

## **A PROPOSAL FOR SOP DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION TRAINING MATERIAL INFORMED BY RESEARCH ON REAL BUSINESS ENCOUNTER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports an attempt to implement some results from a previous study on natural conversation as a part of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Communication Training Material for Face to Face Communication in Service Industry. That study analyzed a heated complaint sequence of interaction (complaint sequence-in short) between hotel staff and a guest using Conversation Analysis (CA). It appeared that some of the actions of the hotel staff result in more preferable responses than the others. In terms of resolving the complaint sequence amicably, any actions that lead to calmer guest or formulation of the problem, are deemed to be preferred. The current study specifically attempts to, firstly capture the moment by moment of small actions (nudges) of the staff that garners preferable responses and vice versa; and secondly, translate those “nudges” as a component of SOP design and Communication Training Material. The framework used to translate staff’s actions into SOP design and training material is Conversation Analysis Role-play Method or CARM.

Keywords: standard operating procedure (SOP), communication training, conversation analysis.

### **INTRODUCTION**

A complaint is a consequence and causes a kind of phenomena. A complaint is assumed to occur as a result of the business establishment’s failure in meeting its promised or expected obligation to its client or customer (Drew, 1998; Schegloff, 2005; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998). For the purpose of discussion, in this paper, the assumed business establishment’s failure is referred to as “complainable” or “complainable event” if the complainable refers to an event. It is understandable then that main “project” (Levinson, 2013) of the complaint is to convey that complainable to the business establishment. Hence, a complaint sequence can be said to be completed when the clients complainable has been well understood by the business establishment.

The assumption is, a customer opts for a service in some business establishment under some sort of good expectation. When a complainable or complainable event occurs, the prior expectation is not met. As a consequence, the business establishment-client rapport (Spencer-Oatey, 2002) is compromised. From that perspective, handling a complaint from a customer is similar to fire-fighting activity. Both starts from a poor situation. The assumed end to fire-fighting activity is to put up the fire, or at least to reduce the size of the fire. Similarly, the assumed end to complaint-handling activity is to address the client's emotional outburst and disappointment, or at least to tone down the patient's emotion. The staff who handles the complaint has to be able to navigate the client's emotional outburst while gauging the nature of the complainable. Only then, that the staff can indicate that the clients complainable has been well understood, and then supposedly move towards the end of the complaint sequence.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of the current paper focuses on the method used to translate Conversation Analysis (CA) result in the communication training package. The method is Conversation Analysis Role-play Method or CARM (Stokoe, 2014, 2018). For a discussion about Conversation Analysis (CA) as a method to analyze natural conversation, see Oktarini (2016), Have (2007), and Sidnel (2010). For the methodological basis of both CA and CARM, see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) and Heritage (1984).

The method starts with recording (audio or video) naturally occurring interaction from the same workplace context of the training. That audio and video recording is then transcribed and analyzed using Conversation Analysis. The first step is to identify the interaction "racetrack", to get the sense of how the real interaction unfolds in real life. For example, a doctor-patient consultation may start from greeting, history-taking, physical examination, diagnosis, and then closing. Then, informed by CA detailed analysis and understanding of the main business of the encounter, some critical interactional moments are identified. The analysis and recording of that interactional moments are then packaged and then employed as training materials. Surely, when the

analysis identifies “nudges” or small action that brings significant effect, the nudges will be shared as a part of the training material.

The current study employs a video recording of an emotionally charged complaint sequence that occurs between front office staff and a guest of one of the hotels in Bali, Indonesia. The video indicated that the recording was made by the hotel guest. The video was uploaded to YouTube video sharing platform and the language is Indonesian. When it was originally viewed in 2016, the video was set for public viewing. As the video was recorded in one of the hotels in Bali, makes it fit to be employed as training material for communication training for hotel staff in Bali.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion of this paper are divided into two. The first part talks about negative and positive “nudges”. They are the small actions that the hotel staffs did in the recording that evidently bring significant impact on how the interaction proceeds afterwards. The second part of this finding and discussion section shows how those nudges can be incorporated into SOP and turned into a communication training material.

### 3.1 Lesson from Oktarini (2016): Positive and Negative Nudges

In this first part of the findings and discussion, I will present some of the positive nudges. Nudges are small action (or even word) that observably cause to bring significant effect to the flow of interaction.

#### 3.1.1 *Positive Nudges*

We observe two kinds of (interactional) action that can move the argument sequence towards the formulation of problem sequence. They are a display of empathy and understanding the guest’s talk.

Understanding the Guest’s Talk (**Error! Reference source not found.**), the guest says that he has two babysitters. In response, the SM (Security Manager) indicates that he gets that information. Then, as the guest says incomprehensible “you can can can” in Line 337, the SM responds with a display of empathy. He does not only understand the information that the guest conveys but also captures the possible issues hinted in the

guest's talk and normalizes it. This is a powerful way of showing empathy (Cf. J. C. Heritage & Lindström, 2012). Evidently, the guest calms down in the subsequent turn.

Extract 1: Line 323-340

<p>323. Guest : [ an]aksaya]          324.           Masih bayi Pak                        <b>My kids are still babies</b>          325. SM : Bayi umur berapa Pak?                        <b>How old (are the) babies?</b>          326. Guest : Dua tahun sama satu tahun (.)                        <b>Two years(-old) and one year(-old)</b>          327. SM : Dua tahun sama satu ta[hun]                        <b>Two years(-old) and one year(-old)</b>          328. Guest : [ sa]tu kasur saya bisa          329.           berem[pat]                        <b>(On) one mattress I can sleep with the four (of us)</b>          330. SM : [ ja]di sekarang Bapak, Istri, lagi,                        <b>So, now (it's) you, (your) wife, then</b>          331.           (1.0)          332. Guest : &lt;baby sitter saya dua&gt; (.)                        <b>I have two babysitters</b>          333. SM : Maaf ya?                        <b>(I am) sorry</b>          334. Guest : babysitter saya dua                        <b>I have two babysitters</b>          335. SM : &lt;Babysitter&gt;, O::key (.)          336.           anger[it]                        <b>Babysitter, okay (.) (I) get it</b>          337. Guest : [ka]mu bisa bisa bisa                        <b>You can cancan</b>          338. SM : Susah       pastinya namanya anak ke[cilya]                        <b>It must be difficult with such young kids, isn't it?</b>          339. Guest : [ YES! ]</p>	<p><i>Display  of  Empathy:  Normalizing the  Guest's  Issue</i>    In Line  334</p> <p><i>Understanding the  Guest's  Talk</i></p>
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**Error! Reference source not found.** occurs quite some time into the complaint sequence. It is only here that the guest's complaint becomes clearer. If we pay good attention to the detail of how the interaction happens, we can catch that the clarity is the result of the SM's action. SM asks some questions that clarify the guest's speech (Line 325 and 333). He also repeats the guest's words (Line 327) and rephrases the guest's information (Line 330). These actions are responded quite well by the guest. He calms

down and he responded to the SM's questions. The sequence can be said to be well underway towards the formulation of the problem. In turn, the formulation of the problem can bring the complaint sequence into a good ending.

### 3.1.2 Negative Nudges

During a complaint sequence, issuing any action that requires the complainer to do something, e.g. request, directive, etc. (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), no matter how "polite" (Brown, 2009; Brown & Levinson, 1987) they are, is ineffective. The "requesting" action may even lead to more prominent emotional outburst (agitation) from the patient.

#### *Directive: Asking the Guest to lower his voice*

Extract 2: Line 68-71

68. SM : Suaranya di turunkan dulu  
**Lower down (your) voice first**
69. Guest : [Kenapa emangnya] (0.3)  
**What's the problem?**
70. SM : [ ((unclear)) ]
71. Guest : Saya mau bicara biar kedengeran  
**I want to speak so that I can be heard**

SM is the Security Manager. At some point in the complaint sequence, SM comes into the picture. Some of the first (interactional) actions that SM does here is to ask the guest to lower down his voice (Line 68, Extract 2). The action is "directive, a high-entitlement kind of action (Craven & Potter, 2010). In terms of how the action is "designed" (Drew, 2013), Line 68 can be said to be mitigated, or polite. Line 68 was done is a low-tone and slow-pace, and void of direct personal pronoun. The aforementioned features indicate its high politeness status (Agustia, 2013; Johns, 1985). Line 68 was responded with a challenge that is produced in a raised tone of voice (Line 69) by the guest. Evidently, though it was produced in a polite manner, SM action to ask the guest to lower down your voice does not work.

### *Request: Asking the Guest to sit down*

Extract 3: Line 19-25

19. HP2 : Bisa duduk sebentar mungkin Pak  
**Can you sit for a while, sir**
20. Guest : Enggak, gak perlu  
**No, (there's) no need**
21. : Ha, saya dari tadi udah nunggu lama kok  
**Ha, I have been waiting for a long time, (you see)**
22. : Ini waktu istirahat saya deng-  
**This (is) my time to reset (with-)**
23. : Tertunda jadinya  
**Postponed because of (that)**
24. : Sama anak saya  
**With my child(ren)**
25. (1.06)

HP2 is the second hotel personnel who handles the guest during the complaint sequence. The part of interaction in Extract 3 occurs before the part of interaction in Extract 2. Here HP2 request the guest to sit down for a while (Line 19). The request is designed as a polar question that arguably put a less entitlement on the speaker's side. However, similar to the directive in Extract 2 (Line 68), the request in Extract 3 (Line 19) meet agitation from the guest. The guest puts a direct disagreement. He then rants about his dissatisfaction with the complainable event (Line 21-25).

## 3.2 Proposal for SOP Design and Communication Training Material

### 3.2.1 SOP component on positive and negative nudges



**Dont's**

- Ask a complaining customer to do anything
- No Directive
- Nor Request
- No matter how polite the directive or request are done

Picture: <https://www.artistsnetwork.com/art-mediums/drawing/beginners-guide-draw-facial-features/>



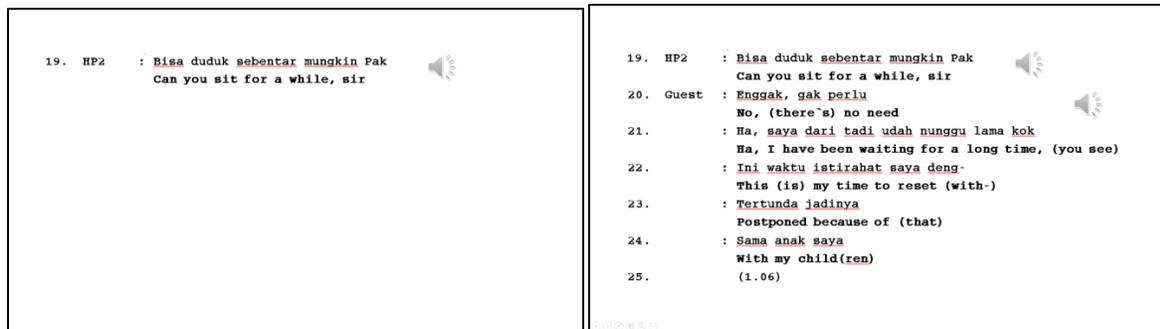
**Do's**

- Listen to what the Guest Say & display understanding
- Repeat
- Rephrase
- Normalize what the guest say, understand his trouble

Picture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsfmGAFHoYw>

### 3.2.2 Communication Training Material

The material is fit for a CARM (Conversation Analytic Role-play Method) training (Stokoe, 2014). The idea is to use the recording and analysis as training material, to get the training participants to experience the complexity and the real-life condition in the field. The selected parts of the conversation (Extract 2, Extract 3, and Extract 1) are presented in the classroom. The program in use is Microsoft Office PowerPoint. The audio from the video is extracted as an audio file. The line by line transcript is arranged in the presentation in such a way that it can be played alongside the sound clip of the specific line. Below is one example.



Picture 1: Slide 1 and 2

Picture 1 illustrates how a specific extract (in this case Extract 2) can be transformed and used as training material. Slide on the left (Slide 1) in Picture 1 is shown first to the training participants, alongside the audio. In so doing, the audience can have complete knowledge of how the request in Line 19 of Extract 2 is produced. Then the facilitator asks the participants about (1) their observation on the request: the tone of voice, politeness, etc.; and (2) what the participants think the guest will do afterwards.

The next slide (Slide 2, Picture 1) can be played after the facilitator see that the participants have a good grasp on how Line 19 of Extract 2 is shown. When Slide 2 is played, it will play the line by line of the talk in concurrent with the guest's talk (play synchronously with the sound file). After Slide 2 is played, the facilitator then can ask the participants (1) whether they think Line 19 works to calm the guest down, whether it

is productive, etc.; and (2) what is the part of Line 19 that the participants think that makes the guest agitated.

Slide by slide can be played and different extracts can be introduced with the same procedure as above. At the end of the session. The facilitator can give the SOP component based on the session. In so doing, the training participants will have a memory holder for what they are learning during the session.

## CONCLUSION

The current study has demonstrated that it is possible to turn communication research finding into a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Component and a classroom-based communication training program. The method illustrated above pointed out to the direction of the feasibility of building a greater study, gathering a big data on business encounter, and in the end design the result in such way that it can be used as input for SOP and communication training program.

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