



Speech Act and Adjective Preferences in Online Hotel Reviews: Corpus Analysis in US Context

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Abstract

Post-consumption reviews have a significant impact on others' purchase choices, especially the negative comments about received services. Thanks to the extensivity of the internet, today the reviews can be found in CMC. The authenticity of these reviews makes them also useful data sources for researchers. In this present study, 344 online reviews from native English speaker US citizens about 5 different hotels were collected on the worldwide-known website called Booking.com, in order to find out which speech acts and adjectives are most frequently preferred by the writers of the reviews. Findings showed that the majority of the reviews include complaints about the services the writers get, however, almost half of them (N=150) also included positive comments about the services. The two most frequently used adjectives were found to be dirty (N=133) and clean (N=59) which is an important indicator of the feature of the institutions that reviewers are most interested in, since these adjectives are antonyms of each other. The findings of the study are expected to be useful for hotel managements and corpus linguists as it sheds light on the expectations of the possible travelers and the way that they use the language to convey their messages in this specific corpus.

Keywords

Computer-mediated communication
Speech acts
User-generated content
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Çevrimiçi Otel Değerlendirmelerinde Söz Edimi ve Sıfat Tercihleri: ABD Bağlamında Derlem Analizi

Özet

Tüketim sonrası yorumlar, özellikle alınan hizmetlerle ilgili olumsuz yorumlar olmak üzere, başkalarının satın alma tercihleri üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. İnternetin yaygınlığı sayesinde, günümüzde yorumlar bilgisayar aracılı iletişimde bulunabilmektedir. Bu değerlendirmelerin özgünlüğü, onları araştırmacılar için de faydalı veri kaynakları haline getirmektedir. Bu çalışmada, anadili İngilizce olan ABD vatandaşlarından, Booking.com adlı dünyaca ünlü web sitesinde 5 farklı otel hakkında 344 çevrimiçi yorum toplanmış ve yorum yazarları tarafından en sık hangi söz edimlerinin ve sıfatların tercih edildiği tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bulgular, yorumların çoğunun yazarların aldıkları hizmetlerle ilgili şikayetleri içerdiğini, ancak neredeyse yarısının (S=150) hizmetlerle ilgili olumlu yorumlar da içerdiğini göstermiştir. En sık kullanılan iki sıfatın kirli (S=133) ve temiz (S=59) olduğu görülmüştür ki bu sıfatlar birbirinin zıt anlamı olduğu için yorumcuların kurumların en çok ilgilendikleri özelliğinin önemli bir göstergesidir. Çalışmanın bulgularının, olası gezginlerin beklentilerine ve bu özel derlemde mesajlarını iletmek için dili nasıl kullandıklarına ışık tutması nedeniyle otel yönetimleri ve derlem dilbilimciler için faydalı olması beklenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

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Introduction

Human beings have always felt the need to express their thoughts and beliefs through various instruments. In our advanced time, we have the ability to communicate with anyone, at any time, about anything. Especially with the development of the internet, it is possible to express our thoughts about our experiences and we also have the chance to get to know about the experiences of others. As Karatepe (2021) stated, the internet and social media have ushered in a tremendous shift in the twenty-first century. With the arrival of Web 2.0, social media has taken up an enormous amount of space in our lives. It is almost impossible to spend a day without encountering the statements of others.

Since mobile phones and computers have become a part of our daily lives, thanks to the internet, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been a topic of study in a variety of fields ranging from marketing to linguistics (Kılıç Gönen, 2019). CMC enables us to state our opinions about services that we get, items that we purchase, and also our expectations about these things. A lot of people today search for online reviews prior to purchase knowing that prior users are eager to share their evaluations. The reason behind this can be both positive and negative. When people receive a good purchasing experience they are prone to share this with other possible buyers/customers since they are aware that they might affect others' choices and they also believe that sharing their positive experience might also cause the providers to maintain the quality of their service. When the purchasing experience is negative, the reviews usually turn into warnings that are addressed to possible buyers/customers.

One of the popularly searched topics is online travel reviews. Online travel reviews have grown in popularity as a venue for travelers to express their trip experiences (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). When travelers express their reviews they tend to use an authentic, sincere language since they want to convey the message as clearly as possible, regardless of the review is intended to be read by the hotel management or possible customers. The travelers share their experiences on various platforms, and many others find these reports valuable (Meinl, 2010). The hotel features such as location, menu, accommodation, services, amenities, and pricing from which potential tourists acquire information for hotel reservations (Pekar & Ou, 2008). As Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) stated, hundreds of millions of potential customers read hotel reviews every year, and more than 80% of them shape their hotel choices accordingly. Providing authentic and purposeful discourse, online hotel reviews have drawn the attention of discourse analysts as well as many other researchers of other fields (Vásquez, 2014). Online hotel reviews are a useful data source for various fields and many researchers have analyzed them for various aims since the reviewers have certain expectations in their minds when they evaluate the service they receive and this makes the reviews valuable data sources. Discourse analysts, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with how the message is conveyed and what writers do while writing a review (Cenni & Goethals, 2017). One of the reasons that discourse analysts are interested in online hotel reviews is that the CMC data, which is both free and simple to transcribe, (Nowson, Oberlander & Gill, 2005) enables researchers to analyze the natural language that can be obtained online (Bodomo, 2009).

Negative comments among the online hotel reviews are found to be more authentic since they include more direct language and aim to raise awareness in the addressee. There are several definitions in the literature for negative comments, such as, any comment that contains a negative component (Heinemann & Traverso, 2009), the expression of displeasure directed at the person or thing that was seen as unfavorable (Boxer, 1989). In online hotel reviews, negative comments are commonly found to co-exist as a "speech act set" (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014) which is the smallest functional unit in communication (Cohen, 1996). A number of studies have focused on speech acts in online complaints

(Kılıç Gönen, 2019; Van Meenen, 2016; Vasquez, 2011) and they have found that almost every complaint includes at least one more speech act.

In the discourse analysis literature, evaluation in the text has been studied from a variety of viewpoints (Karatepe, 2021). As one of the researchers in the field, Hoey (1983) studied textual patterns to learn how writers express themselves. Since the writers find the ability to express themselves freely without necessarily sharing their own identity, their evaluation of their experiences and the way that they convey their expressions is valuable. Usage of the speech acts alongside the message enables the writer to fulfill the need to be understood fully. Hotel reviews are also naturally occurred data which is more reliable than elicited data (Tian, 2013).

To conduct the present study, 344 negative comments about 5 urban hotels, located in 3 different cities in the USA, were chosen to mirror the online reviews. In literature, there are numerous studies regarding online hotel reviews yet a great majority of them focused on holiday hotels where travelers spend their holidays, usually summer holidays. The hotels that were chosen as the subject of this study are urban hotels, and unlike the holiday hotels, they usually serve as temporary lodgings to travelers who have businesses in those cities. Another reason behind this choice is to raise the authenticity of the complaints since the travelers that visit urban hotels do not have expectations as high as travelers of holiday hotels, so when they have complaints, even with less expectation, they are prone to express them more directly and with details, which helps to the research questions. All of the reviews that were included in this study are from US citizens since they are both native speakers of the language and the possessor of the culture of the hotels which enables them to adjust their expectations.

The aim of this paper is to find out which speech acts are preferred by the reviewers in negative online hotel reviews and which adjectives are frequently used. The frequency of the speech acts and adjectives in this specific corpus is expected to show us how the US citizens express their disappointment in online hotel reviews. Regarding the aim of the study following research questions were asked;

- 1) Which speech acts do occur in reviews regarding mentioned hotels on Booking.com?
- 2) What are the most frequent adjectives that were used in this corpus to complain about hotels?

Methodology

The Data Collection

The data for the study was collected from a website called Booking.com. Three large cities, NYC, Chicago, Boston, in the US were chosen and 5 hotels which are located in these three cities were chosen. The chosen hotels have maximum 2 stars and their ranking on the site was less than 6,5/10. The writers of the reviews also rank the hotels on Booking.com, for this reason only reviews with 5.0/10 and less ranking were chosen to build the corpus. Since the study aims to investigate the US context, only the reviews from US citizens, according to their profiles on the site, were chosen. After looking through hundreds of reviews, 344 of them were chosen via purposive sampling and a corpus that consists of 16445 words was created.

Procedure

When the corpus was created, it was uploaded on Microsoft Word and color-coded by one of the researchers in order to determine the present speech acts in the corpus. Color coding was checked by other researchers to be sure that the coding process was carried out accurately. Then, the speech acts were counted and grouped by the researchers in order to analyze the occurrences.

Regarding the second research question, the data was analyzed by using MAXQDA 2020 software. In order to find the frequency of adjectives, the corpus was uploaded on the software and the words that are not an adjective were eliminated from the document and a word count was conducted. A word cloud was also created to visualize the findings. The results were extracted to a Microsoft Excel file and examined further. An interactive word tree was also created for the most frequently used adjective in order to lead to a better understanding of the word sets it was used in.

Results

The results of the study, which are qualitatively analyzed, will be given in the following section, referring to each research question separately.

Speech Acts in the Reviews

Regarding the first research question, reviews were analyzed to see which speech acts occur in the reviews. In 327 reviews out of 344, there was at least one speech act, in other 17 reviews included reviews such as 'Liked nothing' or 'Disliked everything', and this type of reviews isn't included. The speech acts in the remaining reviews were analyzed according to their types. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Occurrence of Speech Acts in Reviews

Type	Number of Reviews	Number of Sentences	%
Complaint	294	355	44
Negative Comment	140	165	20
Positive Comment	150	163	20
Advice	37	42	6
Warning	31	35	5
Regret	24	25	3
Request	17	17	2
Total	693	802	100

As it can be seen in Table 1, among 327 reviews, 294 of them included at least one complaint, with a total number of sentences with complaints was found to be 355. In comments with complaints, writers of the reviews just declared negative incidents they faced during their stay without adding any interpretations. Examples 1, 2, and 3 exemplified this.

- 1) Dirty bedsheets, bad Wi-Fi, just dirty overall. <1>
- 2) People were smoking just about every day and the management did nothing to enforce the rules. <2>
- 3) The mattress was a little ruff. <3>

The second most occurred speech act in the reviews was the negative comments. Negative comments occurred 165 times in 140 reviews and they usually follow complaint sentences. Negative

comments are the ones that writers share their personal negative experiences during their stay which cannot be generalized. Examples 4, 5, and 6 showed this speech act.

4) I got several bedbug bites. <6>

5) Heard snoring from other rooms. <7>

6) 20 minutes into my stay, the WiFi stopped for the rest of my stay. <24>

The third most frequent speech act in the reviews was the positive comments. 150 comments included 163 positive comments, usually praising the location or the price, and positive comments were relatively short and found at the beginning of the reviews. Examples 7, 8, and 9 can be seen as samples.

7) Cheap place to stay in New York. <3>

8) It's cheap and near subways <19>

9) Location and price perfect. <35>

20 out of 163 positive comments were found to be co-occurred with the conjunction "but" as can be seen in examples 10, 11, and 12.

10) The price isn't bad but nope <5>

11) It was cheap, but still not worth the price <17>

12) The location was good, but whole other things were below my expectations. <40>

Also, 9 of the positive comments were found to be co-occurred with the conjunction "only" as shown in examples 13, 14, and 15.

13) The only good thing was the location - near the subway. <170>

14) Only the location. <185>

15) The only plus was the person at the front desk let me use their charger since mine had broken. <307>

The next speech act found was advice. Advice occurred in 42 sentences in 37 reviews. Some advice was addressed to possible guests not to choose the place, others were directed to the hotels to fix the problems mentioned in the comments or renovate their places. Examples 16, 17, and 18 show some of them.

16) They need to remodel the place. <216>

17) Not worth it, there are several hotels on the same street, but new and cheap.<225>

18) Please never waste your time and hard-earned money staying at this hotel <308>

The fifth most frequent speech act was a warning. It was found in 35 sentences in 31 reviews. In sentences with a warning, which were mostly found to be the last sentence of the reviews, the writers of the reviews directly warned the readers against the impending abnormalities as examples 19, 20, and 21 show.

19) Bear in mind that you have to pay 40 dollars a day for parking if you're driving. <31>

20) Be ready to sleep while the lights are turned on! <58>

21) If you want a hotel where you cannot sleep and start the day with a cold shower, then this is the place to go. <61>

Another frequently occurred speech act was regret. It appeared in 25 sentences in 24 reviews. Regret sentences were short, as expected, and the writers expressed their displeasure as can be seen in examples 22, 23, and 24.

22) I should've checked the google reviews prior to booking <52>

23) Huge mistake I will never make again - <69>

24) Won't return even if it's free. <81>

And lastly, the speech act of request was found in 17 sentences in reviews. Requests were addressed to the site booking.com and hotels, usually asking for a refund. Examples 25, 26, and 27 exemplify this.

25) I want my money back! <103>

26) I want a refund <116>

27) We have to get a refund for it. <221>

Frequency of Adjectives

In order to find the answer to the second research question, vocabulary items of the corpus were counted, excluding all words except adjectives, and "dirty" was found to be the most frequent adjective in the reviews. The findings regarding the frequency of adjectives are shown in Table 2 and visualized in Figure 1.

Table 2. *Frequency of Adjectives in the Reviews*

Adjective	Word Length	Frequency	%
Dirty	5	133	40,30
Clean	5	59	17,88
small	5	51	15,45
old	3	43	13,03
good	4	38	11,52
other	5	38	11,52
wrong	5	34	10,30



Figure 1. *Word Cloud of Adjectives in the Reviews*

Additionally, to be able to achieve a better understanding of the word sets that the most frequent adjective was used, examples 28, 29, and 30 are shared and an interactive word tree was created as shown in Figure 2.

28) Place was dirty, walls, floors, especially the bathrooms. <64>

29) Dirty towels and bedsheets <91>

30) First of all the room was dirty, <98>



Figure 2. Interactive Word Tree

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to analyze the online hotel reviews on Booking.com to understand the main speech acts the reviews are made of and also find out the most frequent adjectives used in the reviews. The researchers aimed to figure out the choices of US citizens in the present corpus and in line with this aim the corpus was created by using 344 authentic reviews from 5 different low-ranked urban hotels from 3 different cities in the US, which are NYC, Chicago, and Boston. The reason behind the choice of these three cities is that they are all large, and popular cities in the country which are visited by a great amount of US citizens from other cities every day. Additionally, these cities aren't typical holiday destinations, therefore their visitor base largely includes people who have various businesses in these cities and have to spend few days. Focusing on this type of population is also the reason for choosing low-ranked urban hotels instead of luxurious ones. Lastly, all of the reviews were from US citizens, according to their profiles on Booking.com, to serve the researchers' purpose.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that US citizens are prone to highlight the negative views in a more detailed way than the positive views since the percentage of the complaints in the comments was found to be 44% while the positive comments' ratio was 20%. This drastic difference between these two types of speech acts shows that Americans are more likely to voice their discontentment than their contentedness. It is also noteworthy that positive comments share the same ratio as negative comments, which are the ones that the writers of the reviews shared the personal issues they experienced during their stay. This finding indicates that even though the writers of the reviews stated their complaints, almost half of them did not think that was enough and also wanted their

personal problems with their temporary hosts to be heard by the potential customers of the hotels. After sharing their displeasure with the mentioned speech acts, few of them felt the need to advise or directly warn the potential customers since the ratio of the advice was found to be just 6% and speech act of warning was found to be 5%. Lastly, 17 out of 344 reviews did not include any speech acts, they were just simple statements such as 'liked nothing', which can be interpreted as some of the reviewers did not bother themselves to elaborate their review and just typed something to be able to give the hotel a low ranking.

As for the second research question, the most frequently used adjectives were analyzed to get a better understanding of the descriptions of the reviews since the adjectives are one of the four major word classes and are the ones that give us the details and information about nouns and situations. The most frequently occurred adjectives were found to be *dirty*, *clean*, *small*, *old*, and *good*, respectively. Considering the first two of the most preferred adjectives are the antonyms of each other, it might be interpreted that their context, which is hygiene, is the most important issue in the reviews and the expectations of Americans are mostly in line with each other.

Although the present study has been conducted with a relatively small corpus, the diversity of cities and hotels makes it significant and helpful for future research. However, to be able to generalize the findings, the study needs to be replicated with a much larger corpus and various sources of data must be included.

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