“… But our records show that it was delivered to your guest room”: Facework done by hotel management in review response genre. Symposium on (Im)politeness and Identity. Nanjing University, Nanjing, China, 19-21 October 2018.

Abstract:
This paper discusses how hotel management attempts to achieve two seemingly mutually exclusive goals in its responses to negative reviews posted on TripAdvisor: to threaten and enhance face. While online reviews are generally regarded by travellers as up-to-date, reliable, and trustworthy, negative ones usually have stronger influence on travellers’ choice of hotels. It is therefore important for hotels to address negative reviews with a timely and effective response, termed the review response genre in this paper. Previous research found that the genre contained moves that generally served to attend to the face wants of the reviewers, i.e. the dissatisfied customers: appreciation, redress, apology, appreciation, explanation, acknowledgment, account, and action. To the author’s knowledge, only two studies have reported the inclusion of a face-threatening move in the genre – denial (Ho, 2017a, b). Extending Ho’s line of inquiry, the present study investigates the way hotel management does facework for both the dissatisfied reviewers and itself, with facework interpreted as “[T]he action taken by an individual to make whatever he is doing consistent with face, can serve both the speaker and hearer, and spans from face enhancement/polite through politic to face threat/impolite” (Ho, 2017c: 37). The data comprise the responses given by the management of 40 five-star hotels distributed in the five groups of destinations listed on the TripAdvisor website. The responses only include those given to the negative reviews left by customers who rated the accommodation services as average, poor or terrible.

The way hotel management threatens and enhances the face of the reviewers and its own, and implications for the hospitality practitioners and the teaching and learning of ESP will be discussed.