

Additive Focus Adverbs Presuppose Content to Manage Rapport in Responses to Negative Hotel Reviews

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Abstract

The current study delves into the interpersonal functions of additive focus adverbs (henceforth AFAs) in online communication, an area that has received limited attention in empirical pragmatic research. By elucidating the presuppositions triggered by AFAs, this investigation aims to demonstrate how these adverbs contribute to managing rapport in responses to negative hotel reviews on *TripAdvisor*. A combined corpus and content analysis reveals that the AFA *again*, which triggers known presuppositions, effectively fulfills a hotel's relational goal while implicitly protecting its identity face. Furthermore, by presupposing both new and known but discourse-new content, the AFA *also* enhances the understanding of a hotel's responsible image while concurrently maintaining the quality faces of both the hotel and its reviewers. Overall, these findings indicate that the employment of AFAs in responses represents a successful strategy to foster positive customer-hotel rapport by implicitly attending to the three bases of rapport. These findings provide novel insights into the interpersonal functions of AFAs in handling customer complaints, further enriching the understanding of moves and strategies in negative review responses.

Keywords: additive focus adverbs, presupposition, interpersonal functions, rapport management, negative hotel review responses

1. Introduction

Additive focus adverbs (henceforth AFAs), including but not limited to *also*, *too*, *as well*, *in addition*, *either*, *again*, and *even*, serve as linguistic devices that emphasize information previously introduced, thereby attracting the attention of interlocutors (De Cesare, 2022; König, 1991). These anaphorically referential adverbs, which constitute a core lexical resource in many contemporary languages, have garnered substantial scholarly attention due to their ability to package and disseminate information across diverse discourse contexts (Liao & Li, 2022; Lombardi Vallauri et al., 2022). Notably, within the realm of metadiscourse, Hyland (2005) classified several AFAs as transition markers, highlighting their interpersonal roles in facilitating information flow and textual organization. In pragmatic analyses, researchers have examined the pragmatic functions of AFAs, focusing on their presuppositional content and their capacity to shape opinions (De Cesare, 2022), as well as their persuasive and even manipulative power (Lombardi Vallauri et al., 2022; Moldovan, 2023). For instance, the use of *again* in a sentence can evoke presupposed content, requiring the interlocutor's accommodation. As exemplified by Donald Trump's presidential campaign slogan in Example (1) below, the employment of *again* presupposes that America had previously been ruled effectively by Trump's governance, thereby implicitly arguing that the current state was no longer as favorable. Irrespective of the audience's belief in this proposition, expressing the same content as an assertion might have diminished its persuasive force and possibly provoked greater controversy, as the assertive content is inherently contentious: America is no longer a great nation.

(1) Make America great **again**. (ex. from Lombardi Vallauri (2021, p. 23))

Although the discussions about the functions and usages of AFAs interpreted through presupposition are fruitful and insightful, it is surprising to notice that few studies have stressed the interpersonal functions of AFAs, particularly in the context of online communication. In fact, previous pragmatic studies concerning AFAs have implicitly described their importance in maintaining and repairing interpersonal relationships. For example, challenging the presupposed content is potentially face-threatening since, by doing so, the hearer not only opposes the content but also the way the source has decided to present it (Lombardi Vallauri et al., 2022). Like the Example (1) above, casting doubt on the slogan may both lose the face of America and embarrass the Republican Party.

To fill this gap, particularly in this paper, I choose to investigate the interpersonal functions of AFAs used in the responses to negative hotel reviews on *TripAdvisor*. The data selection for this study is grounded in two primary rationales. Firstly, responding to negative reviews is primarily aimed at maintaining or fostering rapport (Cenni & Goethals, 2020; Ho, 2020). Consequently, these responses include substantial interpersonal elements. Secondly, the genre inherently possesses a persuasive aspect, as hotels strive to convince reviewers to accept their responses and believe in the quality of their services (Ho, 2018). This convincing nature aligns with the persuasive power of information packaged through presupposition. Therefore, drawing from rapport management theory, a representative interpersonal pragmatic theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), this paper explores the communicative purposes and interpersonal functions of AFAs realized through presuppositions in negative review responses, aiming to showcase to what extent these adverbs help manage rapport in the responses.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 commences with an introduction to persuasive presupposition, which serves as the interpretive mechanism for AFAs. Then, a brief overview of rapport management theory is presented. This section concludes with a review of managing rapport in negative review responses. Section 3 delves into the research methods, outlining the process of data collection and interpretation within a working analytical framework. Section 4 first reports the corpus findings on the primary types of AFAs employed. A qualitative analysis of the interpersonal functions of AFAs is then presented. Finally, the concluding section expands on the findings, discussing their implications, as well as the limitations of this study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Persuasive Presupposition and AFAs as Presupposition Triggers

The interpretation of presupposition in this study is guided by the viewpoint that presupposition is a pragmatic phenomenon: a relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context (Levinson, 1983, p.177). In communication, presupposition is the information that interlocutors should take for granted and presume to be common ground (Sbisà 2021). If one part of them misses the shared information, he or she will undergo the process of presupposition accommodation (Lewis, 1983). That is, when presuppositional content is new, they take it for granted unless they have clear reasons to believe otherwise. In fact, based on the speaker-hearer discourse model (De Cesare, 2022; Sbisà 2021), two types of presuppositions are distinguished: known and new presuppositions. The content of a presupposition is known when it is recoverable either in the context, co-text, and/or the encyclopedic memory of participants. On the other hand, presuppositions carrying participant-new information that ought to be accommodated by the hearer to adjust his or her common ground accordingly are considered new.

Recently, the persuasive power of presupposition has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly its ability to implicitly convey content for the sake of diminishing hearers' critical scrutiny of its truthfulness and increasing the likelihood of acceptance and even persuasion, in contrast to directly expressed assertions (Moldovan, 2023). Specifically, Lombardi Vallauri (2022) suggested that by presupposing, a speaker assumes that the addressee already knows and agrees with that content, so there is no need for extra efforts to convey it saliently. Sbisà (2021) further argued that presupposition facilitates a degree of insincerity and disbelief on the part of speakers, enabling informational manipulation. From a cognitive-pragmatic perspective, the reason for its persuasive power is attributed to the varying degrees of epistemic vigilance accorded to different parts of an utterance (Sperber et al., 2010). Notably, presupposition is addressed lower and thus has undergone a shallowing process (Lombardi Vallauri, 2021). Typically, a known presupposition is less subject to critical judgment, but it is also applicable when the presupposed content is new. Given these insights, presupposition emerges as an effective implicit strategy for communicators to influence others' recognition or acceptance of a proposition, regardless of its factual accuracy. Therefore, as Lombardi Vallauri (2022, p. 300) suggested, presupposition, a prototypical implicit strategy, is particularly used in the following contexts: disagreeing; addressing with face-threatening contents; persuading third parties more than the direct opponent. These scenarios align closely with the key characteristics of negative review responses. Therefore, persuasive presupposition offers a novel and valuable insight into interpreting the interpersonal functions of AFAs in the responses, which are conveyed implicitly.

Presupposed content can be realized through presupposition triggers, like AFAs (Levinson, 1983). Several previous studies have described the procedure for interpreting presuppositions triggered by AFAs. The majority of these studies outlined the special traits of AFAs connected to certain presuppositions in discourse. Schwarz (2015) conducted an experiment on AFA *also* and discovered that presupposition was processed more quickly than assertion and was unlikely to undergo an initial critical evaluation. Similarly, most previous studies on presuppositions triggered by AFAs were limited in their theoretical approach, lacking an empirical examination of the communicative functions in authentic discourses. Recently, De Cesare (2022) conducted an empirical study on the pragmatic functions of implicit communication conveyed through presuppositions triggered by AFAs, with a special focus on the opinion-shaping role

for the addressee in texts related to the ‘me too’ social movement in social and traditional media. This study contributes to the understanding of what relevant pragmatic functions are associated with AFAs, which enlightens a further investigation delving into the interpersonal functions of AFAs in the context of negative review responses.

2.2 Rapport Management Theory

In order to have a more systematic understanding of the interpersonal functions of AFAs in responses, this study adopts rapport management theory (henceforth RMT) as the theoretical basis to investigate the functions. As a representative theory in interpersonal pragmatics, RMT pays special attention to the use of language to promote, maintain, or threaten harmonious social relations (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In fact, keeping strong and long-lasting relationships with guests is a crucial duty in the hotel sector (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Therefore, the responses by hotels are considered a crucial way to establish rapport with reviewers and potential customers so as to uphold harmonious customer-hotel relationships (Ho, 2020).

To achieve harmonious relationships, communicators will endeavor to manage rapport through various bases of rapport, resulting in different communicative outcomes. With the framework, Spencer-Oatey (2008, 2013) maintained that managing rapport is essentially equal to managing the three bases of rapport: face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. Face is a person’s effective claim to positive social value that is demonstrated by the action others perceive him or her to have taken during a specific interaction. It is further divided into quality face and social identity face: the former one relates to the self-evaluation of a person’s competence, quality, and integrity, while the latter one essentially concerns the relational or social aspect of face, which is judged by others in a community. The second base is the management of sociality rights and obligations, which are associated with “fundamental social entitlements that a person effectively claims for himself or herself in his or her interactions with others” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 13). In particular, association and equity are the two sociopragmatic interactional principles that interlocutors should manage, which concern social expectations over fairness, thoughtfulness, and behavioral appropriateness. Third, interactional goals refer to the specific goals that interlocutors have ahead of or during the communication. It can be transactional or relational, depending on the communicative purposes of the interaction.

2.3 Managing Rapport in Negative Review Responses

A negative hotel review is a type of written discourse that consists of a customer’s critical assessment of products or services encountered during his or her hotel stay (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). A customer shares this evaluation with other potential customers in order to inform them about the quality of the products or services, as well as with the hotel in order to give it a chance to improve (Vázquez, 2014). Conversely, a hotel’s response to the negative review serves as a rebuttal, aiming at maintaining harmonious relations with the reviewer and prospective guests (Xie et al., 2014). Given the potential detriment to hotel reputation and significant impact on business performance, the diligent response to a negative review deserves significant attention from managers, posing a key challenge in restoring the customer-hotel relationship and safeguarding a hotel’s reputation (Levy et al., 2013).

In the context of the growing emphasis on negative review responses, scholarly attention has pivoted towards elucidating the strategies and dimensions that constitute an effective response, which increases customer satisfaction and fosters positive customer-hotel rapport (Cenni, 2024; Ho, 2020). In the field of linguistics, recent studies have mainly investigated, at a meso-level, how responses achieve interpersonal functions through the construction of various moves and sub-moves (van Mulken, 2024; Zhang & Vázquez, 2014). Notably, many of them adopted RMT as the analytical framework to analyze the functions, validating its feasibility and appropriateness in the realm of online customer service (Cenni & Goethals, 2020; Ho, 2017, 2018, 2020). To name a few, Ho (2017) employed RMT to analyze a corpus of English-written customer responses to complaints about five-star hotels in Beijing. He found that certain moves used by hotels in the responses did help to enhance rapport with the reviewers. For example, the move Show Appreciation could manage their face wants, and the move Apologize and Rectify Problem could manage their interactional goals. In the study by Feng and Ren (2019), Chinese managers on e-commerce websites deployed 14 different rapport-building techniques (moves). This indicated that they were concerned with both offering a speedy resolution to displeased customers and repairing their own reputations. Besides, a study by Cenni and Goethals (2020) has found substantial similarities and differences in the use of moves in English and Italian, suggesting intercultural differences in employing various moves.

As previous studies show, the move strategies for managing rapport in negative review responses have been successfully discovered. However, how exactly the responses are structured with various linguistic devices and realized interpersonal functions remains unexplored. This micro-level investigation is worthwhile for two reasons. Firstly, it enables us to realize the illocutionary force of certain interpersonal expressions with implicit meanings that contain the functions of informativeness and persuasion (Lombardi Vallauri, 2022). These are indispensable in addressing negative customer reviews. Secondly, a micro-level analysis serves as a complementary approach, further elucidating the

organization of moves in responses and the specific functions they convey. Therefore, the current study, specifically focusing on AFAs, aims to address this gap by conducting a micro-level examination that complements meso-level studies and enhances our understanding of this discourse genre.

Based on the aforementioned background, the study is guided by the two research questions below:

- (1) How are AFAs employed to presuppose content to respond to hotel negative reviews?
- (2) What are the interpersonal functions realized by employing AFAs in the responses? Do AFAs help manage rapport?

3. Research Methods

3.1 Data Collection

In this study, the responses and reviews were systematically gathered from *TripAdvisor*, a highly influential online travel and booking platform renowned for its global reach among hotel managers and consumers (Xie & So, 2018). The focus was specifically on hotels in Guangzhou, an international hub in China that hosts numerous global events annually, such as the Canton Fair, thereby ensuring a consistent flow of international travelers. To ensure the representativeness of the dataset, I selected hotels based on their popularity and high ratings, ranking among the top 20 in search engine results (Ho, 2018). To align with the research objective, I narrowed the analysis to reviews with a distinct negative sentiment, comprising scores of 1 ('terrible') and 2 ('poor') out of 5, as assessed by customers themselves (Cenni, 2024). In fact, *TripAdvisor* categorizes reviews with scores of 1 and 2 as 'negative', aligning with the criteria.

All negative reviews and responses were downloaded and collected with the help of *Python*, a popular and powerful programming language that facilitates the process of collecting the information needed. Utilizing *Python*, all negative reviews for the top 20 hotels in Guangzhou on *TripAdvisor* have been collected, up to April 2023. Notably, during this process, I discovered that nearly 15% of the reviews did not receive a response from the hotels. Furthermore, some responses were devoid of substantive content and not written in English, which were not considered in the analysis. Following rigorous selection criteria, a corpus of 354 responses, spanning from April 5, 2010, to April 17, 2023, was compiled for further analysis using corpus tools to identify and interpret the implied meanings of AFAs.

Regarding ethical considerations in utilizing data from *TripAdvisor*, I adhered to the *AOIR internet research ethics* (Note 1), considering the public availability of the responses. To safeguard privacy, all identifying information was anonymized, and pseudonyms were assigned to responses and reviews, if necessary. Additionally, the stylistic and grammatical features of the data were preserved to ensure the integrity of the collected material throughout the analytical process.

3.2 Data Analysis

This study first employed corpus analysis to identify AFAs and subsequently content analysis to explore their interpersonal functions through presupposition. Using the robust corpus tool *AntConc 2019*, the first phase involved the retrieval of AFAs in the responses. This retrieval process utilized the Concordance function, which highlights keywords in specific contexts and illuminates their prevalent usage patterns in sentences, thereby constituting the foundational step of the identification process. The classification of AFAs primarily adhered to the categorical framework proposed by König (1991). Notably, not all adverbs retrieved through concordance analysis in the corpus fell within the realm of AFAs. Therefore, a manual check was conducted to exclude those that did not indicate prior or background information. Like Example (2) below, the adverb *too* in the sentence actually signifies an elevated degree of quantity, which was excluded in further content analysis as it didn't meet the requisite criteria.

- (2) We do apologize that it had taken **too** long, as our selection process is very selective in order to get the best team to serve you.

Additionally, if necessary, supplementary corpus tools such as Cluster and Wordlist within *AntConc 2019* were utilized. The Cluster module, for instance, facilitated the discovery of common expressions and collocations related to AFAs, thereby enhancing the comprehension of the intricate relationships between various textual moves and the employment of AFAs.

The adoption of corpus tools significantly streamlined the identification of all AFAs within the data, thereby paving the way for an in-depth content analysis. In the present study, to elucidate how presupposed content is realized through AFAs, I followed the rule of implicit meaning explicitation practices proposed by Sbisà (2021). Specifically, following the identification of a sentence containing AFAs, the underlying presupposed contents are best interpreted by explicitating the implicit strategies employed, namely, reformulating the same content in the form of assertions. This approach enables a thorough analysis of the interpersonal functions achieved by the employment of AFAs under the guidance of RMT, ultimately fostering a discussion on how AFAs contribute to the management of rapport between

hotels and customers. To guarantee the reliability of the explicitation practices, the author and the other researcher, who has experience in pragmatic analysis, independently analyzed all the sentences with AFAs. When there were significant differences in interpretation, a discussion was conducted until consensus was achieved.

4. Results & Discussion

In this section, I first present the various types of AFAs utilized in the responses, along with their frequencies, retrieved through corpus analysis. Subsequently, I delve into a qualitative analysis of the interpersonal functions served by these AFAs, specifically categorizing them based on the most prevalent AFAs identified. Through a content analysis, the contribution of AFAs to managing rapport is explored by scrutinizing their implicit meanings within the context of addressing customer complaints.

4.1 Corpus Analysis of the AFAs

As shown in Table 1, a total of six AFAs were identified in the responses, with *again* emerging as the most frequent, accounting for over three-quarters of the total occurrences with 267 instances. Through a concordance analysis, it was observed that the adverb *again* was primarily utilized to formulate moves such as Thanking, Apologizing, and Continuing Relationships, aimed at enhancing the sincerity of issue handling. In fact, the preponderance of *again* aligns with previous studies indicating that responses tend to demonstrate the sincerity and attentiveness through repetition in addressing customer issues, thereby fostering the reconstruction of rapport (Ho, 2017; van Mulken, 2024).

Table 1. Frequency of AFAs in the responses

	<i>again</i>	<i>also</i>	<i>too</i>	<i>even</i>	<i>as well</i>	<i>either</i>	Total
Frequency	267	66	3	3	3	1	343
Percentage (%)	77.8	19.2	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.3	100

Furthermore, the adverb *also* appears with 66 counts, reflecting its active usage. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting the frequent employment of this AFA in daily communication to reply to concerns (Schwarz, 2015). By retrieving all concordances and collocations of AFAs in the responses, a content analysis focusing on each move or move cluster with AFA(s) can be further proceeded. Consequently, in the following qualitative analysis, I primarily examine these two adverbs, supplemented by a discussion of other AFAs found in the responses.

4.2 'Again': Managing Hotels' Identity Faces and Relational Goals

In responses containing *again*, most presupposed content instances are known, either occurring earlier in the response or corresponding to the review itself, allowing readers to readily reference the information implicitly conveyed through *again*. Hence, a known presupposition in this case is specified as discourse-known. Upon a thorough analysis, the majority of these instances occur within the two moves: Thanking and Apologizing, manifesting three primary intentions: to offer a further apology to reviewers, to reiterate gratitude for their constructive feedback, and to extend hopes for future visits or engagements once again. A representative example, containing *again*, is in the text of Example (3):

- (3) On behalf of the team here, I would like to extend **again** a sincere apology for the inconveniences this has caused you during your stay.

The apology employing the AFA *again* shows the manager's sincere regret for the inconveniences encountered. Through the adverb, it presupposes the existence of a prior apology elsewhere in the response, a proposition that is indeed mentioned in previous content, allowing readers to anaphorically trace back to that earlier apology. In this context, the primary function of the AFA is to create or enhance local discourse cohesion (De Cesare, 2022), thereby bolstering readers' confidence in the sincerity of the apologies, given the multiple expressions of remorse. Considering the breach in customer-hotel rapport, a sincere apology demonstrates the hotel's commitment to rectifying the relationship, reflecting its relational goal.

In the following example, the wish of managing rapport through persuasive presupposition is made more obvious with the help of more use of *again*:

- (4) Guest satisfaction is very important to us and we try hard to make sure all of our guests have a rewarding stay. Thank you **again** for your feedback and we hope you will consider staying with us **again**.

In Example (4), the first instance of *again* presupposes that the manager has expressed gratitude in a prior portion of the response, mirroring the pattern observed in Example (3). Subsequently, the second occurrence of *again*, positioned at the end, implicitly communicates that the residents have had a stay at the hotel, further suggesting that the hotel welcomes the reviewer's potential patronage in the future. This implicitly manifests an interactional goal of fostering sustainable transactions with reviewers. Both instances of the AFA function to convey previously known content,

thereby prompting readers to recall relevant background information, either explicitly stated in previous text or retained in their memory.

Regarding Example (4), the scenario presented in Example (5) exhibits greater complexity due to the gravity of the incident that led to the negative review, which posed a substantial threat to the hotel's reputation. The reviewer's one-star rating was attributed to the hotel's mistake of checking the guest out without notification and unauthorized double charging of their credit card. To reconcile the relationship, the manager responded by using four AFAs: three *again* and one *also*, as exemplified below:

- (5) **Again**, I would just like to mention **again** that there was no evil intent behind this, just the team trying to do the right thing, but ironocally resulted in an honest mistake and clear disapointment from you. I have **also** addressed the team members apparent lack of care when this case came up, and this is of more concern to me and has been handled accordinly by our Front Office Manager Kevin. **Again**, I am really sorry for this case as communicated to you and your local office team, and appreciate your comments.

The first two coordinations align in their presupposed content, indicating that the manager had explicitly stated that the previously described events were devoid of malicious intent. To underscore the sincerity of the apology, the adverb *again* was employed twice in the initial sentence, highlighting the unintentional nature of the staff's action. Additionally, the use of *again* at the beginning of the final sentence presupposes the manager's personal remorse for the incident, thereby enhancing the authenticity and depth of the apology. In the subsequent section, I will elaborate the usage of *also*. Notably, the increased frequency of the adverb *again* in this context serves to strengthen the persuasiveness of the apology, reflecting a profound sincerity that reassures readers of the hotel's diligent efforts to address the errors and prevent their recurrence.

Delving into the interpersonal functions of the AFA *again*, the frequent use of this adverb, from the view of managing faces (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), is a way for hotels to deliberately lower their quality faces, which, in a broader sense, is an attempt to save their identity faces and reputation as perceived by customers. As exemplified in Examples (4) and (5), hotels leverage many anaphoric references to previous apologies to demonstrate their sincerity in addressing issues. While this may superficially appear to diminish their quality faces by acknowledging service failures, the repeated use of *again* actually improves the persuasiveness of their identity faces, as perceived by readers. To be specific, apologies that incorporate multiple *again* demonstrate hotels' sincere regret, thus encouraging readers to recognize that the issues are seriously handled. This, in turn, implicitly enhances the perceived identity face of hotels as responsible in customers' cognition. Furthermore, the use of *again* helps hotels adhere to their relational goals. It strengthens the bonds within the community by reminding readers that they are part of a shared customer service group that receives the hotel's unbiased attention (Mazzarella & Domaneschi, 2018). Ultimately, this contributes significantly to the management of rapport and the fostering of positive customer-hotel relationships.

In summary, when employed as a presupposition trigger to convey implicit meanings, *again* typically presupposes contents that are either explicitly stated in the co-text or context. Delving deeper into its interpersonal functions, it becomes evident that the incorporation of *again* enhances the argumentative nature of the utterance by showcasing hotels' sincere attitude. This not only aligns with their relational goal of maintaining rapport with reviewers, but also implicitly enhances hotels' perceived identity faces in the public's cognition.

4.3 'Also': Managing Hotels' Quality Faces and Transactional Goals

As the presupposed content triggered by *again* is primarily known to both parties or retrievable from preceding sections, the implicit meanings elicited by *also* diverge in two distinct ways. Firstly, for the presupposed content deemed as known, it is more likely to be retrieved from the reviewers' own memory or related texts, necessitating readers to spare time to verify these details from alternative sources, such as the introduction page. This type of information is labeled as known but discourse-new (Chen et al, 2022). Secondly, in contrast to *again*, new presupposed content introduced through the employment of *also* appears more actively, requiring readers to accommodate and integrate this information into their understanding. As exemplified in the following Example (6), the presupposition is identified as known but discourse-new:

- (6) This case seems to be a miscommunication and the price that was quoted to you was not breakfast price, but it was an upgrade benefits package that **also** included breakfast.

In the negative review, the customer expressed dissatisfaction with the room's high price, expecting it to include breakfast. In response, the manager denied the complaint, clarifying that the price contained an upgraded benefits package, including breakfast. Here, the use of *also* presupposes that the package comprises not only breakfast but also additional services. When compared to a statement without this presupposition, this explanation appears more compelling, as it suggests that the service actually exceeds the guest's original expectations. In this instance, the

manager employed a disclaimer strategy, as outlined by Ho (2017), to explain the issue, implicitly redirecting blame towards the reviewer. Additionally, readers can determine the extent of additional services included in the upgrade package by referring to the room's description page, potentially increasing their likelihood of booking the hotel. Consequently, the employment of *also* not only helps the hotel in evading allegations of poor service but also implicitly fulfills its transactional goal of promoting its services.

Similarly, in Example (7) below, the hotel also rescued itself from the rapport-damaging review by using *also*:

- (7) The records indicated our staff went in once for cleaning and the rest of the entries were by you and your invited guests. We **also** assisted you to file a police report which was turned down by your goodself when the police came.

The customer accused the staff and cleaners of stealing his personal property from the room and thus complained that the hotel did nothing to handle the situation. The serious consequence of this claim was obvious, so a forceful and exhaustive explanation was needed. One of the resolutions, at least as illustrated above, was the use of *also* to project the hotel's pious responsibility for handling the problem. By the AFA, the sentence presupposes the content that the hotel did something else apart from assisting the guests to file a police report to find out the thief. Hence, for the potential customers who are browsing the response, they may judge the hotel as responsible since the hotel did a lot to make sure the security and meet with guests' various requirements.

As illustrated in the preceding examples, the use of *also* can implicitly point out reviewers' own responsibilities for certain problems while not damaging their quality faces. Indeed, in instances where reviewers' accusations are unwarranted due to self-inflicted mistakes, it is crucial to avoid explicit attribution of responsibility, as this approach is impolite and poses a threat to their identity face and sociality rights, which entitle them to express themselves freely (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Consequently, an implicit communicative strategy, such as presupposition, offers a perfect solution (Lombardi Vallauri, 2021). In my case, the AFA triggering known but discourse-new content helps effectively safeguard the quality faces of both reviewers and hotels through liability exemption. This approach fosters harmony between hotels and customers in both cases. Notably, managers do not boldly point out the mistakes but instead save reviewers from the face-threatening act indirectly by using an off-record impoliteness strategy (Culpeper, 2005). This strategy allows both interlocutors to mitigate any potential damage to the reviewers' faces, as presupposed contents can be negotiated and defeated later on (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Meanwhile, some sentences with the use of *also* carry new presupposed content, so readers may not have the chance to verify the content and will take the content for granted in most cases. In the following Example (8), by adding an *also* at the beginning of the sentence, the manager presupposed the idea that they have underscored previous guests' feedback to ensure a higher comfort level for future experiences:

- (8) Please rest assured that we are keeping your helpful notes in mind when retraining our colleagues so that they are better able to serve our guests. We **also** have added your feedback to your guest history to ensure a higher comfort level during your future visits.

Certainly, readers are neither required nor feasible to seek confirmation for every statement. Instead, for the vast majority, it is more commonplace to accept or, at the least, accommodate the information presented. Thus, in this example, through presupposed content, readers can appreciate that each piece of feedback is profoundly esteemed, indicating the hotel's dedicated commitment to enhancing service quality. By establishing a shared understanding through new presuppositions, managers effectively convince readers of the superior quality, thereby positively promoting the hotel and achieving its transactional goal.

As previously discussed, the possibility of challenging such presupposed information is low, as it is unlikely to be cognitively scrutinized (Schwarz, 2016). Moreover, its interpersonal functions are achieved regardless of its factual accuracy (Moldovan, 2023), making it a forceful persuasion technique. In fact, the use of *also* in Example (5) falls within this category, serving a similar purpose as in Example (8). By employing this strategy, hotels can further increase customers' awareness of their ongoing service quality improvements, effectively enhancing perceived rapport.

In summary, the use of AFA *also* as a strategic tool in addressing hotel services involves presupposing content that is either known but discourse-new or entirely new, tailored for reader accommodation. As analyzed, presupposing known but discourse-new content successfully safeguards reviewers' quality face without compromising hotels' liability. Simultaneously, presupposing new content contributes to fulfilling a hotel's interactional goal by cultivating a responsible and competent image among readers.

4.4 Managing Rapport through Other AFAs

To further shed light on the management of rapport by AFAs, in this section I analyze other AFAs to examine interpersonal functions conveyed and the variations comparing to *again* and *also*. The response with *too* is first

analyzed, which has the similar semantic domain like *also*, as shown in Example (9):

- (9) We want you to return and enjoy the high service standard that you are used **too** and if you will give us the opportunity to welcome you back, please contact myself directly for future bookings.

The relative clause containing *too* presupposes that the guests have previously resided in the hotel several years prior, during which they enjoyed a high standard of service, as they themselves mentioned in their review. Notably, the hotel strategically invoked the guest's recollection of this past superior experience through the use of *too*, yet tacitly disregarding the undesirable experience encountered during their current stay. Consequently, this adverb functions as a memory trigger, prompting guests to recall their previous positive stay, thereby implicitly diminishing the impact of the current negative feedback. For other readers, this approach may convey the impression that the hotel's quality is commendable and any displeasing occurrences are merely isolated incidents. This again reflects the transactional goal. Given that negative experiences cited by reviewers often pose a challenge to a hotel's reputation, managers should strive to highlight the positive aspects they can identify. As exemplified by the utilization of *too* in this instance, the management of a hotel's identity face can also be achieved by subtly referencing the reviewer's previous positive experience, suggesting that the hotel's service quality is assured and that any negative experience is exceptional.

The last example involves presupposed content triggered by *even*, which differs from the aforementioned AFAs. Unlike them, *even* not only signifies the meaning of once more but is also classified as a scalar adverb characterized by its unexpected and surprising nature (König, 1991). Consequently, presuppositions realized through *even* partially overlap with those of AFAs, as witnessed in Example (10):

- (10) This does not excuse at all the missing items in your room. A guest room in that condition should not **even** be available to sell to any arriving guests. Your room had been released prematurely without being checked by the floor supervisor.

In this response, the utilization of *even* elicits the presupposed content that an unarranged guest room ought not to be offered to incoming guests. By adopting this adverb, the manager crafted a context of affiliation, thereby amplifying the gravity of the oversight. This approach not only aligns the manager's position with the guest's perspective but also expresses an unexpected and regretful stance towards the occurrence. Such a strategy increases the sincerity and personalization of the response, thereby intensifying the strength of positive rapport through emotional alignment.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, from the perspective of persuasive presupposition, I have examined how the employment of AFAs in negative review responses helps manage rapport between hotels and customers. Valuable insights into the interpersonal functions of AFAs were obtained through analyzing their implied meanings in the context of addressing customer complaints. Overall, the utilization of AFAs in responses represents a successful attempt to manage rapport by implicitly attending to the three bases of rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2013). Specifically, the AFA *again* presupposes known content, enhancing the persuasiveness of the responses by showing sincerity. This not only fosters a harmonious relationship with reviewers but also implicitly boosts a hotel's perceived identity face. On the other hand, the AFA *also* presupposes both new and known but discourse-new content, enriching readers' understanding of a hotel's responsible image and saving both the quality faces of a hotel and its reviewers.

This study has several theoretical implications. First, this paper, in an empirical effort, explores the interpersonal functions of AFAs realized through presupposition, which extends our understanding of a salient group of lexical words at the interpersonal level. These findings suggest that, beyond epistemic vigilance and shallowing processes previously discussed, interlocutors may refrain from challenging presupposed content due to its irrelevance to their communicative goals. Instead, achieving satisfactory communicative outcomes and managing rapport in the conversation appear to be more important. Second, it complements current mainstream meso-level studies so as to improve our understanding of the genre of negative review responses. By delving into the specific roles of AFAs, this study provides a deeper understanding of how language is used to manage rapport and shape the construction of moves in responses.

Additionally, the outcomes of this study provide practical guidance for hotels to use AFAs rationally in responding to online negative reviews. This approach is instrumental in linguistically managing positive customer-hotel rapport. Indeed, AFAs are identified as crucial lexical words that effectively manage rapport within moves and can be used frequently by hotel managers. In order to showcase hotels' sincerity and seriousness in handling reviewers' concerns, the AFA *again* can be frequently utilized when apologizing and thanking. By employing this adverb multiple times, hotels can further bolster their persuasive arguments. Besides, when formulating the move Denying Problems, managers can strategically leverage the AFA *also* to clarify misunderstandings while implicitly redirecting responsibility away from the hotel, thereby strengthening the persuasive force (Ho, 2021). These practices not only safeguard hotels' reputations by clarifying the truth but also implicitly uphold the quality faces of reviewers, ultimately fostering more

harmonious relationships.

Admittedly, there are some limitations to this research. As a case study, the interpretation of the data was limited and somewhat subjective because the analysis of presupposed content triggered by AFAs, though based on pragmatic theories and related literature, was still carried out largely from the researcher's perspective. In the future, retrospective interviews or consultations with hotel industry insiders can be conducted to shed further light on the reviews and responses' rationales. Besides, it is hoped that a comparative study about the usages and interpersonal functions of AFAs between different platforms or languages can be conducted to enrich our understandings of this genre.

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Note

Note 1. For more information about AOIR internet research ethics, please check: <https://aoir.org/ethics/>.