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POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND LINGUISTIC PATTERNS OF EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER SUPPORT DISCOURSE

The rapid development of digital services and globalized markets has intensified the role of English-language customer support communication. The proper formulation of figures of speech in the «customer–support agent» dialogue is of paramount importance and can yield various positive business outcomes, such as sales growth. Customer support discourse represents a distinct type of institutional interaction characterized by asymmetrical roles, problem-oriented communication, and high emotional involvement. The present study explores linguistic patterns that contribute to effective conflict mitigation and customer satisfaction in English-language customer support contexts.

The category of politeness is of great interest in the field of pragmatics. It is considered as a set of strategies or speech patterns that are set by some communicators as norms for themselves or by others as norms for them, and at the same time as socially determined behavioural norms, verbal and non-verbal, in a particular social group. [2, p. 6] In the field of linguistics, politeness is understood as the use of language in conversation to demonstrate consideration and empathy towards one's interlocutor, to cultivate and nurture interpersonal relationships (known as politic behaviour), and to adhere to societal or cultural norms regarding appropriate conduct. [3, p. 16]

The research aims to identify recurrent lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic strategies used in email, ticket and chat support communication. Particular attention is paid to politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), mitigation devices, empathy markers, and discourse structuring techniques. The data corpus consists of authentic anonymized customer support dialogues collected from IT and digital service environments.

It's worth mentioning that artificial intelligence (AI) tools and features are spreading wider. It results in integrating AI-chatbots to services which allows businesses to facilitate human support agents' work, so the AI-search or AI-bot become the first contact for a user. This feature integration can be noticed on Spotify website, where a user can choose a basic or an AI-search bar. On the other hand it is observed that though AI-bots speed up response rate, though it often results in customers' dissatisfaction and irritation talking to bot. This effect can be significantly raised if customers have difficulties finding a way to avoid speaking with a bot and switching to a human agent.

Another important detail to note is that most sources used for research conducting don't offer chat and email/ticket support at the same time. Mostly there is a combination of call support and one of some of the abovementioned. Therefore it was hard to get responses for similar requests from one source in order to get the most unbiased results. As a result some requests were sent to different support channels of different businesses to define common points, explore peculiarities and analyze distinctions.

Preliminary analysis demonstrates that effective support communication relies on several key linguistic patterns: (1) explicit empathy markers (*“I understand how frustrating this must be”*), (2) indirect directive forms (*“Could you please provide...”* instead of imperatives), (3) positive politeness strategies aimed at solidarity building, (4) mitigation through modal verbs and hedging devices, and (5) clear step-by-step structuring of instructions. The strategic use of personalization and inclusive pronouns (*“we will resolve this together”*) significantly reduces perceived conflict intensity.

The conducted analysis points at significant differences between chat and email or ticket communication. The answers provided in chat tend to be more laconic and specific. This is mainly explained by fixed KPIs that usually include a response speed rate which is generally considered to be a main metric of support agents’ effectiveness. This is clearly illustrated by the following case of addressing Nova Poshta support via chat. The issue was related to a non-functioning promo code. Support answer included a greeting, an apology for the delay and a concise two-sentence explanation of the issue (*“The promotional code can only be applied to the original invoice. Since the original invoice has already been closed, it cannot apply to the return invoice”*). It’s necessary to note that efforts to maintain a high response rate often result in spelling or grammar typos as it can be observed in the example above. At the same time email&ticket responses incline to be detailed and wide, trying to cover as much points and further possible customer’s questions or clarifications as possible. They are usually perfectly structured which makes different communication techniques more effective in terms of end consumer effect. Rozetka’s email answer to our possible partnership request is a perfect illustration: it consists of detailed answer (*“If you wish to become our partner, please submit the required information (according to the form available on the website) to partner@rozetka.com.ua”*), additional clarifications (*“Further details are available at: <https://rozetka.com.ua/ua/pages/partnership/>”*), predicting possible questions or a different purpose of the request (*“Details about the franchise opportunity and the application form can be accessed via the following link: <https://franchise.rozetka.ua/#join>”*), (*“Should your proposal relate to another form of cooperation, kindly outline it in an email to partner@rozetka.com.ua. Following the review of your application, a company representative will contact you and provide further details if the proposal is deemed relevant”*).

The findings suggest that linguistic choices directly influence customer perception of professionalism and reliability. It is important to note that contemporary customer support communication demonstrates a general tendency toward simplification and the provision of more pragmatic, task-oriented responses regardless of the communication channel. Support agents in most companies tend to provide more explicitly empathetic and emotionally engaged responses primarily in cases involving strongly expressed dissatisfaction or when their official guidelines require consistent complaint-handling procedures without exception. From an applied linguistics perspective, customer support discourse can be viewed as a hybrid genre combining elements of service communication, technical instruction, and persuasive discourse.

The study has practical implications for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum design, particularly for students in IT, business, and digital marketing programs. Integrating authentic customer support scenarios into ELT may enhance learners’ pragmatic competence and digital communication skills.

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