

“Maam, let me tell you our story”: Analyzing interpersonal relationship and recount structure in American-Filipino call centre complaint conversations

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Abstract

Call centre conversation is a newly emerging workplace discourse. These conversations usually involve a wide range of customer service enquiries and problem-solving goals. The Customer Service Representative (CSR) needs to maintain positive interpersonal interaction with the customer. The major aim of the present study is to find typical interpersonal features which are used by the Filipino CSR and the American customer to make meanings at points of complaint in the call centre conversations. This article firstly investigates the authentic working environment in several reputable call centre service encounters in China, The Philippines and Hong Kong. Participants such as Head of Client Relations and Service Platform Officer were interviewed about the work dynamics, training sections and language used in the call centre. The structure of the calls termed *Customer Interaction Process* and negotiation features from insiders' perceptive are discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2. Later, sections 4.3 and 4.4 indicate that customers frequently use recount strategy and different Appraisal resources to express their negative experience and frustration. The theoretical framework draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Twenty representative calls with complex negotiation were selected and transcribed among about 2000 calls of English conversations from an insurance call centre in the Philippines. The outcomes of this study are twofold: 1) an attempt is made to contribute to applied linguistics; and 2) this in-depth analysis is to support the linguistic service offered by the call centre industry.

1. Introduction

Globalization, the availability of overseas expertise, and huge advances in communication technology, especially recent developments in the Information Technology Enabled Services industry, have led to many multi-national companies outsourcing a range of business services, especially customer services, to Asian countries, such as the Philippines, India and China, mainly to reduce costs (O'Neil, 2003; Richardson & Howcroft, 2006; Vaish, 2008; Velamuri, 2004). Telephone call centres in Asia have seen rapid growth over the last few decades (Elzingre, 2009). However, this growth is not always a positive story, as criticism of

the offshoring and outsourcing of work is often reported in the press (e.g., Lee, 2006; Velamuri, 2004). According to *The Business Times* (2008, December 18), about 38 percent of respondents from five Asia-Pacific countries indicated that they intend to switch business to a competitor in the next year because of poor customer service. Maintaining a satisfied customer can often be very difficult when the customers face communicative challenges incurred in trying to receive customer service over the phone (Burns, 1997; Fuller & Smith, 1991; Pal & Buzzanell, 2008). The customer service representatives (CSR) need to deliver their service, together with care and empathy, through telephone lines.

The call centre industry deserves special attention; however, management focus has been on product knowledge and technological support. To date, call centre research has mainly been undertaken in the business and management field (e.g., Irish, 2000; Knights & McCabe, 1998; Taylor & Bain, 1999). Linguistic studies have started to scratch the surface of call centre conversations, and some have started to discuss issues of language and “complaints”. From my field visits to some call centres, a linguistic definition of complaint as realised by language is absent. The present study gathered detailed insider information from call centre managers, supervisors and CSRs about negotiation and conducted text analysis of the spoken data of authentic calls. The resulting data indicates an important niche in call centre discourse.

2. Literature Review

This section outlines call centre functions and the key driving forces in the growth of the call centre industry in Asia. Some language challenges due to cultural differences will also be discussed.

2.1 Call centres and their functions

A typical call centre is equipped with computers and automatic telephone systems. CSRs and supervisors, who are equipped with a headset, provide customer service through a telephone line (Jones, 1999). CSRs handle telephone conversations with the public (Mirchandani & Poster, 2016). CSRs are required to handle an extensive range of customer enquiries with sufficient product knowledge, satisfactory language skills and quick but reliable answers (Ambriola, Bertagnini, & Pratesi, 2003; Mirchandani, & Poster, 2016). Today, the call centre services being provided are diversified, complex and high value-added, handling sales, bank enquiries, insurance claims, customer service, telemarketing and investment (Aksin, Armony, & Mehrotra, 2007; Jones, 1999; MacDonald & Sirianni, 1996). Thus, an offshore call centre functions as a primary way of interacting with overseas customers through spoken exchanges via telephone.

2.2 Call Centres in Asia

United States- and Europe-based companies have developed a preference for offshoring some of their business by setting up call centres in Asian countries. The market share of Indian call centres is the largest in the world, as India is currently responsible for about 25 percent of the worldwide outsourced IETS markets (Russell & Thite, 2008; Thite & Russell, 2007). Back office work, for example, financial and technical support, has been successfully outsourced to India (Durfee, 2004), while “telecoms, retailing, utilities, IT, airlines and software have also seen much migration” (Nasscom, 2002, p. 21). As India has the most successful call centre industry in the world, the experience from Indian call centres has been used as a blueprint to develop call centres across Asia, especially in the Philippines.

In addition, higher-end work such as insurance and retail banking is prominent in the call centre industry because of “the high proportion of processes and services that can be outsourced overseas” (Nasscom, 2003, p. 65). The Philippines has rapidly emerged as the main competitor of India in business-process outsourcing (BPO) (Economist.com, August 16, 2007). Low labour cost is one possible reason. Among Asian countries, the Philippines has the second-lowest hourly wage, which is at 13 percent of the US level, for offshored professional services (Beshouri, Farrell, & Umezawa, 2005). Call centres in the Philippines provide work for 1 million workers and serve a bigger portion of the world’s BPO market despite the recent global financial crisis (Elzingre, 2009). This focus on reducing cost and operational efficiencies in recessionary environments is anticipated to increase (Dongier & Sudan, 2009; Nasscom, 2009). Call centres in China are a rapidly emerging industry which is possibly the next offshore focus (Velamuri, 2004). Hundley (2005) reported that American Express runs a travel service call centre in China with a workforce that is 85 percent female and on average about 24 years old. This can be attributed to the higher level of English proficiency of the younger generation, who are thus better able to understand customers’ enquiries in English (Hundley, 2005). Hiring young graduates as CSRs seems to be a common recruitment practice in the call centre industry in both China and the Philippines.

2.3 Language Challenges due to Cultural Differences

Call centres can be operated in any language. However, due to globalization, the opportunity for offshoring and outsourcing to destinations where the CSR is a non-native English speaker has increased sharply. This is because English is used as a lingua franca (Crystal, 2003). The term lingua franca usually means “any lingual medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language” (Samarin, 1987, p. 371). It is the language of choice in international business communication (Phillipson, 2004) and a “language with which to interact with the wider world community” (Kenny & Savage, 1997, p. 314). However, Alexander (1999) suggested that there are “some drawbacks from

individuals possibly directly translating their native language into English and then ending with verbs, prepositions and adverbs strung together in an unfamiliar way” (p. 79). Alexander (1999) and Poster (2007) urged that this kind of direct translation from first language to second language be interpreted as a challenge by worldwide professional communicators. Pan, Wong-Scollon, and Scollon (2002) stated that in making telephone calls, speakers should pay attention to situational, relational and cultural differences. They argued that this is because telephone conversations are directed by the cultural norms of language choices within a given society (Pan et al., 2002). It is notable that one word can have more than one meaning, and can be interpreted very differently than intended. Pan et al. (2002) recalled that there is a US company which requires their Chinese employees to use *please* and *thank you* in customer conversations. However, overuse of these phrases can be perceived as intended to create social distance instead of politeness in Chinese culture. Pan et al. (2002) indicated the shortcomings of transferring the scripts and standards of one cultural setting directly to another. Schelmetic (2005) suggested tailoring customer care to potential customers. That means the call centre industry must pay attention to the language of the workplace and to meaning-making in different cultural contexts, as argued by Scollon and Scollon (2001). Therefore, more studies should be undertaken in specific cultural and national contexts to understand language issues and how interpersonal relationships are constructed.

3. Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative research approach which enabled me to arrive at individual interpretations of events and phenomena, and thus I can concentrate on discovering insights which emerge from the data. I visited several medium-sized call centres in Hong Kong, mainland China and the Philippines from 2006 to 2013. Table 1 provides the basic information about the duration, business types, size and interviewees of call centres involved in the field visits. Field notes contribute to the present study by keeping a record of the observations, for example, settings, discussion, and participants’ behaviour (Silverman, 2000). During my field visits to authentic call centres, numerous call centre supervisors and CSRs were performing their duties. The duration of each visit ranged from half a day to a whole night shift.

Table 1. Details of Call Centre Visits

Call Centre (Location)	Duration / Business type(s) / Size of centre	Interviewee(s) / Coding (s)
C1 (Hong Kong, China)	Half-day visit / Investment (<30 seats)	1) Head of Client Relations / C1INF1 2) Service Platform Maintenance/ C1INF2 3) Call Centre Operations Manager/ C1INF3
C2 (Hong Kong & Shenzhen, China)	Half-day visit Whole-day visit / Telephone (<1200 seats)	1) Sales and Service Manager /C2INF1 2) VP in Product & Marketing Management, Contact Centre Business /C2INF2 3) Fault Reporting Department Supervisor/ C2INF3
C3 (Shenzhen, China)	Whole-day visit / Multi-category (<200 seats)	1) General Manager / C3INF1 2) Marketing Department Manager / C3INF2 3) Off-shore Business Department Manager/ C3INF3
C4 (Manila, the Philippines)	Whole-night shift / Multi-category (<3,000 seats)	1) Operations Manager / C4INF1 2) English Specialist Team Supervisor / C4INF2 3) English Specialist Team Leader / C4INF3 4) English Specialist / C4INF4 5) English Specialist / C4INF5 6) English Specialist / C4INF6

In Table 1, “C” stands for call centre, for example, *C1* refers to *Call Centre 1*. “Seat” refers to the number of CSRs in each centre. Generally, the number of seats implies the size of the company. Brief descriptions of these four call centres are as follows:

Call centre 1 (henceforth C1) is a Hong Kong-based investment company located in the central business district. Its businesses include outbound telemarketing and inbound investment plan enquiries. CSRs in C1 are mainly professional financial consultants. C1 management hires university graduates, preferably from finance or business disciplines with knowledge and experience in the investment industry. The languages of their telephone customer services are mainly Cantonese and rarely Putonghua and English. The number of English-language calls received was only about 5 to 10 percent, and Putonghua calls were less than 1.5 to 5 percent of the total calls received.

Call centre 2 (henceforth C2) is a large-scale telecommunications company. The parent company is in Hong Kong with an offshore call centre located in Guangzhou, China. Call centres in Guangzhou and Hong Kong serve businesses in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Their businesses include enquiries concerning public telephone directory, mobile phones, Internet support, airline frequent flyer membership and banking. The telephone customer services are conducted in Cantonese and Putonghua, with English only representing a small proportion of calls.

Call centre 3 (henceforth C3) is a middle-size outsourcing third party call centre operator located in mainland China. A third-party operator is a BPO organization contracted to perform back office work for a vendor (Forey, 2010). They mainly focus on the Chinese market, and the business ranges from taking fast food orders to data entry, technical support and internet support. They help companies set up call centres and provide equipment, consultation and training materials. The languages of the telephone customer service are Putonghua, Cantonese and English.

Call centre 4 (henceforth C4) is a multi-business call centre company located in the Philippines. The first language of the Filipino CSR is Tagalog or some regional dialect spoken in the Philippines. However, the target customer in C4 is in the United States, and most customers' first language is English. The operational language spoken in call centres is dependent on the location of the target customers and the first language of these customers. The operational language of these calls is mainly English. Compared to the operational language of C1 and C2, C4 has a more difficult language aspect. Filipino CSRs need to use English to communicate with American clients, and so the tasks performed by them are more challenging as they have to use their L2, i.e., English, to communicate. In addition, the Philippines call centres mainly operate at night because of the time difference between the Philippines and the United States. The operation manager, C4INF1, indicated that "The peak hours include 8 p.m., 9 p.m., and 10 p.m." These peak times vary depending on whether the account is serving the east coast or the west coast of the United States.

In addition, the spoken data from the present study mainly came from an English-language insurance call centre in the Philippines. The data are audio recordings of Filipino Customer Service Representatives (CSR) and English-speaking American customers interacting in commercial customer-service phone-in enquiries. A text analysis of salient linguistic features was undertaken by drawing on SFL theory. An SFL-style analysis of texts can "make explicit the relations between meaning constructed at clause level and meaning at the 'larger' levels [paragraphs and text] which in turn can be systematically related to the specified elements of the context" (Harvey, 1993, p. 25). Audio-taped transcriptions of call centre transactions were used to investigate interpersonal meaning (Halliday, 1994; Martin, 2001). From about 2,000 calls, 20 representative calls, all with complex negotiation, were selected. The spoken data consists of 20 conversations comprising approximately four hours of talk, with transcripts running to 39,000 words. The average handling time (AHT) of a call is 12

minutes. The conversations involve 45 participants: 20 Filipino CSR, 3 supervisors and 22 American customers.

4. Findings and Discussion

The call structure termed *Customer Interaction Process* and specific negotiation features from insiders' perceptive are analysed in sections 4.1 and 4.2. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 report that customers frequently use recount strategy and lexicogrammatical choices to express their unsatisfactory experience and frustration.

4.1 Customer Interaction Process

Related materials from previous field visits termed *Customer Interaction Process* in C1 were extracted to provide a basic understanding of the schematic structure of call centre conversations in the present study. C1 is an investment company and has an outbound financial telemarketing function. The CSR and management from C1 had experience of handling high-value calls. Trainers in C1 classified the steps of calls, termed *Customer Interaction Process*, namely *Greeting* ^ *Understanding needs* ^ *Presenting solutions and options* ^ *Confirming and committing* ^ *Closing*. The details of these stages are as follows:

Greeting, for example, saying *good morning* and *good afternoon* in a clear, polite, slow and pleasant manner, is the first step in the conversation (cf. Forey & Lockwood, 2007; Lockwood et al., 2009). As an interviewee, C1INF1, Head of Client Relations, stated, "The CSR may mumble and become unclear after repeating the greetings a hundred times. The CSR will then be the only one to hear the greeting but not the caller." In call centres, the scorecard technique is often used to assess the language skills of the CSR (Lockwood et al., 2009). As shown on their scorecard, marks will be deducted on the scorecard if the CSR uses a wrong tone in greeting the caller. Therefore, CSRs should maintain their greetings with appropriate rhythm and voice quality. In addition, at this stage, the CSR is required to ask the customer's first name and to make use of it. "This is to eliminate nervousness, establish trust and rapport," the C1INF1 emphasized. Setting up a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for calls is a way of making the customer feel comfortable and intended to open space for further discussion.

In the next stage, *Understanding needs*, the CSR usually spends nearly 50 to 75 percent of the call time to identify and to understand the customer's authentic needs, investment goals and investment horizon. The crucial strategy at this stage is to listen to the real needs of the customer. "One of the biggest mistakes is that the CSR talks too much and listens too little", explained C1INF1. For example, since C1 is a financial company, the client may ask, "What is the best fund today?" A wide range of possible beneficial funds exist in the market, and the one

which suits an individual's need may vary from person to person. Here, listening applies not only to the question, but the CSR also needs to discover the underlying meaning and implied attitude of the caller. The CSR should sell investment by consultation rather than by employing the hard sell. The C1INF3 supervisor pointed out that generally clients are nicer and more cooperative when the CSR seeks their permission to ask questions at the beginning. If the CSR does not seek prior consent, the client may only answer the first and second question. However, if the CSR then asks a third question, the client may lose patience. C1INF1, Head of Client Relations, demonstrated the CSR conversation, "...I'm going to ask you a few questions. This may take some time. So I can help you better, I would like to introduce our plans to you". In addition, open-ended questions and closed-ended questions are used in different situations. Open-ended questions are used during difficult situations, for example, while closed-ended questions are used when the caller is quiet and shy during the interaction. Sometimes customers do not know how to express their inquiries. If the CSR recognizes that the meaning of the caller is not well-expressed, or if the caller hesitates, there could be some implicit meaning. Hence the CSR must pay attention to the sentence structure and questions from the caller. It is important for the CSR to check by paraphrasing, for example, "Did you mean that..." Above all, the CSR should always respect the client's time. Only if the customer says *yes*, can the CSR talk more. If not, they should suggest an alternative time for further discussion.

In the *Presenting solutions and options* stage, appropriate techniques, such as emphatic and high-impact language, are needed to show care and concern over the telephone. "The right tone is important to show empathy. Jargon – that is a technical term used by particular groups of people, especially in their work – is also best avoided", stated the C1INF1. "Right tone" probably refers to an appropriate voice quality which conveys the CSR's commitment and enthusiasm for their product towards the customer. This strategy can help to construe a favourable and positive interpersonal relationship.

The stage *Confirming and committing* checks understanding and seeks agreement from the customer. This stage is essential in call centre customer service. The CSR must manage reasonable expectations from customers by making specific comments and suggest concrete follow-up actions at the most appropriate time. In C1, the name of the CSR will be provided to the customer such as "Please give me a call, my name is ..." to take personal responsibility. The call centre supervisor emphasized that the CSR should call at the most appropriate time. For instance, "Can I call you next week? When will be a more suitable time to call back?" Otherwise CSRs may bother the client and perhaps jeopardise their sales.

Closing is the last stage of the *Customer Interaction Process* in C1. At the end of the call, the

CSR is required to ask if any additional help is required, to show their appreciation for the current call and to provide their direct extension for a follow-up call.

Based on these industry training materials, the *Customer Interaction Process* in C1 has high pedagogical value to CSRs in terms of the basic text structure of the calls. It is also important for the call centre industry to understand the staging of the call and its social purposes, and the specific lexicogrammatical features of authentic conversation data. Emerging from the data was the need to further focus on points of negotiation in call centre conversations.

4.2 Understanding of Negotiation in Call Centre Conversations

Call centres tend to use the term “communication breakdown” more than “complaint” to sound positive, although these terms refer to similar concepts. The C2 management was not even willing to use the term “complaint”. The company preferred to call a complaint “objection handling”, which was interpreted as less offensive, as clarified by a supervisor from the Fault Reporting Department (C2INF3). Perhaps “objection handling” is more easily accepted by their shareholders and the public. The supervisor believed that the most common form of complaint experienced by the CSR was realised by the customer shouting at the CSR and the frequent use of foul language. In my visits to call centres “complaints”, “objections”, “communication breakdown”, or variants thereof, were seen to be extremely problematic for the customer, the organization and the CSR. Although there may be some variants in how these terms are used, and indeed what they refer to, I will use the term “negotiation” in the present study to refer to exchanges in the call where the customer and the CSR have a difference of opinion. The findings from the field visits also indicated that the extent to which organisations viewed language choices which construe negative attitude appeared to be lacking systematic investigation and were often based purely on intuition. It is also evident from the literature that little is known about the structure, goals, and language resources of authentic complaint calls.

The present study views complaint calls as calls involving complex negotiation. “Negotiation is concerned with resources for exchanging information and goods and services in dialogue” (Martin, 2002, p. 55). In the present study, expected and discretionary responses (see Halliday, 1985; Ventola, 1988) are very relevant to the study of negotiation. These responses are used to study the dialogic nature of conversation. While the expected responses include “accepting an offer, carrying out a command” (Halliday, 1994, p. 69), the discretionary responses are “rejecting an offer and carrying out a command” (Halliday, 1994, p. 69). In the call centre conversations of the present study, the customers present commands and the CSRs provide offers in general calls. Here, “general calls” refers to action and knowledge exchanges which are completed with many expected responses “obeying” the command instantly. The

problems or enquiries can be solved within a few turns. For example, in Transcript 19, a customer asks “*Can you send this letter through email?*”; the CSR responds, “*Oh sure*”. In complex calls, the CSRs may refuse to take the command, or the customers may reject the offer. These discretionary responses obstruct the anticipated exchanges (Burton, 1980) and thus lead to a further negotiation. For example, in Transcript 6, the CSR asks, “*May I have your date of birth?*” The customer refuses immediately, saying, “*I’m not I’m not going to give you my date of birth because you sent me a paper work on a policy I have no ideas who owns*”. In the data, general calls have many expected responses, and complex calls have many discretionary responses. In general calls, commands usually consist of a high degree of alignment and agreement, whereas complex calls consist of many discretionary responses in which the exchanges can be incomplete. Complex calls have been selected as the data for the present study. In the following sections, recount structure and some lexicogrammatical features in complex calls will be discussed.

4.3 Recount structure

This sub-section focuses on analysing the stages of *Understanding needs* and *Presenting solution*. The results indicated that customers frequently use recount. Recounts, as part of experiential meanings, are frequently associated with delayed refusal, with a challenge in exchange structure. Two types of recounts are identified: “event recount”, which is relatively explicit and factual, and “personal recount”, which is relatively implicit and personal. These recounts can also be realised “on the lexicogrammatical stratum” with an affirmative/negative choice in the system of polarity in the mood network (Ventola, 1987, p. 91 and see Martin, 1981).

In *Understanding needs* stage, the customer tells the CSR of an event/event(s) which he or she has experienced. This kind of recount is called event recount in the present study. In the spoken data, “event recounts” are generally related to the unsatisfactory performance of CSRs encountered previously. If the customer is not satisfied with work previously provided by CSRs, they complain by recounting what has happened. In transcript 10, the customer (C10) recounts the experience of talking to various CSRs: “*I can fill this out, but I have talked to Mable, I talked to Jennifer, I talked to Mable last week, I have talked to you before. I talked to a Peter before, and they were all going to send this information to me and I had not received yet.*” One significant lexicogrammatical feature of this recount structure is the frequent use of parallel structure. The customer (C10) used the parallel structure *I talked to / have talked to* for developing and displaying the seriousness of the problem. The objection in this turn hits its peak when it comes to “*...they were all going to send this information to me and I had not received yet.*” In this example, past, past perfect and past continuous tense are employed to shape the time sequence. Other common lexicogrammatical features of the event recount are

the use of negative polarity and personal pronouns “*I didn’t call,*” reported speech and repetition. Thus, an event recount serves to recap the problem. Most importantly, at the end of the recount, the customer aims to point out a huge difference between their expectations and the reality.

Family or personal recounts, on the other hand, are about the caller’s unfortunate personal experience and/or related family background. The main function of these personal recounts is to seek empathy from the CSR. For example, in Example 1, Transcript 5, turn 102, C5 supplies more personal information about her son, another policy holder, to object to the company’s policy of not paying tax: “*He’s just going through a divorce. And he has no money.*” Later in this example, the customer initiates an exchange: “*Now who’s supposed to pay his taxes? My husband or him?*”

Example 1 (Transcript 5)

turn 96	C5	So what’s happening now? This this is completely depleted, right?
turn 97	R5	Yes, it is completely depleted
turn 98	C5	Now we doesn’t have anything there anymore
turn 99	R5	No
turn 100	C5	so but I still have to pay taxes on 1300 dollars?
turn 101	R5	Yes
turn 102	C5	This is not right hahaha ma’am let me tell you our story he’s just going through a divorce. And he has no money, em, now who’s supposed to pay his taxes? My husband or him?

In turn 102, C5 provides extra personal information to R5; clearly this is not a knowledge exchange of new information. In fact, it is unessential for the CSR to be informed about her personal background in order to process the call. C5 expresses her true underlying purpose after using another concessive, “*...ma’am let me tell you our story he’s just going through a divorce.*” This personal recount can be interpreted as a way to seek alignment and understanding from the CSR. The customer intends to seek personal empathy from the CSR that goes beyond the institutional boundary. This expression is relatively implicit. The affective involvement in a personal recount is much higher than in an event recount. Semantically, these recounts help to establish an image of a helpless and weak person. These recount turns function to reflect the severity of the misery and more importantly to urge the CSR to take action to solve the current problem, such as taking it to the *Servicing stage*. However, the present study believes that the more helpless an image the customer can shape, the more powerful they may appear in order to demand immediate solutions from the company.

4.4 Appraisal Analysis

Analysing lexicogrammatical features of texts can help us to understand the attitude of speakers. The present study shares a view with Stubbs (1996) that, “Whenever speakers (or writers) say anything, they encode their point of view towards it” (p. 197). This section studies how the CSR and the customer negotiate interpersonal meaning by using different lexicogrammatical features in the *Understanding needs* and *Presenting solution* stages in complex calls. I carried out an analysis of texts in terms of a system of Appraisal (Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005) to explain and illustrate the use of interpersonal lexicogrammatical choices. Several categories have been used frequently, such as intensifier, number and quantity, tense, temporal adjuncts, modal finite and evaluative lexis. In the stages of *Understanding needs* and *Presenting solution*, there are more evaluative lexis than in other stages. In Sections 4.4.1-4.4.3, examples of Appraisal resources were taken from the 20 transcripts to explain interpersonal meaning in complex calls. The findings show that the explicit Attitude resources that were identified in the data were limited. One reason for this is that both the CSR and the customer want to maintain professional and rational discourse strategies to achieve their respective goals.

4.4.1 Affect Analysis

The Appraisal, which belongs to the interpersonal metafunction, focuses on attitude (Martin, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2003). In the following tables, Appraisal resources are interpreted as critical moments of negotiation were displayed. These key resources have to do with “evaluation of things, people’s character and their feelings” (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 7). Affect is to do with positive and negative emotion in areas of “inclination/disinclination”, “happiness/unhappiness” and “security/insecurity” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 66).

Table 2. Appraisal Resources of Affect: Inclination/Disinclination (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 66)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Affect: disinclination	T7/T85/C7	aggravated	delayed confirmation letter
	T11/T40/C11	crazy	feeling
	T14/T143/C14	don't like	feeling
	T18/T74/C18	don't like	CSR's attitude
	T9/T35/C9	don't wanna pay	child's policy
	T7/T32/C7	fed up	prior CSR
	T7/T85/C7	fuss	CSR
	T7/T73/C7	hate to go through	customer telephone system
	T18/T74/C18	none of your business	handling
	T15/T134/C15	oh man	feeling
Affect: inclination	T13/T88/C13	serious	thought
	T14/T39/R14	good	handling

Table 2 lists lexical items such as *aggravated*, *crazy*, *don't like*, *fed up*, *fuss*, *hate*, *none of your business* which are used to appraise the callers' negative emotions. Occasionally words which embed a negative disinclination towards the caller's inner feelings, the CSR's attitude and performance, the insurance policy and delayed handling are found in the data.

Table 3. Appraisal Resources of Affect: Happiness/Unhappiness (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 66)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Affect: unhappiness	T8/T66/C8	aggravated	prior CSR
	T8/T56/C8	aggravating	payment
	T8/T68/C8	aggravating	problem
	T11/T6/C11	bothering	feeling
	T11/T62/C11	bothers me	feeling
	T8/T68/C8	depressing	problem
	T7/T75/C7	highly upset	prior CSR
	T17/T78/C17	Jesus Christ	feeling
	T13/T88/C13	laugh	policy
	T19/T64/C19	not very good	feeling
	T9/T26/C9	oh dear God	feeling
	T8/T199/C8	oh Jesus	feeling
	T7/T32/C7	put out with	prior CSR
	T2/T41/R2	sorry	problem
Affect: happiness	T7/T81/C7	appreciated	current CSR

The feeling of unhappiness is usually expressed by the customer. Table 3 shows a list of words that negatively appraise the feeling of the caller towards the CSR, payment, problem and policy. Some common items include *aggravated/aggravating*, *bother*, *depressing*, *highly upset*, *sorry*, *put out with*, *Jesus Christ*, *oh dear God* and *oh Jesus*. A positive affect item, *appreciated*, is used to describe the caller's feelings towards the current CSR.

Table 4. Appraisal resources of Affect: Security/Insecurity (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 66)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Affect: insecurity	T6/T35/C6*	are so screwed up	her situation
	T8/T96/C8	confused	cost
	T8/T109/C8	confused	feeling
	T10/T20/C10	confused	feeling
	T16/T45/R16	confused	feeling
	T12/T143/C12	confusing	feeling
	T13/T69/R13	confusing	feeling
	T15/T135/R15	confusing	feeling
	T16/T46/C16	confusing	feeling
	T6/T39/C6*	don't give, ah, me any confidence	company
	T15/T135/R15	frustrating	feeling
	T13/T40/C13	god forbid	problem
	T5/T73/R5	puzzling	customer's experience
	T6/T35/C6*	scary	her situation
T10/T24/C10	totally lost	feeling	
Affect: security	T2/T40/C2	assured	policy holder

An Appraisal analysis can also appraise the insecurity of personal feelings (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 66). Table 4 shows that both the customer and the CSR use Appraisal items to show their insecure feelings towards their situations, the company, the problem and the policy. Examples include *are screwed up*, *confused/confusing*, *don't give, ah, me any confidence*, *frustrating*, *God forbid*, *puzzling*, *scary*, *totally lost*, and so on. Common lexicogrammatical features can be frequently found, which are *confusing/confused* to describe the feeling of insecurity. The uncertainty of the unsolved problem makes people become insecure. To summarise the use of affect, subcategories of disinclination (e.g., *don't like*, *don't wanna*), unhappiness (e.g. *bothers*, *aggravated*) and insecurity (e.g., *confused/confusing*) are used by the customer to project their negative feelings.

4.4.2 Judgment Analysis

Judgment refers to the lexical items that help to reflect human behaviour and character in terms of “the ability”, “the tenacity”, “the normality”, and “the ethical standard” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 68).

Table 5. Appraisal Resources of Judgment: Ability/Inability (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 68)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Judgment: inability	T2/T40/C2	barely	make
	T2/T40/C2	blind	health
	T7/T79/C7	could screw things up	company
	T2/T52/C2	failing	my eye sight
	T17/T90/C17	pissed me off	behaviour of CSR
	T2/T40/C2	practically	blind
Judgment: ability	T20/T149/C20*	beautiful job	performance
	T2/T52/C2	good	mind
	T7/T81/C7	helpful	current CSR

In a personal recount, the customer tends to negatively judge his/her health condition, using words such as *practically blind/blind* to evaluate *failing* eye sight, which is a common signifier of aging and being powerless. These Appraisal items of Judgment (inability) function to seek empathy from the current CSR and to urge the CSR to provide further services. However, Table 5 also illustrates that the customer tends to use positive judgment items to appraise help from the current CSR such as *did a beautiful job* and *helpful*. Thus the customer is interacting interpersonally to allow for reciprocation and a smoother interaction.

Table 6. Appraisal Resources of Judgment: Normality/Abnormality (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 68)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Judgment: abnormality	T11/T76/C11	absurdity	policy
	T5/T94/C5	confusing	explanation
	T15/T66/T15	don't want	sign a document
	T6/T8/C6	fooled the hell out of me	death
	T15/T96/C15	ridiculous	unfair treatment
	T7/T119/C7	shoot out	processing
	T11/T58/C11	strange	prior CSRs
	T11/T98/C11	unusual	occurrence
	T7/T119/C7	wrong	processing

In the complex call, the customer uses negative judgment resources to indicate an abnormal occurrence or abnormal processing, for example, *absurdity*, *confusing*, *ridiculous*, *strange*, *unusual* and *wrong* as shown in Table 6.

Table 7. Appraisal Resources of Judgment: Ethical/ Unethical Standard (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 68)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Judgment: unethical standard	T7/T81/C7	has lied to me	a CSR who a customer has previously spoken to
	T7/T111/C7	strung me along	a CSR who a customer has previously spoken to
	T1/T50/C1	unacceptable	drawing money
	T7/T46/C7	was misled	experience

The last subcategory of Judgment to be considered is unethical standard, as shown in Table 7. In the call centre conversation, the customer may make strong objections to the company relating to allegedly unethical behaviour such as (a CSR who a customer has previously spoken to) *has lied to me*, *strung me along*, *(I) was misled*, and (this behaviour) *is unacceptable*. However, instances of this subcategory are few in the data, perhaps because it is a very serious allegation, and potentially exposes the customer to legal action. The customer is more careful in using this subcategory than the subcategories of normality and abnormality.

To summarise, the use of Judgment in call centre spoken data, subcategories of which refer to the inability of a CSR(s) previously spoken to, the company and own health (e.g. *blind*, *pissed me off*), the abnormality of processing (e.g., *ridiculous*, *unusual*), together with

reference to allegedly unethical behaviour (e.g., *lied to me, was misled*) are used by the customer in the stages *Understanding needs* and *Presenting solutions* to express their judgment of another's behaviour.

4.4.3 Appreciation Analysis

Appreciation refers to how the speakers evaluate the worth of things (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 69), for example, the quality of the call or service.

Table 8. Appraisal Resources of Appreciation: Reaction (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 69)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Appreciation: reaction	T8/T215/C8	it doesn't make any sense	policy
	T20/T28/C20	oh God	different address
	T20/T28/C20	oh goodness gracious	different address
	T20/T46/C20	oh my goodness	different address
	T17/T56/C17	unbelievable	amount of time
	T17/T90/C17	unbelievable	amount of time

Appreciation (reaction) helps to indicate positive and negative mental reactions to things, for example, the policy in call centre data. Table 8 mainly shows the negative reactions of the customers to issues pertaining to their policy, address and time. For example, the customers use *it doesn't make any sense, oh God, oh goodness gracious, oh my goodness*, and *unbelievable* to display their negative reaction to any situation.

Table 9. Appraisal Resources of Appreciation: Composition (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 69)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript/ turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Appreciation: Composition	T7/T50/C7	has been messed up	Policy
	T7/T69/C7	a huge mess	a confirmation letter

Table 9 shows how customers express their Appreciation items in appraising things such as a policy or a confirmation letter. The customers use expressions such as *has been messed up* and *a huge mess* to negatively appraise how the different parts of policy and process are organized.

Table 10. Appraisal Resources of Appreciation: Valuation (adapted from Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 69)

Category: subcategory of lexical items	Transcript / turn / speaker	Lexical items	Appraised
Appreciation: Valuation	T13/T23/C13	active	policy
	T14/T26/C14	correct	beneficiary information
	T20/T41/R20	correct	checking
	T11/T74/C11	useful	policy
Appreciation: negative valuation	T13/T68/C13	bad	starting of the policy
	T13/T78/C13	bad	handling
	T17/T56/C17	bad	connection
	T8/T22/C8	beans	policy
	T17/T86/C17	bullshit	automated phone system
	T17/T90/C17	crap	information
	T13/T88/C13	funny	handling
	T15/T92/C15	funny	thing
	T17/T90/C17	gimmick	handling
	T20/T92/C20	hard	reading
	T18/T42/C18	hassle	policy
	T19/T62/C19	high	shrill
	T7/T38/C7	important	legal matter
	T7/T119/C7	large	company
	T17/T28/C17	ridiculous	payment
	T4/T2/C4	serious	problem
	T2/T92/C2	surprise	policy
	T20/T92/C20	teeny tiny	words
T6/T46/C6	wrong	information	
T16/T79/R16	wrong	information	

Appreciation (valuation) can be used to appraise the positive and negative attitudes of the speaker towards the thing (Martin & Rose, 2003, 2007). As shown in Table 10, positive valuations include *active* and *useful* (policy) and *correct* (information). There is a high frequency of negative valuation. There are direct and explicit valuations, such as *bad*, *bullshit*, *crap*, *wrong*, *ridiculous* and *hassle*. Metaphors are frequently used to present negative valuation, such as *funny*, *beans*, *gimmick* and *shrill*. In addition, the customer may use contrast to show negative valuation indirectly, such as *you are a big/large company* and *this is a legal matter*. To summarise, Appreciation is a more dominant subcategory than Affect and Judgment in terms of the number of occurrences in the call centre spoken data. The customers use more Appreciation items to express their evaluations towards an event or a thing. They can sound more factual than if they only used Affect and Judgment items.

5. Conclusion

This has major implications for CSRs who deal with customers and customer complaints. Unfortunately, due to a lack of research and detailed understanding of the linguistic complexity of customers' complex requests and objections, the CSR often has to use his or her own intuition to deal with such issues. In the present study, field notes including observation and informant interviews, and text analysis, were the research instruments. Field visits offered an opportunity to observe authentic call centre environments and to conduct non-participant observation. Lastly, the present study discovered that recounts and Appraisal resources in the transcribed texts can help the customer build up interpersonal meaning, making the call more linguistically complex. The findings of the present study provide evidence that linguistic features found in call centre conversations can be modelled and incorporated into training programmes. We hope that the findings of the present study can inform development within the industry; perhaps customers will then have a more positive customer service experience during their calls.

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