

SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF CALL CENTER AGENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES: ITS IMPACT TO CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Ma. Whelsa N. Tabuete^{1*} & Rafael V. Oñate²

^{*1-2}University of Saint Anthony

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Abstract: In the rapidly growing Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines, effective communication plays a vital role in ensuring quality customer service and maintaining customer satisfaction. Call center agents are expected not only to possess grammatical and linguistic competence but also to demonstrate sociolinguistic competence, which involves the appropriate use of language according to social and cultural contexts. Despite the importance of communication in the BPO sector, challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, code-switching, and inappropriate communication styles continue to affect customer interactions and service outcomes. This study aimed to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of selected call center agents in the Philippines and examine its impact on customer satisfaction. Specifically, the study focused on language appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, conversational strategies, and pragmatic competence in customer interactions. Furthermore, it sought to identify whether a significant relationship exists between sociolinguistic competence and customer satisfaction. The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. Data were gathered through interview and structured survey questionnaires administered to selected call center agents from BPO companies in the Philippines.

The study found that selected call center agents possess a high level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of appropriateness of language use, code-switching and style shifting, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic competence. They are capable of adjusting their language, tone, vocabulary, and communication style based on the customer's background, emotional state, and level of understanding while maintaining professionalism and respect. The findings also showed positive customer communication outcomes, as customers frequently expressed gratitude, became calmer after clear explanations, used positive language, followed instructions, acknowledged issue resolution, and gave high satisfaction ratings. This indicates that effective communication behavior among call center agents significantly contributes to customer satisfaction, successful service interactions, and overall service quality. The study concludes that selected call center agents demonstrate a high level of sociolinguistic competence in language use, code-switching, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic competence, which enables them to communicate effectively and professionally with diverse customers. Their ability to adapt language, show empathy, and handle customer concerns appropriately contributes to positive customer communication outcomes such as gratitude, cooperation, issue resolution, and high satisfaction ratings. While company scripts provide structure and consistency, flexibility, personalization, and strong communication skills remain essential in building customer trust and satisfaction. Therefore, a training module titled "Enhancing Sociolinguistic Competence for Effective Customer Communication in the Call Center Industry" can be utilized by call center companies and training institutions to strengthen agents' communication skills.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistic Competence, Call Center Agents, Customer Satisfaction, BPO (Business Process Outsourcing, DSAT, CSAT, Linguistic Competence.*

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Introduction

In today's globalized service economy, merely knowing how to communicate is no longer sufficient; individuals must possess the skills necessary to become effective communicators. Effective communication serves as a fundamental determinant of organizational success, particularly in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, where interactions with clients and customers are central to daily operations. The Philippines is recognized as one of the leading hubs of the BPO industry, providing employment opportunities to millions of workers, particularly call center agents. Filipino call center agents are globally acknowledged for their English proficiency, hospitality,

and adaptability in handling customers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Call center agents primarily interact with customers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, requiring not only proficiency in English but also strong intercultural and sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately according to social context, culture, tone, and communicative situation. In the call center industry, this includes the proper use of language, politeness strategies, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and conversational adaptability during customer interactions. According to Cem Alptekin (2020), social context refers to culture-specific norms,

values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns that influence communication.

Customer satisfaction is considered one of the most important indicators of organizational performance in the BPO industry, as it directly influences client retention, company reputation, and profitability. Studies have shown that oral proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and strategic language use are essential factors in delivering quality customer service.

Despite the growing importance of sociolinguistic competence in customer service interactions, many studies in the BPO industry have focused primarily on English proficiency, technical communication skills, and customer service strategies. Limited attention has been given to how sociolinguistic competence specifically affects customer satisfaction among Filipino call center agents. Moreover, there remains a lack of localized studies that examine how agents' ability to demonstrate empathy, cultural sensitivity, politeness, and conversational adaptability contributes to positive customer experiences.

This gap highlights the need to further investigate the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and customer satisfaction in the Philippine call center industry. Understanding this relationship may provide insights into how communication practices influence service quality and customer perceptions.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the sociolinguistic competence of selected call center agents in the Philippines and its impact on customer satisfaction. Specifically, it seeks to determine how agents' use of appropriate language, empathy, cultural awareness, and communication strategies contribute to customer experiences and satisfaction. The findings of this study may serve as a basis for improving communication training programs, enhancing service quality, and strengthening customer relations within the BPO industry.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design using a sociolinguistic approach to examine the sociolinguistic competence of call center agents in the Philippines and its impact on customer satisfaction. The descriptive aspect of the research was used to determine and describe the linguistic features, communicative strategies, and regulatory practices commonly observed in call center interactions.

This design was deemed appropriate because the study sought to describe existing conditions and patterns of communication within a real-world professional context rather than manipulate variables or impose experimental controls. The sociolinguistic framework guided the analysis of how language is used and regulated in professional customer service settings, emphasizing the social dimensions of linguistic behavior such as politeness, formality, empathy, and communicative appropriateness.

The study combined both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were gathered through surveys and rating scales assessing the perceived linguistic competence of agents and customer satisfaction levels. Qualitative data were collected through interviews to gain deeper insights into the communication

strategies, challenges, and regulatory practices used by agents during interactions.

The integration of both methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Quantitative data established the relationship between linguistic competence and satisfaction, while qualitative data provided contextual explanations for the patterns observed. This mixed-method sociolinguistic approach allowed the researchers to interpret how language skills and regulation practices contribute to effective communication and customer satisfaction in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry.

Participants

There are sixty (60) participants for the questionnaire and ten (10) participants for the interview. The respondents of this study are consisted of selected call center agents from Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) companies in the Philippines. The call center agents will serve as the primary respondents because they are directly involved in customer interactions and communication processes. The selection of participants was based on their direct involvement in customer interactions, which makes them suitable respondents for a study focusing on sociolinguistic competence of call center agents and its impact to customer satisfaction.

The study uses snowball sampling technique in selecting participants. The participants represented diverse backgrounds in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, and length of service in the BPO industry. This diversity enriched the data by capturing varied linguistic experiences and perspectives within the same organizational setting.

The participants provide valuable information regarding the level of sociolinguistic competence among call center agents and its possible relationship to customer satisfaction. Their responses contribute to understanding how communication skills, cultural awareness, and language appropriateness influence the quality of customer service in the Philippine BPO industry.

Data Gathering Tools

To obtain comprehensive and reliable data, the study utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative research instruments designed to assess the sociolinguistic competence of call center agents and its impact to customer satisfaction. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather qualitative data that provide deeper insights into the agents' communication behaviors.

According to Hofsi et al. (2014), as cited by Bihu (2020), semi-structured interviews is important for generating rich, meaningful information about individuals' personal experiences and perspectives. The researcher ensured that each participant offered substantial and relevant responses to the matter being discuss and the objectives being attained.

Additionally, a structured survey questionnaire was developed by the researchers to collect quantitative data on the agents' linguistic competence and perceived customer satisfaction. The questionnaire was validated by language and communication experts to ensure content validity, and pilot-tested among a small group of call center agents to check for clarity and reliability.

Ethical Consideration

This study will observe and uphold ethical standards throughout the research process to protect the rights, privacy, and

welfare of all participants. Before conducting the data-gathering procedures, the researcher ensures that all participants were fully informed of the study’s objectives, scope, and procedures. One-on-one interviews were conducted with participants, during which the purpose of the research and the use of the information were clearly explained. For agents-respondents, it was emphasized that only their perceptions were required. All participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by ensuring that no identifying information was disclosed. Participants were protected from any form of harm, embarrassment, or risk. All data collected were used solely for academic purposes, and the rights and dignity of all participants were fully respected.

The researchers will ensure that no harm, discrimination, or discomfort will be experienced by the participants during the conduct of the study. Questions included in the survey questionnaires will be respectful, relevant, and non-invasive. The study will also avoid any form of bias, manipulation, or misrepresentation of data to maintain honesty and integrity in the research process.

Data Analysis Tool

To analyze and interpret the findings of the study, the combination of statistical treatment for quantitative data and thematic interpretation for qualitative data ensured that both measurable trends and deeper sociolinguistic insights were captured. This mixed-method analysis provided a robust foundation for drawing conclusions on the role of sociolinguistic competence of call center agents in the Philippines and its impact to customer satisfaction.

In a quantitative data research, data analysis is deemed vital yet a complex process. Analyzing is a way to ensure validity (Cohen, 2011). It is the process that somehow reduces or breaks down into small fragments the huge volume of information collected from the respondents will be analyzed in an appropriate manner employing the following statistics.

The weighted mean will be utilized to determine the level of sociolinguistic competence of call center agents and the level of

customer satisfaction based on the responses gathered from the survey questionnaires. This statistical tool will help identify the average responses of participants for each indicator in the study.

The collected data will be tabulated, interpreted, and analyzed using statistical software such as Microsoft Excel, or similar data analysis tools. The results will serve as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations of the study regarding the impact of sociolinguistic competence on customer satisfaction in the Philippine BPO industry.

Result, Findings, and Discussion

Sociolinguistic Competence of Call Center Agents in The Philippines: It’s Impact on Customer Satisfaction

This section presents the the level of sociolinguistic competence of selected call center agents and the manifestations of the customer satisfaction on the communication behavior of the agents. The results of the study are presented together with the corresponding discussions and interpretations.

Perceived Level of Sociolinguistic Competence of Call Center Agents

This section presents the data gather for the following; appropriateness of language use, code-switching and style shifting, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic competence or context-appropriate responses. Furthermore, the study examines the manifestations of customer satisfaction in communication, specifically how effective sociolinguistic competence contributes to positive customer interactions, understanding, trust, and overall satisfaction with the service provided by call center agents.

Table 1 presents the respondents’ level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of appropriateness of language use. The results show that all three indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation, indicating that the selected Call center agents demonstrate strong ability in adjusting and using language appropriately during customer interactions.

This was followed by “I can adjust my language depending on the customer’s background (e.g., age, nationality, tone)” with a weighted mean of 4.52, also interpreted as Very High.

Table 1: Appropriateness of Language Use

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I can adjust my language depending on the customer’s background (e.g., age, nationality, tone).	4.52	Very High
I can simplify my language when speaking with customers who struggle with English.	4.75	Very High
I can avoid slang or informal expressions during calls.	4.50	Very High

Meanwhile, “I can avoid slang or informal expressions during calls” received the lowest weighted mean of 4.50, but it still falls under the Very High verbal interpretation. This indicates that respondents strongly agree that they maintain professionalism by using formal and appropriate language during calls.

This implies that respondents have a strong understanding of appropriate language use in customer service. They are highly capable of simplifying language for better customer understanding,

adjusting communication based on customer background, and maintaining professionalism by avoiding slang or informal expressions. Overall, these skills reflect strong sociolinguistic competence that helps build trust, clear communication, and positive customer experiences.

It can be inferred that appropriate language use is essential for effective customer service communication. Agents who simplify language, adjust their speech based on customer

background, and maintain professionalism are more likely to deliver efficient service and achieve customer satisfaction. Sociolinguistic competence also helps reduce communication barriers in diverse customer interactions, improving overall call handling and service quality.

Based on the study of Holmes (2013), which emphasizes that sociolinguistic competence involves knowing how to use language appropriately based on the social context and the listener’s background. Holmes explained that effective communication requires speakers to adjust their language

depending on the situation and audience, which is highly evident in the respondents’ ability to simplify language and adapt to customers’ needs.

Table 2 presents the respondents’ level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of code-switching and style shifting. The results show that all four indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation, indicating that the selected call center agents are highly capable of adjusting their communication style based on customer needs and interaction contexts.’

Table 2: Code-Switching and Style Shifting

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I can adjust my tone depending on the customer's emotional state.	4.80	Very High
I can change my speaking pace depending on how fast or slow the customer speaks.	4.68	Very High
I can shift from conversational language to technical language when explaining procedures.	4.58	Very High
I can adjust my vocabulary depending on the customer’s level of English proficiency.	4.55	Very High

Among the statements, “I can adjust my tone depending on the customer emotional state” obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.80, interpreted as Very High. This was followed by “I can change my speaking pace depending on how fast or slow the customer speaks” with a weighted mean of 4.68, also verbally interpreted as Very High.

Meanwhile, “I can shift from conversational language to technical language when explaining procedures” received a weighted mean of 4.58, and “I can adjust my vocabulary depending on the customer’s level of English proficiency” obtained the lowest weighted mean of 4.55, though both still fall under the Very High interpretation.

The findings show that respondents have strong sociolinguistic competence in code-switching and style shifting. They are highly skilled in adjusting tone based on customers’ emotions, matching speaking pace to improve understanding, and shifting between conversational and technical language when needed. They also adapt vocabulary according to customers’ English proficiency. Overall, these abilities enhance

communication effectiveness, improve customer interactions, and contribute to better service quality.

It can be inferred that code-switching and style shifting are essential components of effective customer service communication. Agents who can adjust tone, pace, and language style are more likely to enhance customer understanding, reduce frustration, and create a more positive interaction experience.

These skills also help bridge communication gaps, particularly in diverse environments where customers differ in emotional state, communication style, and language proficiency. As a result, agents can handle calls more efficiently and professionally.

In the study of Gumperz (1982) highlighted that code-switching serves as a strategy for effective interaction, allowing speakers to adapt their language to suit different social situations. This is evident in the respondents’ ability to shift between conversational and technical language during customer interactions.

Table 3: Cultural Sensitivity

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I can remain respectful even when a customer expresses culturally different views.	4.75	Very High
I can show patience when customers struggle with language differences.	4.73	Very High
I am careful not to use expressions that may offend customers from different cultures.	4.77	Very High
I understand cultural differences that affect communication.	4.75	Very High

Table 3 presents the respondents' level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of cultural sensitivity. All indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation showing that the selected call center agents demonstrate strong awareness and respect for cultural differences during customer interactions. cultural sensitivity. All indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation, showing that the selected call center agents demonstrate strong awareness and respect for cultural differences during customer interactions.

Among the statements, "I am careful not to use expressions that may offend customers from different cultures" obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.77, interpreted as Very High. This was followed by both "I can remain respectful even when a customer expresses culturally different views" and "I understand cultural differences that affect communication", each with a weighted mean of 4.75.

Meanwhile, "I can show patience when customers struggle with language differences" received the lowest weighted mean of 4.73, but it still falls under the Very High verbal interpretation, indicating strong agreement among respondents.

This implies that respondents have a high level of cultural sensitivity in customer service communication. They are highly aware of avoiding offensive expressions, remaining respectful

despite cultural differences, and understanding how culture affects communication. They also show patience when customers face language barriers. Overall, these skills reflect strong professionalism, empathy, and intercultural awareness, leading to more respectful and effective customer interactions.

It can be inferred that cultural sensitivity plays a significant role in effective customer service communication. Agents who are respectful, patient, and aware of cultural differences are more likely to build trust, avoid misunderstandings, and provide better customer experiences.

The findings also imply that strong cultural sensitivity helps reduce communication barriers in multicultural environments, enabling agents to handle interactions more professionally and successfully.

The study of Kramsch (1998) emphasized that language and culture are closely connected, and successful communication requires cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is evident in the respondents' understanding of how cultural differences influence interaction. Overall, the results confirm that cultural sensitivity is a key component of sociolinguistic competence and an important factor in delivering effective and respectful customer service.

Table 4: Pragmatic Competence (Context-Appropriate Responses)

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
I know how to respond politely even when the customer is angry.	4.65	Very High
I can use appropriate expressions when apologizing or clarifying issues.	4.73	Very High
I know when to follow the script strictly and when to personalize response.	4.72	Very High
I can maintain professionalism throughout the call.	4.80	Very High

Table 4 presents the respondents' level of sociolinguistic competence in terms of pragmatic competence or context-appropriate responses. All indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation, showing that the selected call center agents demonstrate strong ability in responding appropriately and professionally in different customer service situations.

Among the statements, "I can maintain professionalism throughout the call" obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.80, interpreted as Very High. This was followed by "I can use appropriate expressions when apologizing or clarifying issues" with a weighted mean of 4.73, and "I know when to follow the script strictly and when to personalize response" with 4.72, both also interpreted as Very High.

Meanwhile, "I know how to respond politely even when the customer is angry" received the lowest weighted mean of 4.65, but it still falls under the Very High verbal interpretation, indicating strong competence in handling difficult customer interactions.

The findings show that respondents have a high level of pragmatic competence in customer service communication. They are highly capable of maintaining professionalism, using polite and

appropriate expressions when apologizing or clarifying issues, and balancing scripted responses with personalized communication. They also respond respectfully to angry customers despite challenging situations. Overall, these skills reflect strong communication awareness and professionalism, leading to effective interactions and positive customer service experiences.

It can be inferred that pragmatic competence is a crucial factor in effective customer service communication. Agents who can remain professional, use polite and appropriate expressions, and adjust responses based on the situation are more likely to resolve customer concerns successfully and improve customer satisfaction.

The findings also imply that context-appropriate response help reduce conflict, manage customer emotions, and strengthen service quality. This enhances the overall effectiveness of call center interactions and supports long-term customer trust.

The study of Thomas (1983) explained that pragmatic competence involves understanding how language functions in real social situations, especially in managing politeness, apologies, and clarification. This is evident in the respondents' ability to use suitable expressions during customer interactions.

Table 5: Manifestations of Customer Satisfaction in Communication Behavior

STATEMENTS	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Customers express gratitude at the end of the call.	4.43	Very High
Customers become calmer after I explain the solution clearly.	4.57	Very High
Customers use positive language (e.g., “Thank you,” “That helps a lot”).	4.68	Very High
Customers follow my instructions without resistance.	4.23	High
Customers acknowledge that their issue was resolved.	4.65	Very High
Customers change from a negative tone to a positive tone during the interaction.	4.48	Very High
Customers give high satisfaction ratings after the call.	4.43	Very High

Table 5 presents the manifestations of customer satisfaction as reflected in customers' communication behavior during and after interactions with call center agents. Most of the indicators received a Very High verbal interpretation, indicating that customers generally respond positively to the agents' communication skills and service performance.

Among the statements, “Customers use positive language (e.g., ‘Thank you,’ ‘That helps a lot’)” obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.68, interpreted as Very High. This was followed by “Customers acknowledge that their issue was resolved” with a weighted mean of 4.65, and “Customers become calmer after I explain the solution clearly” with 4.57, both also interpreted as Very High.

The statements “Customers change from a negative tone to a positive tone during the interaction” and “Customers express gratitude at the end of the call” received weighted means of 4.48 and 4.43, respectively, while “Customers give high satisfaction ratings after the call” also obtained 4.43, all verbally interpreted as Very High.

Meanwhile, “Customers follow my instructions without resistance” received the lowest weighted mean of 4.23, with a verbal interpretation of High, indicating that this behavior is less frequently observed compared to the other indicators.

The findings show that respondents are highly effective in creating positive customer experiences through clear, polite, and appropriate communication. Customers often express appreciation, acknowledge issue resolution, and become calmer after receiving clear explanations, showing strong customer satisfaction. The positive shift in customer tone also reflects the agents' strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Although some customers may hesitate to follow instructions, overall results indicate that effective communication greatly improves customer satisfaction and service quality.

It can be inferred that effective sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence among call center agents significantly contributes to customer satisfaction. When agents communicate clearly, use appropriate tone, and respond with empathy, customers are more likely to become calmer, cooperative, and appreciative.

The findings also imply that customer satisfaction is reflected not only in problem resolution but also in emotional and

behavioral responses such as gratitude, acknowledgment, and positive feedback. These serve as strong indicators of successful customer service communication.

The study of Friginal (2009) found that call center agents who demonstrate strong communication skills, politeness, and clarity are more likely to achieve positive customer responses and higher satisfaction ratings. This supports the results showing that customers become calmer and more appreciative after effective communication.

Scripts as a Foundation for Professional Communication

Most participants viewed company scripts as essential tools that provide structure, consistency, and professionalism during customer interactions. Scripts help agents ensure that important information is communicated accurately while maintaining service quality standards. Several respondents emphasized that scripts serve as guides that help them develop confidence, particularly when handling common customer concerns.

Participants generally perceived company scripts as valuable communication frameworks that promote professionalism and consistency in customer service. Scripts provide agents with standardized language, helping them deliver accurate information while ensuring compliance with company policies. For many respondents, scripts served as a foundation for developing communication skills and confidence, especially when dealing with routine customer concerns. The findings suggest that scripts play a significant role in maintaining service quality and reducing communication errors during customer interactions.

Balancing Scripts with Natural Communication

While scripts provide guidance, participants highlighted the importance of adapting them to sound more conversational and authentic. Agents reported modifying their tone, wording, and delivery style to avoid sounding robotic and to create a more comfortable customer experience.

Although company scripts offer structure, respondents emphasized the need to personalize their delivery to maintain natural communication. Many participants described using scripts as references rather than rigid instructions, allowing them to adjust their tone and language according to the customer's personality and situation. This adaptation helps agents establish rapport, create a more engaging conversation, and prevent interactions from

sounding mechanical. The findings indicate that sociolinguistic competence enables agents to balance organizational requirements with authentic customer engagement.

Limitations of Overreliance on Scripts

Several participants acknowledged that excessive dependence on scripts can hinder authentic communication. They noted that strict adherence to scripted responses may restrict self-expression and reduce the ability to respond flexibly to customer needs.

Respondents recognized that while scripts are useful, overreliance on them may negatively affect communication effectiveness. Some participants reported feeling that scripted language did not fully reflect their personality or natural speaking style. Others observed that excessive dependence on scripts could make interactions repetitive, impersonal, and robotic. These findings suggest that successful customer service communication requires agents to move beyond memorization and develop the ability to adapt their responses to dynamic conversational contexts.

Addressing Unique and Complex Customer Concerns

Participants reported going beyond the script when customers presented issues that were not covered by standard procedures or when situations required more detailed explanations. Many respondents indicated that scripted responses are not always sufficient for addressing unique or complex customer concerns. When faced with unusual situations or issues not covered by standard guidelines, agents often modify their communication approach to provide clearer explanations and more relevant solutions. This flexibility enables them to address customers' specific needs more effectively and improve problem resolution outcomes.

Demonstrating Empathy During Emotional Interactions

Respondents frequently mentioned departing from scripts when dealing with frustrated, confused, or emotionally distressed customers. They believed that empathy and personalized communication were essential in such situations.

The findings reveal that emotional customer interactions often require agents to move beyond scripted communication. Participants emphasized the importance of acknowledging customers' feelings, expressing empathy, and adapting their language to the customer's emotional state. By doing so, agents can de-escalate tension, build trust, and foster more positive customer experiences. This highlights the role of emotional intelligence and sociolinguistic competence in effective customer service communication.

Building Rapport and Trust

Participants stated that they go beyond the script to establish stronger customer relationships and create more meaningful interactions. Several respondents reported that personalized communication helps them build rapport and strengthen customer relationships. By adjusting their responses and engaging in more natural conversations, agents can create a sense of connection and trust. This approach allows customers to feel heard, valued, and understood, contributing to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty.

Verbal Confirmation of Resolution

Participants commonly relied on direct customer confirmation that their issue had been resolved before ending the

interaction. Most respondents identified verbal confirmation as a primary indicator of customer satisfaction. Agents typically ask follow-up questions, such as whether the customer's concern has been resolved or whether additional assistance is needed. Positive responses provide assurance that the customer is satisfied with the service received and ready to conclude the interaction.

Positive Tone and Expressions of Appreciation

Participants noted that changes in customers' tone of voice of voice and expressions of gratitude often signal satisfaction. Respondents reported paying close attention to verbal cues, including calmer tones, positive language, and expressions of appreciation. Customers who thank the agent, sound more relaxed, or express satisfaction with the resolution are generally perceived as having positive service experiences. These cues help agents assess customer sentiment beyond direct verbal confirmation.

Absence of Further Concerns

Many participants viewed the lack of additional questions or objections as an indication that the customer's needs had been successfully addressed. Another important indicator of customer satisfaction identified by participants was the absence of unresolved concerns. When customers no longer repeat issues, raise objections, or request further clarification, agents interpret this as evidence that the problem has been adequately resolved. This finding suggests that effective communication contributes to a clear understanding between agents and customers.

Active Listening and Allowing Customers to Express Their Concerns

A dominant theme that emerged from the participants' responses was the importance of active listening when handling difficult or angry customers. Most respondents emphasized allowing customers to express their frustrations without interruption before providing explanations or solutions. This approach helps customers feel heard and understood, reducing emotional tension and creating a more productive interaction. Participants believed that listening attentively enables them to better understand the customer's concerns and identify appropriate resolutions. The findings suggest that active listening serves as a foundational communication strategy for managing challenging customer interactions effectively.

Demonstrating Empathy and Emotional Validation

Another significant theme was the use of empathy to acknowledge customers' emotions and frustrations. Participants reported expressing understanding, offering sincere apologies when appropriate, and validating customers' experiences to establish rapport and trust. Several respondents highlighted the use of empathy-based approaches such as the H.E.A.T. strategy (Hear, Empathize, Apologize, and Take Action) to de-escalate emotionally charged situations. By demonstrating empathy, agents help customers feel respected and valued, which often leads to a reduction in hostility and increased willingness to cooperate in resolving issues.

Maintaining Calmness and Professional Composure

The ability to remain calm and composed emerged as a critical strategy when dealing with difficult customers. Respondents emphasized controlling their emotions, maintaining a respectful tone, and avoiding defensive reactions even when faced with customer anger or frustration. Participants viewed calmness as essential for effective problem-solving because it allows them to

think clearly and respond professionally. The findings indicate that emotional self-regulation enables agents to maintain constructive communication and prevent conflicts from escalating further.

Providing Clear, Honest, and Solution-Oriented Communication

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of providing clear, honest, and solution-focused responses. Rather than making unrealistic promises, respondents preferred explaining situations transparently and outlining practical next steps for resolving customer concerns. Many participants stressed that customers appreciate honesty regarding the status of their issues, even when the information may not be favorable. By focusing on actionable solutions and maintaining transparency, agents can build credibility and reassure customers that their concerns are being addressed effectively.

Patience and Active Listening

Participants emphasized the importance of remaining patient and listening carefully, particularly when dealing with frustrated customers. Many respondents described situations in which patience and active listening played a crucial role in achieving customer satisfaction. By allowing customers to fully explain their concerns and demonstrating genuine attention, agents were able to identify issues more accurately and provide appropriate solutions. These communication skills helped customers feel valued and understood, leading to more positive interactions.

Clear and Effective Explanations

Respondents highlighted the significance of explaining solutions clearly and in a manner that customers could easily understand. The findings indicate that clear communication is essential in resolving customer concerns. Participants reported using simple language, step-by-step instructions, and transparent explanations to help customers understand solutions. This approach reduced confusion, increased customer confidence, and contributed to successful issue resolution.

Empathy and Emotional Management

Many participants described using empathy and emotional support to calm distressed customers and improve customer experiences. Respondents shared experiences in which empathy significantly contributed to customer satisfaction. By acknowledging customers' emotions, maintaining a calm demeanor, and providing reassurance, agents were able to de-escalate difficult situations and foster positive outcomes. These findings demonstrate that emotional management and interpersonal communication skills are critical components of effective customer service.

Taking Ownership and Providing Solutions

Participants emphasized the importance of taking responsibility for customer concerns and ensuring that appropriate actions were taken to resolve issues. Several respondents described situations in which taking ownership of customer concerns led to successful outcomes. Rather than merely following procedures, agents actively coordinated solutions, provided updates, and ensured that issues were fully resolved. This proactive approach increased customer trust and satisfaction, highlighting the importance of accountability in customer service interactions.

Across all responses, a central theme emerged: while company scripts provide a necessary framework for professionalism and consistency, customer satisfaction is primarily achieved through agents' ability to adapt their communication style, demonstrate empathy, build rapport, and personalize interactions according to customer needs. This adaptability reflects the sociolinguistic competence of call center agents and significantly contributes to positive customer experiences.

Challenges That Call Center Agents Encounter In Communicating With the Customers

The findings revealed that one of the major challenges encountered by call center agents is managing customers' negative emotions, particularly when dealing with angry, frustrated, or distressed individuals. Many participants emphasized the importance of allowing customers to vent their concerns before providing explanations or solutions. This suggests that agents frequently face emotionally charged situations where customers express dissatisfaction regarding unresolved issues, delays, or previous unsuccessful interactions. Such encounters require agents to exercise patience and emotional control to prevent the conversation from escalating further.

Another challenge identified was maintaining professionalism under pressure. Participants consistently mentioned the need to remain calm, composed, and respectful despite encountering hostile or confrontational customers. This indicates that agents are often exposed to stressful situations where they must regulate their own emotions while continuing to provide quality service. The necessity of maintaining a professional demeanor, even when customers direct their frustrations toward them, highlights the emotional demands associated with customer service communication.

The responses also suggest that building customer trust through honest communication is a significant challenge. Some participants noted that customers become more frustrated when they receive false promises or unclear information regarding their concerns. As a result, agents must carefully balance honesty and professionalism when communicating unfavorable situations or delays. This challenge requires agents to explain issues transparently while managing customer expectations and preserving confidence in the service being provided.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the challenge of demonstrating empathy while simultaneously resolving customer concerns. The frequent use of active listening, acknowledgment of emotions, apologies, and empathetic statements reflects the need for agents to address not only the technical issue but also the emotional state of the customer. This dual responsibility can be demanding, as agents must ensure that customers feel heard and understood while effectively guiding the conversation toward a resolution.

Another communication challenge evident in the responses is the need to provide clear and understandable explanations. Participants stressed the importance of communicating solutions in a straightforward and respectful manner, particularly when customers are upset or confused. Emotional distress can affect customers' ability to process information, making it necessary for agents to simplify explanations and clearly communicate the next steps. This requires strong communication skills and the ability to adapt messages according to the customer's level of understanding.

Finally, the findings indicate that de-escalating conflicts is a recurring challenge in customer interactions. Participants frequently described using strategies such as active listening, empathy, calmness, and solution-focused communication to manage difficult situations. These responses suggest that agents regularly encounter customers whose emotions can potentially escalate conflicts if not handled appropriately. Therefore, agents must possess effective interpersonal and communication skills to redirect conversations toward constructive outcomes and achieve customer satisfaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that call center agents face various communication challenges that extend beyond simply providing information. These challenges include managing customer emotions, maintaining professionalism under pressure, establishing trust through honest communication, expressing empathy, explaining solutions clearly, and de-escalating conflicts. Collectively, these findings highlight the complex nature of customer service communication and emphasize the importance of sociolinguistic competence, emotional intelligence, and adaptive communication skills in achieving successful customer interactions.

Conclusions

From the light of the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. In conclusion, the findings show that selected call center agents possess a high level of sociolinguistic competence, which plays a vital role in delivering effective customer service and achieving customer satisfaction. Their ability to adjust language use, communication style, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic responses allows them to handle diverse customer concerns professionally and efficiently. By balancing script adherence with personalized communication, they build trust, resolve issues effectively, and create positive customer experiences. The presence of customer gratitude, calmer interactions, successful issue resolution, and high satisfaction ratings confirms that strong sociolinguistic competence directly improves service quality and overall customer satisfaction.

2. Company scripts play an important role in helping call center agents deliver clear, professional, and consistent customer service. While scripts provide structure and confidence, effective communication depends on the agents' ability to use them flexibly and naturally. By going beyond the script when necessary, showing empathy, staying calm, and focusing on solutions, agents can handle difficult situations more effectively and build stronger customer trust. Positive customer responses such as gratitude, calmer behavior, and confirmed issue resolution show that strong communication skills significantly contribute to better service quality and higher customer satisfaction.

3. The findings show that call center agents face several communication challenges when handling difficult or angry customers. These include managing negative emotions, maintaining professionalism under pressure, handling unrealistic expectations, balancing empathy with problem-solving, ensuring clear communication, and de-escalating conflicts. Overall, these challenges are both emotional and interpersonal, requiring strong emotional control, empathy, and sociolinguistic competence to achieve effective and satisfactory customer interactions.

4. Instructional materials such as modules can be used to enhance the sociolinguistic competence of call center agents by addressing real workplace communication challenges. These materials should focus on balancing script use with natural communication, managing emotions in customer interactions, and applying appropriate language in different contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Call center companies should continue strengthening agents' sociolinguistic competence through regular communication skills training focused on language use, cultural sensitivity, code-switching, and pragmatic competence. Agents should be encouraged to balance script adherence with personalized communication to improve customer interactions. Regular coaching, role-playing, and performance evaluations, along with an accessible Learning Centre Program, can support continuous learning, better service quality, and higher customer satisfaction.

2. It is recommended that call center companies train agents to use company scripts as flexible guides rather than fixed responses. Agents should be encouraged to develop empathy, active listening, and problem-solving skills to handle customer concerns more naturally and effectively. Regular coaching and communication training can help improve service quality, strengthen customer trust, and increase customer satisfaction.

3. It is recommended that call center companies provide continuous training to enhance agents' sociolinguistic competence, focusing on emotional regulation, professionalism, and effective communication in handling difficult customers. Training should emphasize empathy, active listening, and de-escalation strategies, supported by role-playing and real-life simulations. Companies should also reinforce clear and honest communication to manage customer expectations and reduce misunderstandings.

4. It is recommended that the training module titled "Enhancing Sociolinguistic Competence for Effective Customer Communication in the Call Center Industry" be utilized by call center companies and training institutions to strengthen agents' communication skills. The module was developed based on the findings of this study and is designed to enhance sociolinguistic competence, particularly in language appropriateness, code-switching and style shifting, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic competence. Its implementation may contribute to more effective customer interactions, improved service quality, and increased professional communication among call center agents.

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