveal important insights into how airlines should best respond to dissatisfied customers online.

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Clemens Hutzinger (Seeburg Castle University), Wolfgang Weitzl (University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria), Tina Torggler (Seeburg Castle University)

When compensation wording matters: Empathy, severity, and bystanders' reactions in webcare

In online service recovery (“webcare”), the language of a company’s response can shape not only complainants’ satisfaction but also bystanders’ perceptions (Hutzinger & Weitzl, 2021). Bystanders – who far outnumber original complainants – scrutinize how the current issue is handled and draw inferences that influence their attitudes and future behaviors. Yet little is known about how subtle differences in compensation wording affect bystanders (Bacile et al., 2018). This study addresses that gap by examining two nuanced webcare framing tactics: (1) compensation framing (framing redress as a percentage-off vs. an absolute amount) (Darke & Chung, 2005) and (2) recovery-type framing (an individual vs. group-oriented remedy) (Albrecht et al., 2019).

The first experiment finds that classic framing effects are surprisingly fragile in this context. Bystanders’ sensitivity to compensation framing emerges only when they are empathetic and the complaint is minor. In such cases, framing the compensation (percentage vs. monetary amount) alters perceived fairness of the response, which in turn boosts bystanders’ attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, no framing effect occurs for severe failures or among less empathetic observers, underscoring clear boundary conditions. Follow-up experiments (Studies 2 and 3A) replicate these patterns and generalize them to recovery-type framing. A group-oriented remedy (versus individual-only) yields higher fairness perceptions and bystander goodwill, but again only among empathetic bystanders in low-severity contexts.

Overall, our findings underscore the fragility of framing effects in webcare and delineate empathy and problem severity as key boundary conditions. Theoretically, this work reveals that emotional engagement (via empathy) is necessary for linguistic framing to sway bystander perceptions. Managerially, fine-tuning the wording of online responses can enhance public perceptions, but only when context and audience predispositions align. Major failures, by contrast, demand substantive remedies rather than cosmetic communication.

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Abdul Ahad Jajja (KU Leuven) & Nicolas Ruytenbeek (KU Leuven)

The Management of Organizational Face through Webcare: A Case Study of a Facebook Consumer Group

Van Noort et al., (2015) define webcare as organizations' engagement in online interactions with (complaining) consumers by seeking out and addressing their complaints. While one of the functions of webcare is reputational management, it remains unclear how organizations manage their "face" in webcare interactions. This study, therefore, aims to 1) understand organizational face management in customer interactions and 2) provide empirical evidence for such management by analyzing webcare interactions in a public consumer-centric Facebook group. At the individual level, face is the positive social value a person claims for themselves by taking a "line" that is co-constructed and evaluated in an encounter (Arundale, 2010; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). While original notions of face were centered on the individual, collective notions have since been proposed (Nwoye 1992; Earley, 1997, etc.). This talk focuses on the face of organizations and how they manage their public self-image in interactions. Based on previous research (Arundale, 2010; Félix-Brasdefer & Márquez Reiter, 2021; Goffman, 1967; Nwoye, 1992; Spencer-Oatey, 2005), we define organizational face as the positive public self-image an organization claims and co-constructs in encounters, enacted by its representatives, regulated by policies and evaluated by stakeholders. As a case study, we study 200 webcare interactions on a public Pakistani Facebook group of consumers which we categorize under the food delivery and retail sectors. The analysis looked at conversational turns in posts with a focus on face management by the company aimed at reducing simultaneous face threats to: its own face and the customer's face. Initial results revealed customer posts publicly threatened a company's face through FTAs of criticism, sarcasm, appeals, compensation requests, etc. Meanwhile the company response: 1) preserved its competence face (Lim & Bowers, 1991) by offering solutions, guidance, 2) preserved its separation face (Arundale, 2010) by directing customer to private DM and 3) preserved the customer's negative face by acknowledging in a public setting. The study's results will shed light on linguistic strategies used in face management to achieve webcare goals of online reputation management and customer service.

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Christine Liebrecht (Tilburg University) & Charlotte van Hooijdonk (Utrecht University)

The impact of a brand tone in webcare and chatbot interactions

Research on the conversational human voice (CHV; Kelleher, 2009) shows that a human-like communication style positively influences customer perceptions in both webcare (e.g., Van Noort et al., 2015) and chatbot interactions (e.g., Liebrecht & Van der Weegen, 2019), compared to a formal tone of voice. However, brands can also distinguish themselves from competitors by adopting a brand tone of voice. For example, IKEA uses Swedish elements (*hej* 🇸🇪 🇸🇪) and the Efteling theme park uses fairytale elements (*We wish you an enchanting stay* ✨).

This study examines how different tones of voice (formal tone, CHV, brand tone), affect customer's brand perceptions in webcare and chatbot interactions. It also explores whether the customer's goal (hedonic vs. utilitarian) moderates these effects. Barcelos et al. (2018) found that CHV (vs. formal tone) is more effective for a hedonic goal than a utilitarian one. However, it is unknown how a brand tone and the interlocutor type (human vs chatbot) interact with the customer's goal.

Two experimental studies were conducted with a 3 (tone of voice: formal, CHV, brand) x 2 (customer goal: hedonic, utilitarian) between-subjects design. Participants were recruited via Prolific and randomly assigned to one of the six conditions. In study 1, participants watched a chat conversation between a customer and a service employee, and in study 2 participants watched a conversation between a customer and a chatbot. After watching the conversation, participants filled out an online survey in which brand attitude, perceived warmth, perceived competence, and social presence were measured (cf. Liebrecht & Van der Weegen, 2019). During the Webcare symposium, we will present the findings and provide insights into how brands can strategically use tone of voice to strengthen brand perceptions in webcare and chatbot interactions.

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Conversational Human Voice revisited: A corpus study of verbal and visual elements in consumer messages and companies' webcare responses

Previous corpus research on Conversational Human Voice (CHV; Kelleher, 2009) in webcare has primarily focused on a limited set of (verbal) CHV features (e.g., Van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018), while the comprehensive taxonomy of CHV elements developed by Liebrecht et al. (2021) shows interlocutors can implement various verbal *and visual* elements in webcare conversations. For example, they can select visual elements such as emoji to illustrate the topic of a message (e.g., *I need a holiday* ✈️ 🌴), replace words (e.g., *I ❤️ you*), add extra information (e.g., *I am hungry* 🍕), or convey tone and emotions (e.g., *that's just great* 😞) (Pohl et al., 2017). Furthermore, previous corpus research on webcare solely focused on CHV features in organizations' webcare messages, thereby unjustly ignoring the other interlocutor in a webcare conversation: the consumer.

This study addresses these gaps by analysing a large corpus of real-world webcare conversations from Twitter and Facebook ($N = 2400$ messages, 603 conversations), collected for especially this study. First, we have assessed the reliability of Liebrecht et al.'s (2021) taxonomy, including an extended set of emoji types and visuals, to determine whether all categories can be consistently applied by human coders. Second, we have conducted frequency analyses of all CHV categories across both company and consumer messages, offering a more complete picture of how conversational elements are used in webcare. Third, this bidirectional corpus has allowed us to explore alignment (or communicative accommodation) between companies and consumers, thereby examining whether organizations mirror the CHV features, particularly emoji, used in messages they are responding to. To illustrate these alignment patterns, we have qualitatively analysed selected conversation excerpts. Together, these findings will contribute to a more reliable, nuanced, and empirically grounded understanding of how CHV - zooming in on emoji - shapes the tone and dynamics of webcare conversations.

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Multimodality in webcare: Emojis between customer care and mass messages

Emojis are an established feature of digital communication that add to the multimodal nature of online messages and interact with other semiotic resources to make meaning (Logi and Zappavigna 2023). Since the introduction of social media platforms in the early 2000s, emojis, and also emoticons, have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Research has, for example, explored emoticons' illocutionary force (Dresner and Hering 2010), compared the effect of emojis to other non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions (Erle et al. 2022), and linked emojis to areas of linguistic study including metaphors and the construction of identities (Sergeant 2019).

One area where emoji use has not been studied extensively is digital business communication, or webcare: “[t]he act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers” (van Noort and Willemsen 2012: 133). In this paper, we carry out a large-scale data-driven corpus pragmatic analysis of emoji use on Twitter (now X), focussing on how US companies in three industries (airlines, food and beverage, streaming services) and their customers use emojis when interacting with each other. The analysis is based on the US Corporate Twitter Corpus (UCTC) which was compiled through the Twitter API in March 2023, and contains 4.4m English tweets posted between September 2021 and February 2023.

Initial results show that emojis constitute almost 2% of all tokens in our corpus and that there are differences in distribution between the three industries studied, with emojis being least frequent for the airline industry. Through collocation analyses (Lutzky and Kehoe 2016, 2017), we explore the different functions of emojis in the UCTC with the focus on disambiguating their use in tweets serving different webcare goals. We offer new insights into the use of emojis and their functions in webcare communication, and show how corpus linguistic methods can be used to uncover their intended meaning and illocutionary force.

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Revisiting the Factors of eWOM Relevance for Webcare in the Time of Pervasive LLM-Generated Content

Vermeer et al. (2019) criticised the idea that sentiment analysis was the most optimal way to target eWOM that should be prioritised for webcare. Prior to that criticism, the standard practice was based on the assumption that webcare should address negative content first and foremost, so businesses used sentiment analysis techniques to automate the detection of dissatisfied customers online. Building on previous research on the benefits of responding to positive eWOM (Schamari & Schaefers, 2015), Vermeer et al. (2019) discussed a variety of computational approaches for detecting relevant eWOM beyond sentiment analysis and concluded that their classification model based on supervised machine learning was the most effective in comparison to other solutions. Nowadays, the widespread use of generative large language models not only aggravates the existing problems of inauthentic content and astroturfing attacks but also has the potential to change how companies' responses to negative and positive reviews are perceived. This report re-examines the factors that determine the relevance of eWOM for webcare in light of the contradictory claims in the recent literature and the rising popularity of LLMs.

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Responding to praise: A comparative study of human and AI hotel communication

Although most hotel reviews are positive (Deng & Ravichandran, 2023), responses to these reviews remain underexplored within language and communication research (Cenni & Goethals, 2021; Lopes et al., 2023). This gap is critical because such responses require strategic choices: leveraging praise to strengthen online reputation without sounding boastful or insincere. Understanding these choices is even more important now that generative AI opens new possibilities for automating online reputation management. However, to integrate this technology responsibly, we must first examine whether AI-generated responses differ from human ones, and if so, in what ways. To address this research question, we conducted a comparative content analysis of human and AI-generated responses (ChatGPT 4.0) to 600 positive Booking.com reviews from 150 hotels in Flanders and the Netherlands. All human responses were written in 2022, shortly before generative AI became widely adopted. Half of the reviews were exclusively positive (one-sided), while the other half also included critical remarks (two-sided). Following previous studies on AI responses to negative reviews (Wan, 2024; Yan & Liu, 2025), we analysed the length and structure of the responses. To map politeness strategies and relational language (rapport management), we drew on the move taxonomies developed by Cenni and Goethals (2020, 2021). Our findings reveal notable differences between ChatGPT and human responses. AI replies are typically longer and follow a fixed pattern: thanking the guest, paraphrasing praise, and inviting the guest to return. For two-sided reviews, the bot adds empathic language or mentions improvement actions. Human responses are more varied, ranging from a brief “Thnx” to over 1,300 characters. They refer less explicitly to compliments, and nearly one in four replies to two-sided reviews takes on a mildly defensive tone. Our comparative content analysis shows that AI not only standardises the structure of hotel responses but may also act as a potential catalyst for discursive shifts in hotels’ communication strategies with satisfied guests.

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Webcare and Conversational Human Voice in Mexican and Peninsular Spanish Hotel Interactions on Booking.com: An Intra- and Intercultural Variational Discourse Pragmatic Analysis

In this study we examine how webcare practices and Conversational Human Voice (CHV) are discursively realised in hotel responses to mixed reviews on Booking.com, focusing on two varieties of Spanish: Mexican and Peninsular Spanish. In doing so, we want to contribute to a small but growing body of research applying cross-cultural pragmatics to digital webcare (Raedts et al., 2025). Drawing on a representative corpus of 800 publicly available customer hotel interactions (divided in four subcorpora (n=200), reflecting both intra- and intercultural interactions between hotels and guests, i.e., ES-ES, ES-MX, MX-ES, MX-MX), we analyse how hotels respond to reviews that contain both positive and negative elements. The qualitative and quantitative pragmatological analysis focuses on (1) the degree of content-based responsiveness (Roozen & Raedts, 2018), (2) the use of defensive versus accommodative strategies (Lopes et al., 2023), and (3) the discursive realisation of CHV based on three dimensions: personalisation, informality, and invitational rhetoric (Liebrecht et al., 2021). The results show that while Mexican hotels display significantly lower levels of content-based responsiveness and often resort to vague acknowledgment, Spanish hotels are more inclined to respond explicitly to complaints. Regarding the nature of the response strategies, both linguacultures primarily adopt accommodative strategies, albeit in markedly different pragmatic forms. Spanish hotels tend to respond more directly and assertively, whereas Mexican hotels favour a more indirect, harmony-oriented approach. CHV is selectively employed in both the intra- and intercultural interactions and exhibits notable stylistic variation. Furthermore, in intercultural interactions, both Mexican and Spanish hotels show evidence of strategic adaptation to the perceived communicative style of the other, suggesting intercultural awareness within a shared language (Márquez-Reiter & Hidalgo Downing, 2021). These findings confirm earlier research indicating that CHV cannot be applied universally but must be linguaculturally calibrated (Van Herck & Vangehuchten, 2024).

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Business-to-Influencer Communication in Online Video Reviews: The Case of Keith Lee

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new format of online consumer reviews: short form videos uploaded to popular, algorithmically-driven social media platforms such as TikTok. Whereas earlier text-based consumer reviewing platforms gave every reviewer an equal voice (at least in theory), this latest format and context of consumer reviewing has given rise to a new phenomenon that is deeply embedded in algorithmic logics and influencer culture: the reviewer-as-microcelebrity, in which a handful of consumers' voices exert disproportionate influence on consumers.

One of these highly influential figures is Keith Lee, a U.S. restaurant reviewer and microcelebrity, who has amassed over 17 million followers on TikTok. Receiving a review from Lee – who is especially well-known for his video reviews of small, minority-owned, family restaurants in different cities across the US – can literally make the difference between the success or failure of a business. In extreme cases, Lee's reviews have even saved some restaurants that were on the verge of bankruptcy: journalists have called this unprecedented phenomenon “the Keith Lee effect.” Among Lee's stated aims in the content he creates is to provide free marketing for deserving restaurants who simply do not have sufficient resources to do their own digital marketing.

The extremely high stakes involved with these kinds of influencer video reviews raise a number of important questions relevant for business communication scholars in the era of “Webcare 3.0” – questions such as “What discourse strategies are businesses using to appeal to influencers and to persuade them to review their establishments?” and “How might influencer-reviewers wield their power ethically and responsibly?”

Adopting a qualitative case-study approach, in this talk I focus on a set of 122 restaurant review videos posted by Keith Lee. I provide an in-depth analysis of apparently effective rhetorical and multimodal strategies used by businesses to appeal to Lee. These appeals (in the form of direct messages, text messages, and TikTok “stitches”) are often showcased at the beginning of Lee's 3-5 minute video reviews, giving business communication scholars a unique glimpse into what might otherwise be an occluded genre. Finally, I close by considering how both Lee and the restaurants he reviews are involved in a project of mutually reinforcing one another's brands.

Iryna Wehr (WU Vienna)

“Dear guest, we are surprised by your review”: A cross-linguistic analysis of hotel responses to negative reviews on Booking.com

Managerial responses to negative hotel-stay-related experiences shared on platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com have attracted considerable attention from discourse analysts, marketing experts, and scholars in information, tourism, and hospitality studies since the emergence of Web 2.0. This growing research interest in webcare can be attributed to the potentially harmful effects of negative reviews on customer loyalty and business reputation (Panseeta & Todd, 2014). Recognising the significance of negative review management (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014) in the luxury hotel sector, this paper emphasises the need to examine online hotel responses in underresearched geographical contexts. Specifically, it investigates online service recovery practices in the Ukrainian, Austrian, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish luxury hotel industries. Hotel responses written in German, English, Russian, and Ukrainian to negative reviews on Booking.com are analysed and compared in terms of their move structure. Adopting a cross-linguistic approach (Cenni, 2024), this study aims to refine existing move taxonomies within the review response genre and to identify similarities and differences in response strategies across the languages analysed. By doing so, the research seeks to contribute to the field of digital tourism discourse and to foster greater scholarly interest in the underexplored luxury hotel sectors of these regions.

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