

Politeness Strategies Versus Customer Retention in Hospitality Sector: A Focus on Fast-Food Establishments in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria

Jesutofunmi K. Okunlola-Folorunso & Olusola S. Folorunso

Abstract

Service sectors are platforms for social interactions, and language happens to be the crucial factor for successful communication. The catering establishment falls under the category of one of the germane aspects of the sector. Effective communication is central to customer satisfaction and retention in the hospitality sector, with language serving as a key tool in shaping interpersonal interactions. Fast-food establishments, as integral components of the service industry, rely heavily on staff–customer interactions to foster loyalty and drive business performance. While previous studies in pragmatics have examined service quality, customer loyalty, and etiquette training in hospitality settings, there is limited exploration of how politeness strategies function as tools for customer retention. This implies that these studies have not adequately explicated the politeness strategies as customer retention tools in the hospitality sector. Therefore, this study investigates the deployment of politeness strategies in conversations between staff and customers within fast-food establishments in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Using a qualitative approach, six conversational excerpts collected from two establishments between January and March 2024 were analyzed through Brown and Levinson’s Face Theory. Findings indicate that strategic use of positive and negative politeness features enhances customer satisfaction, builds trust, and contributes significantly to retention, thereby impacting overall business performance. The study concludes that regular staff sensitization and monitoring of communication practices are essential for sustaining customer loyalty and promoting a professional service culture in hospitality settings.

Keywords: Hospitality Industry, Politeness Strategies, Customer Retention, Pragmatic Act, Service.

Introduction

The service industry is becoming the backbone of most economies because of its huge contribution to the nation’s GDP (Isibor & Odi, 2014). Service, according to Gronroos (2000) means a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that

Jesutofunmi K. Okunlola-Folorunso, Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, tofunmisolafolorunso@gmail.com.

Olusola S. Folorunso, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.

normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interaction between customer and service employee and/or physical resources or goods and/or system of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. The complex nature of this definition gives room to the dynamic nature of service and its wide variety found in its settings. Fast food establishments in Nigeria, especially in Ilorin, just like their counterparts all over the globe, are faced with the challenges of how to effectively satisfy/retain their customers through proper communication and properly implementing/executing their work ethics. This is because research reveals that an increasing level of customer satisfaction is positively correlated with customer loyalty and profitability, especially in the hospitality industry (Isibor & Odia, 2014). To deal with these challenges, business owners often devise means of getting feedback from their customers through strategic suggestion box placements in the hospitality establishment, provision of hotlines for phone calls, customer service desk, hence facilitating wider coverage of the audience and winning the confidence of the customers to continue to patronize their businesses as the devised methods show that the business establishment has their customers interest at heart.

Representation is power, and visibility provides a platform for business growth. This is the most apposite in the interrogation of politeness versus customer retention. Politeness helps in building trust and rapport, ensuring clients feel valued and respected (Gemma Harding 2011). It yields effective communication, reduces misunderstanding and enhances customer satisfaction. Politeness goes further to reflect the business establishment's culture and standards, thereby playing a major role in customer retention and referrals. The main focus of this paper is a discussion of the pragmatic import of ethical values and the aspects of politeness that are directly concerned with customer retention in fast food establishments. Before politeness strategies were put in place as a measure to tackle problems and complaints, many business corporations or organizations have been utilizing customer discussion rooms to allow them to raise issues and complaints quickly. It is one of the many ways business corporations and organizations consolidate customer relationship management towards any problems and complaints by negotiating resolutions and assuring their satisfaction (Arumugam et al., 2020).

Ilorin is the capital city of Kwara State, Nigeria, which is developing with high-rise in, modern fast food and state-of-the-art structures. The city has its own culture and standard of behaviour, a culture that predates civilization. (Adesina 2018). Ilorin was founded in 1450 by the Yoruba, originally as a provincial military outpost of the Oyo Empire. The city later became a significant Islamic center under the Fulani dynasty following its capture in the early 19th century during the Fulani Jihad. Ilorin is unique due to its blend of Yoruba, Fulani, Hausa and Nupe cultures, reflected in its architecture, cuisine and festivals. Ilorin's diverse heritage and strategic location at the crossroads of northern and southern Nigeria contribute to its unique cultural and social dynamics. The primary languages spoken in Ilorin include Yoruba, Hausa and English, with a significant portion of the population also speaking Fulani and Nupe. English serves as the official language, used in administration and education, while Yoruba is the most widely spoken language in daily interactions. Hausa is commonly used in trade and among the Muslim population. The Nigerian cultural heritage is promoted through literature and media, especially through poems and movies. This is an assertion that Nigeria has a virile culture, which the citizens no longer wish to be disengaged from.

Statement of the Problem

Although both linguistic and non-linguistic studies on customer retention have received considerable scholarly attention, a critical gap still exists in understanding how pragmatic politeness strategies function as customer-retention tools in the hospitality sector. Non-linguistic research has predominantly focused on administrative challenges, staff incompetence, and operational issues confronting fast-food outlets and related establishments. Similarly, existing studies in hospitality have largely examined customers' perceptions of service quality and organizational performance, often relying on statistical models such as t-tests and z-tests to measure satisfaction and behavioural outcomes (Osaiga Felix Isibor & Onowe Edith Odia, 2014).

Within applied linguistics, previous discourse-oriented studies have explored how language constructs identities, frames events, and reveals ideologies (Odebunmi, 2005; Kuldip et al., 2022); however, they have not sufficiently addressed the pragmatic dynamics of interaction between frontline staff and customers in hospitality settings. In particular, the literature lacks a systematic analysis of how specific politeness strategies employed in everyday staff–customer conversations contribute to customer satisfaction, relational bonding, and long-term patronage. This underexplored intersection between pragmatics and hospitality management necessitates the present study, which seeks to determine the recurrent pragmatic strategies used in hospitality interactions and to identify the politeness features that can enhance customer retention through effective and strategic language use.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyze and interpret the discourse on customer retention with relation to the Hospitality industry in Ilorin metropolis from a politeness-strategic perspective. The objectives are to:

1. analyze staff–customer interactions in fast-food establishments to determine how language use reflects service quality and customer-friendly behaviour,
2. identify the frequency and types of politeness strategies used by staff during customer interactions; and
3. Examine the specific politeness features in staff–customer utterances that contribute to customer satisfaction and retention.

Apart from extending knowledge of the subject matter, a pragmatic analysis and interpretation of conversations in the hospitality industry will reveal the production of creative linguistic and non-linguistic activities during business interactions and advocate actively for a new social order to remedy the problems identified with the current situation.

Database of the Study

The study is a survey recording, analysis and interpretation of the discourse on customer retention. This requires qualitative information about the perception of the attitude of hospitality staff/agents in all ramifications of their contact with customers in different settings such as restaurants, hotels, tourist centers, event centers and so on. The data analyzed are conversations between waiters/waitresses in different fast-food establishments in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, using the participant observation method, and discussions were documented using voice recorders, then later transcribed to written forms.

A total of ten sessions were collected through tape recording and transcribed for

the purpose of this study. The study engaged a purposive sampling technique to select five relevant recordings in total, and these were subjected to a qualitative analysis. The study engaged Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, which posits that individuals use specific linguistic strategies to preserve their own and others' face needs during interaction, thereby reducing potential face-threatening acts (FTAs) and maintaining social harmony. All four stages identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) were found useful in analyzing the hospitality discourse data and were consequently deployed in explaining the interactive properties of the exchanges. These four stages are strategies, and they are: bald-on-record, where speakers communicate directly without mitigation; positive politeness, which seeks to build rapport and express approval; negative politeness, which minimizes imposition and respects the hearer's autonomy; and off-record politeness, where meaning is implied rather than stated directly.

Customer Retention in the Hospitality Sector

The topic of Customer Retention is a very sensitive one in view of the uniqueness of the activities surrounding it and its impact on humanity. The discussion of it in research, reports, views and comments has been multifarious, multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral and multidimensional, spanning fields such as medicine, sociology, religion, psychology and linguistics. We present a review of some works that benefit this study below.

Osaiga Felix Isibor and Onowe Edith Odia (2014) did a comparative study of service quality in Nigerian restaurant and transport business organizations. The study focuses on determining customers' perception of service quality in the restaurant and transport industry. Using the t-test and z-test analysis model, the findings show that customers of both service sub-sectors are fairly satisfied with a significant difference in their service offerings. Additionally, the study shows that the reasons for customer dissatisfaction are sub-sector specific and related to the core business of the service organization.

Elena B. Kuzhevskaya (2019) attempts a comparative statistical analysis of different strategies of politeness in modern Business English. This study reveals that a crucial component of conversational strategies in business is politeness strategies. It further states that awareness of linguistic politeness as a strategy of speech behaviour allows interlocutors to maintain a felicitous pattern of communication and prevent conflict. Subjecting a corpus of cases to a comparative analysis, the study deduced that raising awareness of politeness strategies and acquiring practical skills can help both the speaker and the listener to understand implied meanings conveyed in different communicative situations and adjust their speech behaviour to achieve the aims of communication, which ensures success in business.

Kuldip et al. (2022), employ the components of politeness strategies and negotiation strategies to study the way the organizations' personnel handle customers and resolve conflicts. This qualitative study generated its data online via discussions.apple.com, which belongs to a mega-corporation technology organization. By utilizing the purposive sampling method, customer questions, issues and complaints were analyzed. The results show that customers use more positive politeness, and it also revealed that the four negotiation strategies from the responses of the organization's personnel in the discussion room are evident. Ultimately, the organization embrace the use of a simple and accessible language strategy as its negotiation strategy.

This study complements the studies above by providing a fresh perspective on utilizing politeness strategies as a customer retention tool in the hospitality sector. We

shall now explain the concept of politeness strategies and their components briefly.

The Concept of Politeness Strategies

The theoretical framework adopted for this work is based on aspects of polite behaviour in interaction provided by Brown and Levinson (1978). This model accounts for politeness premised on the notion of Face, “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself,” (1978:61) and reflects the assumptions and inferences made in interaction” (1987:56). The model assumes that human communication is purposeful and goal-oriented. Brown and Levinson involve the use of strategies for interactional behaviour based on the idea that human beings engage in rational behaviour to achieve a certain level of satisfaction. They account for strategies of communication that are universal to human interactions using Face derived by Goffman (1967) to establish their claims. They claim that there are two kinds of face, the positive face and the negative face, which can either be gained or lost in interaction. Faces are threatened in various ways during interaction, which require the things we do with words such as commanding, advising, criticizing and arguing. This paper dwells on Brown and Levinson’s view of communication as a rational act, on the reasons for doing things with words in interaction.

The theories of Politeness proposed by Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987) describe politeness from the perspective of Speech Act theory. They believe that the speech act creates the appropriate context and that the context determines what is polite or what is not. Oishi (2011) discusses an Austin Speech Act theory in which the illocutionary acts are described as values. These values are determined by the relationship between utterances and the speech situation. He also uses culture and genre specifications of language use to explain how illocutionary acts are situated. Leech (1983) identifies the seven maxims of politeness as tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy and the Pollyanna Principle. The maxims are meant to maintain friendly relationships in interaction. His description of the Pollyanna Principle sees the bright side of life and centers on conflict avoidance. The principle borders on friendly relations with interlocutors.

Politeness, according to Brown Levinson (1987) has validity across cultures. They propose strategies for interaction based on the opinion that people achieve satisfaction of their wants and goals through interactional behaviour. They relate these goals to face and identify the two kinds of faces as negative and positive. They have distinguished face-threatening acts in four ways as acts that threaten the hearer or addressee’s negative face, acts that threaten the addressee’s positive face, acts that threaten the speaker’s negative face and acts that directly damage the speaker’s positive face. Brown and Levinson (1978) opine that face is managed in interaction using politeness features. They define negative face as the want of every ‘component adult member’ that his actions be impeded by others, and positive face as the want of every member that his wants be desirable to some others. The negative face implies freedom from imposition, while the positive face is a need to be appreciated and gain the approval of others. Admission of guilt, for instance, is a threat to the speaker’s positive face. In a courtroom situation, what the attorney does is to minimize the threat by unveiling what a client has done wrong through mitigating devices. Therefore, face can be lost, maintained, enhanced and must be constantly attended to, in interaction (1978: 65-73).

Brown and Levinson (1978) show four politeness strategies by which a person

can deal with a “Face Threatening Act” FTA or manage the positive and the negative faces. These four aims at redressing or mitigating a threatened face. Do the FTA baldly record, off record, FTA on record with positive politeness, FTA with negative politeness and Don’t do the FTA. The negative face of an individual can be redressed when it is threatened, while positive politeness orients the positive face. Don’t do the FTA occurs when a speaker does not say something because it looks potentially face-threatening. Regressive action that is addressed to the hearer’s negative face is positive politeness. Doing FTA baldly without redress involves direct, clear, unambiguous and concise expressions.

Odeunmi (2005) examines politeness and face management in conversational interaction between doctors and patients. He discovered that the interactions were characterized by the employment of face-threatening acts without redress and face-threatening acts with redress, besides the use of tract and generosity maxims. The work presents politeness and effective management as exerting a positive influence on medical procedures. The data from selected fast-food establishments are therefore subjected to the politeness theory analysis.

Fast Food Establishments versus Customer Retention

Singh and Khan (2012) assert that customer retention is a high-profile strategy for reaping enormous organizational profit. As more and more customers are treated with dignity by bringing their requirements to bear, the more their loyalty and the more profit for the firm. Customer retention has become very imperative in improving business performance and, as such, has become a byword, a buzzword and a catchy word for advertisement for most companies that apply diligent strategies towards attracting customers (Gengswari, Padmashantini, Sharmeela-Benu, 2013). Many business organizations have come to the consciousness of the benefits of customer relationships, customer retention and have adapted and adopted it to improve their customer lifetime value in the fast-food industry (Mornay, 2011). According to him, integrated marketing ensures customers are properly attracted to the offerings of the hospitality establishment, and they tend to become loyal based on how they are treated, especially in the aspects of communication. Equally, Falabi, Akande and Folorunso (2018) suggested that, beyond physical environment, quality of service is important in retaining customers. This implies that prior to arrival, during the service and post-service, the interactions that ensue between customers and employees of the hospitality establishment.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the use of politeness strategies in the hospitality sector with particular focus on fast-food establishments in Ilorin, Kwara State. The choice of a qualitative approach was informed by the need to capture the subtleties of natural communication and the pragmatic functions of politeness in real-life service encounters. Fast-food establishments in Ilorin were selected as the focal context because they represent one of the busiest, most interactive, and linguistically dynamic segments of the hospitality industry, where rapid service delivery depends heavily on effective customer–staff communication. Ilorin, being a growing metropolitan centre with a high concentration of students, civil servants, families, and informal workers, provides a socially diverse customer base whose constant patronage makes politeness a crucial factor for customer satisfaction and

retention. The city's vibrant fast-food culture, therefore, offers an ideal environment for observing naturally occurring politeness strategies and evaluating their impact on customer loyalty. The data for the study were sourced from interactions between hospitality staff and customers across selected fast-food establishments in Ilorin between January and March 2025. Using participant observation, conversations were documented through voice recordings with the consent of participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim. A total of ten (10) sessions were recorded, out of which eight (8) were purposively selected for detailed analysis, based on their relevance to politeness strategies and customer retention. Purposive sampling was adopted to ensure that the selected interactions reflected diverse scenarios such as greetings, requests, complaints, and appreciation. This was necessary to provide a representative sample of pragmatic exchanges in the hospitality context.

The data were subjected to pragmatic analysis using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which emphasizes the management of face in interpersonal communication. The four politeness strategies identified in the model, bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, were applied to examine the ways in which hospitality staff mitigated face-threatening acts and reinforced customer satisfaction. This methodological approach enabled the study to not only describe the linguistic strategies employed by hospitality personnel but also to interpret their pragmatic implications for customer retention in the fast-food industry. However, in line with standard research ethics, the identities of the selected hospitality establishments were anonymized to protect organizational confidentiality and maintain professional integrity. Similarly, participants' interactions were treated with strict confidentiality, and data were used solely for academic purposes.

Indexes Results

Datum 1

Waiter: Good afternoon, sir

Customer: Good afternoon

Waiter: Oh! Sorry, I saw you sitting down for a while. Do you care for any drink?

Customer: (kisses teeth) No, I'm not feeling too well, maybe you should give me water.

Waiter: Okay..., Okay..., a glass of water will do, right? Alright, I'm coming.

Datum 2

Customer: Hello, waitress, excuse me. Your jollof rice is a little bit spicy.

Waitress: We are very sorry, ma'am. I will have to tell the chef. We won't do that next time.

Another customer: (male voice) Can I get a bottle of beer, please?

Waitress: What kind of beer do you care for, sir?

Male customer: (continues) Goldberg? Do you have Goldberg?

Waitress: We don't have

Male customer: How about Budweiser?

Waitress: It's not chill

Male customer: Oh, Heineken nko?

Waitress: Yeah, we have

Male voice: Hey, babe. What kind of drink do you care for?

Female voice: Do you have chill exotic?

Waitress: We have. We have, ma. It's available.

Male voice: You can bring one of those

Waitress: And one of exotic, right?!

Male voice: Yeah

Waitress: so, that's two. Okay, now. I'm coming, sir. I'm coming ma.

Datum 3

Waitress: Good afternoon, ma'am. Good afternoon, sir.

Female customer: Good afternoon

Waitress: Welcome to our restaurant. This is our menu for today.

Female customer: Okay.... I don't think we really have much time to look at the menu. Can you just, just give us a time, let us check what is on the menu? We'll get back to you.

Waitress: Okay...

Female customer: (pointing to her preferences) Just give us this, this and this.

Waitress: Okay, sorry, can you come again? This and what?

Female customer: And rice?

Waitress: Okay, thank you. Your order will be ready in the next 20 minutes. Would you like to sit?

Female customer: Sure, of course

Waitress: Ma, before you go to your table. We have some beverages on our menu. Would you like to see them?

Female customer: No, I'm fine just with water, you know, just water

Waitress: Okay, thank you.

Datum 4

Two receptionists: (chorus) Good afternoon, sir and ma

Female customer: Good afternoon

1st receptionist: Welcome to Princess Luxury Hotel. Do you have a reservation here?

Male customer: No, we don't have a reservation. We are here to use the restaurant.

1st receptionist: May I ask my colleague to lead you?

Male customer: Yeah

2nd receptionist: Please, follow me.

Datum 5

Female customer: E kasan ma

Old woman (waitress): E kasan, aunty mi o

Female customer: Shey amala wa?

Old woman (Waitress): Amala wa

Female customer: Ati gbegiri pelu obe ewedu

Old woman (waitress): owa

Female customer: ejo, e bami ta ponmo meji, rounda about meji, shaki kan ati edo kan

Old woman (waitress): Ogunfe na wa o

Female customer: e bami ta amala #300 si ona meta

Old woman (waitress): Okay ma, moti gbo ma

Young female waitress: sir, ki lefe sir?

Male voice: shey rice wa?

Young female waitress: o wa

Male voice: e funmi ni.....

Young female waitress: ani white rice, ani fried rice, ani jolofrice, ani mega rice

Male voice: ha! Ewo ni mega rice, wahala won po ni ibibayi

Young female waitress: (with hesitations) mega rice....

Male voice: hmmmmmm...okay, funmi ni. Shey e ni fried rice ni?

Young female waitress: a ni sir, a ni, owa.

Male voice: ehn fun mi ni fried rice. Shey plate le n ta?

Young female waitress: No, portion la fi n ta. #300 per portion, sir.

Male voice: Ehn meji

Young female waitress: two portion ti to, ani shaki, ani abodi, ani turkey

Male voice: Turkey. The table is over there.

Female waitress: O wa. Alright sir, I'm coming sir.

Datum 6

Female customer: Hey waitress!

Waitress: Hi

Female customer: How are you?

Waitress: I'm fine

Female customer: Thank you for the meal, I like it

Waitress: You are welcome

Female customer: and I love your service

Waitress: thank you

Female customer: No problem, don't worry.

Datum 7

Elderly waiter: Good evening, my dear

Female customer: Please, do you have parfait?

Elderly waiter: Hmm, yeah, what kind of size do you want? We have the one of #800, #1500 and #2,500

Female customer: I'd prefer the #1,500. Two cups

Elderly waiter: Okay, wait a minute. I'll get back to you.

Datum 8

Female customer: Good afternoon, brother

Hausa vendor: Good afternoon

Female customer: How you dey now?

Hausa vendor: I'm fine fa

Female customer: how much you dey sell your noodles?

Hausa vendor: Walahi! How you want make I do am for you?

Female customer: You dey sell indomitable?

Hausa vendor: I have different type, I have indomie, I have indomie with egg, which one you want?

Female customer: I want two indomitables and two fried egg.

Hausa vendor: two indomie will be #500, the egg is #500, making #1,000. Walahi, I go do am now

Female customer: Ehn, no wahala now, do am fast, fast, fast fast.

Hausa Vendor: I go do am now.

Female Customer: Oya! Pa pa pa

Another Female Customer walks in

Female Customer 2: Aboki, how far? How far my guy

Hausa Vendor: Haha (in excitement) My friend, my friend, how are you?

Female Customer 2: I dey o

Hausa Vendor: Long time, you travel ni? I don't see you

Female Customer 2: I go to Togo

Hausa Vendor: Wetin you bring for me now?

Female Customer 2: Turkey ni

Hausa Vendor: Make I do tea for you. Wait, make me do tea for you.

Female Customer 2: Oya, fast fast fast fast.

Analysis of Results

The analysis of interactions in the selected fast-food establishments in Ilorin revealed consistent patterns in the use of politeness strategies by hospitality staff. Across the sampled data, five dominant themes emerged:

1. Prevalence of Greetings and Respectful Address

Greetings such as “Good afternoon, sir/ma” and “Welcome to our restaurant” were frequently used as opening strategies. These polite forms established rapport and signalled respect, aligning with positive politeness strategies aimed at recognising customers’ social value.

2. Use of Apologies and Repair Strategies

When customers expressed dissatisfaction with meals or services, staff members responded with apologies, expressions of regret, and corrective assurances. This approach minimised face-threatening acts and demonstrated attentiveness to customer concerns, thereby reinforcing trust and satisfaction.

3. Cultural and Multilingual Adaptations

Staff often employed local languages (Yoruba, Hausa, and Pidgin English) alongside English to accommodate customer preferences. This strategy not only reflected cultural sensitivity but also strengthened relational bonds, particularly in informal interactions.

4. Offer of Alternatives and Recommendations

In situations where customers’ requests could not be met, staff members provided alternatives, such as offering a different type of meal or drink. This mitigated potential frustration and highlighted the use of negative politeness strategies that reduced imposition.

5. Customer Acknowledgement and Appreciation

Positive reinforcement from staff (e.g., “Thank you, ma,” “You are welcome”) was commonly observed at the close of interactions. Such responses emphasised gratitude and acknowledgement, further encouraging repeat patronage.

Discussion

The findings from the analysis of interactions in fast-food establishments in Ilorin demonstrate the pivotal role of politeness strategies in fostering customer retention. The excerpts examined reveal a variety of pragmatic choices made by hospitality personnel, ranging from greetings and apologies to humour, mitigation, and culturally sensitive expressions. These strategies align with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, which emphasises the maintenance of both positive and negative face in communication.

The data show that greetings such as “Good afternoon, sir” or “Welcome to our restaurant” set the tone for cordial interactions, creating a sense of respect and recognition for customers. Apologies, as illustrated in situations where customers complain about food quality, also mitigate potential face-threatening acts and re-establish rapport, thus ensuring customer satisfaction as supported by Arumugam et al. (2020b). Similarly, the use of culturally embedded politeness markers (e.g., Yoruba and Hausa greetings) highlights the importance of context-specific communication in the Nigerian hospitality sector, where multilingualism and cultural hybridity shape social

interactions.

Furthermore, the deployment of positive politeness strategies, such as offering alternatives, acknowledging customer preferences, and expressing gratitude, not only reduces social distance but also fosters emotional connections between staff and customers. Negative politeness, exemplified by deference and indirect requests, was also evident and helped in reducing imposition on customers. This is in tandem with the findings of Bashiru et al. (2024), which emphasise the role of employee performance in customer satisfaction. These strategies collectively enhance customer experiences, leading to increased loyalty and repeat patronage.

The findings corroborate previous scholarship (Kuzhevskaya, 2019; Kuldip et al., 2022), which emphasises that politeness is not merely a communicative tool but also a strategic business practice. Kaur et al. (2022) added that framing interactions as opportunities to maintain dignity, respect, and satisfaction, politeness strategies transform ordinary service encounters into avenues for customer retention and long-term brand loyalty. Therefore, the findings indicate that politeness strategies in the hospitality context function as both communicative and business tools. Their application not only facilitated smooth interpersonal exchanges but also served as a mechanism for customer retention, reinforcing the economic viability of fast-food establishments in Ilorin. Thus, politeness in hospitality should be considered an indispensable element of service quality and customer relationship management.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between politeness strategies and customer retention in fast-food establishments in Ilorin, Nigeria, using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as a framework. The analysis demonstrates that politeness, expressed through greetings, apologies, offers, and culturally sensitive utterances, contributes significantly to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Politeness strategies do not only serve interpersonal functions but also have economic implications, as they help businesses retain existing customers and attract new ones. The study concludes that regular staff sensitisation and monitoring of communication practices are essential for sustaining customer loyalty and promoting a professional service culture in hospitality settings.

In line with the findings, it is recommended that hospitality organisations provide regular etiquette and communication training for staff, emphasising both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of politeness. Management should also adopt monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistent application of these strategies across service encounters. Ultimately, embedding politeness strategies in hospitality practice contributes to building a customer-centric culture that ensures sustainable business growth and strengthens the role of hospitality as a driver of economic and social development.

References

- Adesina, O. S. (2018). Culture, identity, and social organisation in Ilorin. Ilorin: Unilorin Press.
- Arumugam, N., Suppiah, P. C., Kaur, K., & Idham, M. (2020). Negotiation and politeness

- strategies in customer service interactions. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n4p1>
- Arumugam, N., Suppiah, P. C., Kaur, K., & Idham, N. B. (2020). Politeness strategies in customer-service interactions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 9(4), 12–21.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bashiru, A. A., Folorunso, O. S., Adebayo, H. M. and Igbekele, G. O. (2024). Guests' Perception of Hotel's Image in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria: The Role of Employees' Performance. *EKSU Journal of the Management Scientists*, 3 (1):138-150
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eelen, G. (2001). *A critique of politeness theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Falabi, O. M., Akande, E. A. and Folorunso, O. S. (2018). The Influence of Food Quality, Service and Physical Environment on Customer Satisfaction in Kwara Hotel, Ilorin, Nigeria. *Elizade University Journal of Research in Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 1: 11- 27
- Gemma, H. (2011). The importance of politeness in customer service communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 74(2), 201–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569911404058>
- Gengeswari, K., Padmashantini, P., & Sharmeela-Banu, S. A. (2013). Impact of customer retention practices on firm performance. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 3(7), 68–80.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behaviour*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Gronroos, C. (2000). *Service management and marketing: A customer relationship management approach*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Isibor, O. F., & Odia, O. E. (2014). Service quality in Nigerian restaurant and transport business organisations: A comparative study. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 6(18), 112–121.
- Kaur, K., Suppiah, P. C., Arumugam, N., & Idham, N. (2022). Pragmatic competence and service interaction quality. *Journal of Language and Communication*, 9(3), 44–59.
- Kuldip, K., Suppiah, P. C., Nalini, A., & Idham, M. (2022). Politeness and negotiation strategies in organisational communication: A case study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 194, 80–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2022.01.004>
- Kuzhevskaya, E. B. (2019). Politeness strategies in modern business English communication: A comparative study. *Journal of Language and Education*, 5(4), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle2019.9721>
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Mornay, R. (2011). Customer retention strategies in the fast-food industry. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(34), 13014–13025.
- Odebunmi, A. (2005). Politeness and face management in conversational interactions between doctors and patients. *Ilorin Journal of English Studies*, 2(1), 1–15.
- Oishi, E. (2011). Austin's speech act theory and its influence on pragmatics. *Linguistic Review*, 28(3), 455–472.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*,

64(1), 12–40.

Singh, H., & Khan, M. N. (2012). An approach to increase customer retention and loyalty in the B2C world. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2(6), 1–5.

Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2006). *Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the firm*. New York: McGraw-Hill.