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The authentic service employee: Service employees' language use for authentic service experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how service employees' language use influences the authenticity of a service. The extant service literature on language use remains exclusively focused on the customer's perceptions of first language use in direct communication. Shifting the focus to the service employee, this paper posits that language could exert a wider influence, contributing both to how customers perceive the authenticity of the service and the entire service experience. Analyzing language use in service encounters, the paper addresses this research gap in the literature from the perspective of the service employee. In many service settings, authenticity is an important part in customers' construal of their experience. The study analyzes how service employees in British pubs outside the UK may use English with local customers who frequent these pubs to get a taste of Britain and British culture, contributing to the service literature by introducing a typology to align the service employees' language use with authenticity to strengthen the customer experience. The paper further contributes to service theory by extending the understanding of service sabotage by showing how, why, and in which circumstances service employees may use a language switch to sabotage the customer experience. Finally, the study extends the extant human resources literature on the effects of allowing service employees to be themselves to show that this managerial practice not only benefits the service employees also results in a more authentic customer experience.

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1. Introduction

Should service employees always try to speak the customers' language, or could using a different language contribute to how customers perceive the authenticity of the service, and even influence the overall customer experience? Understanding how to manage the customer's experience remains one of the main challenges for marketers and is a topic in need of further research (Homburg, Jozić, & Kuehnl, 2015). The extant service literature on how to use language in customer experiences in service contexts argue for significant benefits to using the customer's first language; speaking the customer's language can improve customers' word-of-mouth (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014), customer perceptions (Holmqvist, 2011) as well as increase the tip for the service employee (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). Marketing research in other contexts further echo these positive outcomes of using the customer's first language in service contexts, including more positive reactions to advertising or slogans in the customer's first language (Noriega & Blair, 2008; Puntoni, de Langhe, & Van Osselaer, 2009).

Research in the field of sociolinguistics also reports on how service employees use the customers' first language, even if the customer starts the interaction in a second language; Callahan (2006) shows that employees often switch to the language in which a customer feels most comfortable, regardless of the language in which the customer initially addresses the employee. Building on this situation, extant research on language use in the field of service research (Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014), recommends addressing customers in their first language. This paper posits that this practice may not always be the best approach, and that conscientiously using a different language in well-defined customer experiences, such as Spanish at a salsa festival or English in a British pub abroad may contribute to the customers' appreciation of the service by giving the experience a more authentic feel. In 2012, the Norwegian coffee-chain Fugeln (The Bird) opened a Norwegian café in central Tokyo, meeting with huge success. Not only is the name Norwegian; the interior design and the furniture are Norwegian and the Japanese service employees even learn some Norwegian phrases to use with the local customers, underlining how management invokes the language of service employees in combination with the servicescape to provide a more authentic customer experience.

In many service settings, authenticity is important in lending the service provider credibility, and an authentic human touch can even

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determine the difference between the service offerings available to customers (Bowen, 2016). However, management needs to properly manage this authentic touch because service authenticity is multifaceted and may involve personal costs, particularly emotional costs, for the service employee (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2012); the extant HR literature shows that these emotional costs could even lead to the service employee hitting back by deliberately sabotaging the service (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Kao, Cheng, Kuo, & Huang, 2014). Recent marketing research shows the benefits of the service employees' behavior being authentic to the brand they represent (Sirianni, Bitner, Brown, & Mandel, 2013). Homburg et al. (2015) posit that successfully managing customer experiences requires internal consistency, and this research extends their proposition by suggesting that the external consistency is of equal importance to achieve alignment between service employees and perceptions (cf. Sirianni et al., 2013). The existent research on customer preferences for their first language focuses almost exclusively on the customer's perceptions of language in direct communication with the service employee (Holmqvist, 2011; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). This paper posits that language could exert an even wider influence, contributing to how customers perceive the authenticity of the whole experience.

Customer experiences often provide the customer with a hedonic aspect (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), an engaging experience representing a break from the ordinary (Arnould & Price, 1993). Building on this understanding of the customer experience, the authors analyze a service encounter in which customers engage to experience a short hedonic break: typical British pubs abroad, designed to offer a British experience. Through a qualitative study of observations and interviews, this study details how service employees in British pubs outside the UK conscientiously use English with local customers who frequent these pubs to get a taste of Britain and British culture. The following sections review the extant literature on the customer experience in services, before reviewing how the literature on language use in services adapts to these experiences.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining the customer experience

The concept of the customer experience goes back to customers' overall impressions of their consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and the customer's role in the service context is an integral part of service research from its very beginnings (Eiglier & Langeard, 1976; Grönroos, 1978; Shostack, 1977). Service researchers recognize the importance of the customer in the service, as the service depends on the dyadic interaction between the customer and the service employee (Shostack, 1984; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). In this understanding, the service encounter becomes a co-created interaction between the customer and the service provider (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In addressing this interaction, service research tends to focus almost exclusively on the customer's role in the interaction as well as on the customer's perception (Heinonen et al., 2010; Helkkula, Kelleher, & Pihlström, 2012; Holmqvist, Guest, & Grönroos, 2015). Recently, some service researchers even remove the service employee outright, focusing on collective customer experiences (Carù & Cova, 2015) where interactions between customers play an important part, and where customers can co-create value between themselves in the service context (McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, & Ferrier, 2015; McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney, & van Kasteren, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2011).

The authors recognize that the role of the customer is crucial in service encounters, but agree with Homburg et al. (2015) who underline that the service employees have an important role to play in the customer experience. Incorporating findings from the field of human resources, the authors agree with Yagil and Medler-Liraz (2012) that service employees can have both a personal and a professional identity,

and that greater authenticity depends in part on aligning these identities. This paper thus posits that the service employee remains an important part of the service encounter and that more research on the role(s) of the service employee is crucial.

In order to further understand how service employees can influence the customers' experience, the paper next reviews how the language use of the service employees can influence customer perceptions of service quality as well as of the authenticity of the service provider.

2.2. Language use in the customer experience

The last years have seen an increased interest into the role of language use in services. This research includes comparisons between different language groups in the same country (Holmqvist, 2011), between language use in different countries (Holmqvist, Van Vaerenbergh, & Grönroos, 2014), language use according to the type of service context (Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2013) as well as different customer outcomes depending on the language used in the service (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013, 2014). Common to all of these recent studies is that they find a positive effect when customers get to speak their first language with the service employee. All of these studies, however, focus on rather mundane service contexts where the language use is purely communicative. Given that the customer experience can be hedonic (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and even serve as a means for customers to engage in a brief transformation (Carù & Cova, 2003), the authors posit that the role of language could serve a broader purpose than merely as a means of communication (cf. Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012).

Building on research in psycholinguistics, the paper posits that customers' second language use may play a positive role in certain customer experiences. People who master a second language that they seldom have an opportunity to use may relish the opportunity to speak their second language at times (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999). A second, more emotional motivation is that people might enjoy speaking a second language and feel good about themselves when they are able to carry out an interaction in a foreign language (Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003). Furthermore, people interacting in multilingual settings may want to indicate their social identity by the language that they speak (Torras & Gafaranga, 2002). The paper thus proposes that in some situations customers' normal preference for their native language (cf. Holmqvist & Grönroos, 2012) may give way to a desire to use a second language, particularly when engaging in a customer experience that is hedonic (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) and offers a temporary transformation (Carù & Cova, 2003).

Adapting this desire to use a second language in well-defined interactions (Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1999) to the customer experience, this paper extends Carù and Cova's (2003) description of transformative motivations in customer experiences in service contexts to suggest that in some situations the possibility to communicate in a second language could enhance the customer's experience. This research further posits that the service employees' language use could play a role for the authenticity of the service establishment. Sirianni et al. (2013) build on Kernis and Goldman (2006) and Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliouis, and Joseph (2008) to define authenticity as behavior in accordance with one's true nature, and show the benefits of the service employees' behavior being congruent with the brand they represent. The paper extends Sirianni et al.'s (2013) findings on the positive benefits on congruency between the service employees' behavior and the brand to posit that customers engaging in a service encounter with the intention of experiencing a brief transformation may perceive the service as more authentic if the service employee's language use is congruent with the design of the wider customer experience.

If some customers engage in the service with the desire to use their second language, how should the service employee deal with this situation? Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2014) adapt the concept

of speech accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991; Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis, 1973) to service contexts to better understand language use in services. Building on psycholinguistic studies showing that people tend to have a more positive image of those whose speech converge to their own (Genesee & Bourhis, 1988; Kelly & Toshiyuki, 1993), Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2014) show how customers' word-of-mouth intentions are stronger when the service employee converges to the customers' first language. Recognizing the importance of this finding, this paper extends this line of research by suggesting that service providers could benefit from language convergence no matter what language the customer speaks. In other words, this paper posits that service employees should converge to the language the customer uses regardless of what language this is, even when customers attempt to speak their second language.

The following study addresses these questions by looking at customer experiences in British pubs abroad. Through interviews with service employees in four British pubs in France, this paper analyzes what language the service employees use and whether their language use is congruent with the overall positioning of the pubs as authentically British. The paper further identifies how service employees' language use may change between different contexts and different customers, and finally addresses the service employees' motivations for speaking the language that they speak in any given situation.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The sample is made up of sixteen service employees working in four English and Irish pubs under British ownership; all the pubs are situated in the same area of a major French city. The majority of the participants are native English speakers from the British Isles, and the remaining participants are either native or fluent English speaking foreigners. The participants' level of French ranges from basic French (4), through limited working proficiency (6), professional working proficiency (5) up to completely bilingual (1). Some participants have taken a year off from studies while others moved to France years ago. Table 1 provides details of the sample.

This study focuses mainly on a well-known English pub in a major French city. The authors chose this pub as one of the oldest and best-known British pubs in this city, and many of the newer British pubs copy parts of the concept in their own establishments. The staff speaks English behind the bar and to the kitchen, and the manager pushes staff to try to have a conversation with every customer. The pub also has a predominantly local French clientele due to its location in a residential area in the city center but outside the main tourist zones. Thanks to a mainly local French clientele, the pub is well suited

for a study on customers who may visit a British pub for a brief British experience, allowing for a study on switching from English to French and vice versa. In addition to the observations in this pub and the interviews with nine service employees working here, the study extends to three other British pubs in the same city. Just like the first pub, these three pubs all have British, Irish or Scottish managers, a British/Irish identity and English speaking staff. The authors include these pubs to eliminate the risk that any of the findings would be specific to just one pub. The observations in the three other pubs reveal no differences concerning language use between any of the pubs, and the subsequent interviews with service employees in these pubs again confirm the findings from the first pub with no detectable differences between any of the pubs. The discussion thus treats all four pubs collectively.

3.2. Data collection

Focused observations, in-depth interviews and follow-up conversations took place over an eight-month period. Both authors visited all four pubs several times for observations, totaling some 90 h. In line with previous qualitative research in marketing (Cayla & Arnould, 2013), these observations of the interactions between service employees and customers form the basis for the interviews. The authors conducted the interviews in English, starting by asking service employees about their work place in general, about the kind of customers who visit their pub, and then moving on to ask about the language that they use. Most service employees spontaneously started talking about different kinds of interactions from a language perspective, giving examples and explaining how they saw these situations. Several respondents also offered their own interpretations about why customers want to use one language or the other; in the few cases where they did not talk about the customer perspective, the authors asked them to consider why they thought customers behave as they do and why they may want to use a certain language.

The authors adapted the questionnaire after analyzing a first round of interviews, which took place between November 2014 and March 2015. The duration of these interviews was between 55 and 103 min. The second round of interviews took place in June and July 2015, consisting of more precise questions on the influence of language on authenticity and quality perceptions and switching between languages. These follow-up interviews lasted 20 to 28 min. Without exception, participants gave permission to record the interviews. The authors also asked for short follow-up conversations with a few participants to clarify specific situations witnessed during the observations during which the authors took field notes and pictures (cf. Peñaloza & Cayla, 2007) to support the observations.

3.3. Data analysis

The authors transcribed and analyzed the interview recordings using thematic/template analysis (King, 1998, 2004), using an a priori-defined template, based on the second interview guide and added or fine-tuned codes once the analysis of the interviews started; both authors participated in the coding process. Following King (2004) the authors employ hierarchical thematic coding (King, 1998), grouping similar codes together and then discussing the meaning of statements so as to define relevant higher-order themes (King, 2004). In order to prevent subjective interpretations the authors discussed and agreed on every step of the coding process before continuing with the next part of the data analysis. The authors also employed field notes and photographs to double-check ideas when something was not immediately clear (Peñaloza & Cayla, 2007). The attribution of higher-order themes took place during the regular meetings. Following King's (1998) recommendation the hierarchical coding did not surpass two to four levels in order to preserve clarity in organizing and interpreting data. For the sake of anonymity, the authors assigned random names to each participant.

Table 1
Participants by pub, gender and position.

Pub	Age	Gender	Nationality	Job title	
1	22	F	British	Bar staff	
	22	F	Irish	Bar staff	
	23	M	Irish	Day shift manager	
	25	F	Polish	Bar staff	
	27	M	Polish	Bar staff	
	28	M	British	Bar staff	
	32	M	British	Bar staff	
	35	M	British	Bar staff	
	55	M	Scottish	Manager	N = 9
2	24	F	Romanian	Bar staff	
	28	M	Columbian	Assistant manager	
	35	M	Irish	Manager	N = 3
3	23	M	Irish	Bar staff	
	31	F	Polish	Bar staff	N = 2
4	24	F	American	Bar staff	
	25	M	British	Assistant manager	N = 2

4. Results

The service employees in the study work in four service establishments projecting a British brand image; three English and one Irish pub. One of the three English establishments is a more modern pub-restaurant with a large open space where the placement of the tables and bar allows everybody to see each other. The bar is well lit, the taps with particular British beer brands are clearly present and the design of the interior is open and light. Participants working here describe the establishment as a modern gastro-pub of the type becoming popular in the United Kingdom in recent years. The other three pubs, including the pub in which most observations and interviews took place, all have a more traditional British pub interior. They are warmer, cozy places with a lot of wooden panels, dark wooden furniture and bar. Themed decorations cover the walls, bringing the British Isles to mind. Every table has candles and, because of the placement of the tables, customers are more cut-off from what is happening around them, allowing for a more intimate night out.

What all four places have in common, according to the service employees, is the warm welcome and the easy-going British pub atmosphere. Although most participants perceive their place of work as a rather authentic British or Irish experience, they acknowledge that French elements play a role owing to the location in France. As an example, all four service establishments have mainly British dishes on their menus but also French plats du jour, which feature on the typical pub-chalkboards placed around the interior and on the pavement outside. The customer segment is similar in all four pubs, with most customers being local French people, even though the pubs also have a group of regulars that includes expatriates and people working in the other British pubs.

Crucial to the study is that all four service establishments not only profile themselves as British or Irish but also have an almost exclusively foreign, overwhelmingly British/Irish pub staff. A few French people work in the back kitchens but the service employees in regular contact with customers are usually British, or at least foreign and English-speaking. Jim explains how this situation is a deliberate choice by the owner, as the foreign service employees play a part in the overall strategy.

There is a French girl that works there, but she does not have a contract because the manager does not really want French people in the bar because she knows that people are there to see English people or English-speaking people [...] because that's what adds to the whole atmosphere.

Several interviews highlight that exclusively hiring foreign bar staff is a deliberate HR-strategy, John even refers to an “*unwritten policy not to employ French people here.*” According to participants the owners have a clear vision of what the pub environment should be and they adapt their HR-policy accordingly as they are looking for a specific person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996). Management wants customers to walk into a place with a British feel, where they are always able to speak English and meet people from abroad. According to John the owner wants to see the staff speaking English behind the bar at all times. Harry gives his vision of the owner's strategy:

I think they [the pub management] want to be a nonthreatening English establishment. They've been here for 20 odd years. They started slow and now they're trying to push the Englishness of the place. We speak in English to each other, friendlier, more opening, more welcoming. ... A bit more English style, laid back.

Anyone applying for work at the pub has a job interview during which the owner or the general manager will assess the English language proficiency and general attitude for working in a pub. Once they are convinced that the candidate is a good fit with the work environment (Kristof, 1996) they will propose a trial shift. Management instructs new employees to speak English but also asks them to be

themselves. Lester agrees with his employers' opinion on the use of English in the pub.

Yeah, well you work in an English pub so people expect to hear an English word.

Even though most service employees are native English speakers, not everybody is British or Irish. Recruiting a diverse English-speaking staff therefore appears to be a key HR-policy. Participants also see this diversity as a positive characteristic of their workplace. Mark explains how the diverse backgrounds help build the typical pub atmosphere.

In our particular pub, well the guy owns three actually and he hires almost exclusively English speaking. They don't have to be native speakers but English speaking. There's virtually no French natives at all. [...] It makes it more enjoyable for everybody. I mean, English, like communication isn't normally a problem. The ones who are not native speakers are normally at a pretty good level so it's fine.

Exclusively hiring foreign English-speaking bar staff means that the employers do not need to invest in language training, which often is a crucial factor in managing employees from different countries especially in larger MNCs (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2005). Another advantage of hiring foreign staff is the positive effect on the authenticity of the service in the pub compared to establishments hiring French bar staff. Many people who come to work in these establishments want to discover France and meet new people. They have no prior experience in the hospitality sector and often return home after one or two years to continue their studies. Even so, the turnover rate for these pubs is below the average of nearly 60% reported for employees in the first year of contract in the French hospitality sector (Dares, 2015). In the meantime the foreign employees are genuinely enjoying themselves in their temporary job. Their employer even asks them to be themselves in the pub, allowing for an authentic personal touch (Bowen, 2016) towards customers, without having to invest in specific training and development. Eva gives an account of staff authenticity.

I really miss this in French restaurants when I'm going somewhere. And I think people notice this in [the pub in question]. That we care about the customers, yeah, especially our manager, who is lovely person and he's doing magic tricks for the children [...] So, yeah, I think people appreciate this.

4.1. Defining the customer experience

Understanding the nature of the customer experience and the customers' expectations is a crucial challenge for both service employees and service managers. Every interview started by asking participants what they perceive as the reasons for customers to come to the pub; the authors asked about this aspect before asking any other questions to avoid any bias in the results. The answers show that the service employees' perceptions of customer expectations fall into two main categories: (1) general reasons that include good and competitively priced food and beer, and (2) reasons related to the uniqueness of the service establishments when compared to French bars and restaurants. This second category includes reasons invoking the traditional British pub culture such as an authentic atmosphere, friendly staff, and a cozy and warm interior. Some reasons relate more precisely to the Britishness of the establishments, and Mike elaborates on the care taken to make the overall interior authentic:

Everything you see is Irish, Irish, Irish. Irish pictures everywhere.

Several service employees focus on the experience by talking in terms of customers wanting to take a break from France and visit the

UK or Ireland by coming to the pub. Dan explains how the design of his work place helps set the mood.

This is a classic traditional pub. The interior, visual aesthetics, looks, designed to be cosy, warm, friendly, traditional – like you'd find in Ireland, Scotland, Wales.

In line with the deliberate efforts of the managers to make the pubs feel British through recruiting service personnel who speak English, the language spoken between service employee and customer becomes one of many aspects in the pub that help make the establishment authentic. Some service employees believe that a British pub with an entirely French staff would not come across as authentic. Mike describes how being “too French” might impact the authenticity of a British pub.

To give you an example about [a British pub in the same city], six months ago they only had foreigners; English, Irish, Peruvian. Right now they have three French people behind the bar. And that place has like... It's an English pub. Before it used to be packed and people used to love it and now people go like: boring. It's just French people behind the bar [...] So that would probably change how people would see the bar.

As these results show, the service employees generally perceive the overall authenticity of the service establishment as an important aspect, recognizing that many French customers visit the service establishment for a taste of England or Ireland. The management takes considerable care to make the interior seem authentic, including recruiting English speaking service personnel. Language thus appears to play a part, but what is the exact role of language use in these service encounters?

4.2. Language use in the customer experience

The observations and interviews with the service employees all indicate that the service employees' language use is not just a simple dichotomy of speaking or not speaking a given language. During each observation, the authors notice some customers using only French, some using only English, and a considerable number of customers making at least some use of both languages. The interviews with the service employees confirm this observation, with all participants reporting using both languages regularly. However, the frequency with which they speak English with customers, their own motivations to do so as well as their perceptions of customers' motivations to speak English all show considerable variation.

4.2.1. Speaking English as the main reason to engage in the service

All service employees in the study report about customers for whom speaking English, the customers' second language, is an important part of the service and adds to their overall experience. Both Lester and Harry report about customers for whom speaking English is either the most important reason or one of the most important reasons for visiting the pub.

We get students who come into the pub as for a lesson in English, with English native speakers. (Lester).

We get language students from the local university. (Harry).

With customers for whom speaking English may be the main reason to visit a British pub, all service employees in the study emphasize that they make an extra effort never to switch to French. Dave explains how he perceives his own role when serving customers of this kind.

I've met many people over the years who come in just to practice their English. Even if they make mistakes, I never correct

them – unless they ask me to. It's important to encourage them, you know.

While some customers enjoy speaking English for their own sake and to practice their language skills, Harry explains how part of the motivation for some customers when going out with friends to a British pub is to speak English to display their language skills in front of their friends in a form of bragging. These customers take pleasure in speaking a second language but apparently also have a desire to appear educated or worldly to their friends.

Sometimes there are a couple of people in a group that want to take their friends there because they want to show off. (Harry).

4.2.2. Speaking English as part of the overall experience

For other customers, the opportunity to speak English appears to be important but more as an indicator or enforcer of the overall experience. For these customers, according to the service employees, speaking English in a British pub appears to be intertwined with other aspects that combine to make the experience feel authentic. Dan reports on customers for whom speaking English is part of the wider desire for an authentically British experience:

Some of them will talk to you about their visits, where they've been to, perhaps exchange in Britain when they were younger, and they might come here to say “Oh, this is great, here I can practice my English”, eat the food they used to have, feel nostalgic.

Mike elaborates further on the same kind of situation by discussing some of the reasons customers tell him regarding how the overall customer experience in the pub becomes a possibility to relive another country, in which speaking English is an important part but by no means the only part of the experience:

You hear stories like probably every week. “I was in Dublin and that's why I came here to drink some Guinness.” And then they'll tell me about the places that they visited in [...] And we have Irish books as well so then they look at the pictures. And then they go like “Oh it's so beautiful” and they try to speak in English with us... And they talk with each other. With family or friends “Oh do you remember when they were serving the Guinness. It's the same.” And they just remember everything. How it was in Ireland.

4.2.3. English as a passive indicator of authenticity

In contrast to the customers who chose to speak English in the pubs and for whom actively speaking English is an integral part of the experience, the observations show that the majority of customers tend to use French, their first language. The service employees also unanimously report that many customers just come for the British atmosphere, the beer and the food but without wanting or being able to converse in English. Carol recognizes this situation and explains why making the pub completely English speaking would be a mistake:

If the patron would say “Okay we are only speaking English from now on.” And then we would walk up to customers and speak English. They would feel uncomfortable because maybe they don't speak it. They wouldn't want to go somewhere where they would have to speak another language. So it's important to speak the language of the country where you work.

However, even when service employees speak French with customers who prefer using French, they are looking for ways to improve the fit between their interaction with customers and the pub environment. The service employees often add short English

greetings or sentences to the conversation, usually when serving food or when customers want to pay. Whilst not a complete conversation in English, Lester explains how this language use still contributes to a more authentic English experience.

I speak in French. But I tend to say... I graze the conversation with English phrases. Like goodbye or have a good night. Because as I work in an English pub you know, I just add that as, I don't know how to say. Just add a bit more chit.

Tim also feels that many of the French customers visiting a British pub in France see the visit as an experience, sometimes even setting the mood and the theme of the entire evening. Tim explains how the use of at least a little bit of English can add to the experience, make the service encounter more genuine and even make the customers feel good about themselves.

It's a British pub; it's kind of like a themed night out. So when the French people come, they'd like to say try their English [...] they'll say "Hello, how are you doing?" and "Can I have the bill please?" or something. And sometimes I hear the bar would respond with "Thank you, goodnight." It's kind of that little thing that makes them satisfied and they leave "Oh yeah, I've just spoken a bit of English."

Even for French customers who speak no English, or who prefer not to try out their English, the fact that they constantly hear English around them in these pubs may still contribute positively to their perceptions of the authenticity of the pubs. Lisa explains how even customers who do not speak English will still perceive the language use as part of their overall experience.

We all do speak English together, and people hear that [...] and I think that the manager thinks it makes it more authentic if they [the customers] hear people speak English.

Adding to how customers who prefer speaking French can still perceive language use to play a role in making the customer experience seem authentic, Carol explains how the service employees' English-accented French could play a role in strengthening the perception of an authentic British pub even if the entire service encounter takes place in French.

We all have a terrible accent in French, but [laughter] it's probably charming for our customers. We speak English together, so people who want to speak English can practice with us.

4.2.4. Managing the language switch

In a service context in which some customers want to speak English, some want to speak French, and some a bit of both, the service employees in the pubs face a potential dilemma with every customer walking through the door. Talking French to a customer who comes to experience England and to practice English may lower customer satisfaction, but so might talking English to a French customer who speaks no English and only comes for a pint. Apart from regular customers, the service employee will not know what language people want to speak when they walk into the establishment. As the majority of the customers speak French, the observations show that most service employees tend to start in French. But how should the service employee react if a French customer addresses the service employee in English but with a detectable French accent? This is a common situation that the authors observe several times during each observation, and the service employees usually, but not always, try to accommodate the customer by responding in English; this is true even for the service employees

who have a professional working proficiency in French or are fully bilingual. Adam describes why he sticks with English.

I actually think when I first started working, when I spoke French, people would start speaking in English. And I originally thought it was because they heard that it's not my first language. So they're helping me out or they're speaking in English so that it's easier for me. But that's not the case. What I realized it's actually their chance to speak a bit of English. Their chance to practice what English they know. You know? So whereas before I used to say "No. I'm okay speaking French" and I'd reply to them in French. Now I realize that they've come in here, they know it's an Irish bar, an English. . foreign place, and they're getting served by a foreigner so they want to practice the little English that they know. And you entertain them and speak to them.

Virtually all the service employees mirror Adam's reaction, regardless of their own proficiency in French. The service employees are well aware that some customers want to practice their English, or feel that speaking English in a British pub adds something to their experience. Julia explains why she uses English even with customers whose English may be hesitant, realizing that language use is a part of the customer's overall experience.

I definitely stick with English. I think it's nice if ... because some of them actually want that experience, to go to an Irish pub and speak to an Irish person.

Several participants recognize the importance of accommodating the customers and feel that if they would switch to French with customers who make an effort to use what little English they have, then this switch could have a negative influence on the customers' quality perception as Dave details.

Definitely negative because if they are making the effort to speak in English and I would go "Nah I'm going to speak French, I don't have time." I think it would definitely influence their first impression.

Carol also explains why she would not switch to French with customers who try to use their English and how she believes that such a language switch could lower customer satisfaction.

[If the customer has an accent] I continue in English because I think it's polite to speak to a person in the language they're speaking with you. And obviously that person is speaking English because they want to speak English, have a conversation in English. I guess it [switching to French] could discourage people, especially if they come to speak English.

Even though all service employees in the study report accommodating customers who want to speak English by continuing to speak English with them, some still recognize that using English may not always be possible, as the observations also confirm. Lisa explains why this might be the case:

I normally continue in English if they make the effort to speak English, and I think that maybe they want to speak English. If I can understand, then I continue to speak English. If they are really struggling I may speak French, mainly when I don't know what they're saying. [...] If someone's struggling, it's more that I want to make it easier for them. It's not that I don't want to speak English with them, it's just that it might go smoother if we both speak a language we understand.

Lack of understanding aside, all service employees report trying their best to answer the French customers in English if the customers try to speak that language. However, two exceptions to this rule become evident in several of the interviews. The first is due to time constraints,

as the pubs may be very busy, especially during weekends. Harry and Carol both explain why they sometimes switch despite their intentions not to do so.

If I'm very busy and their English is very bad, it may be easier for me to speak French. (Harry).

If I think it's quicker I might sometimes switch to French. ... Because they're like taking their time. And it's really busy and really stressed. Especially if it's one person at the table speaking English and everybody else is speaking French. (Carol).

The other exception, which almost all the service employees in the study mention, is when they perceive the customer to be rude. The service employees describe different behaviors to intentionally make these customers' service less enjoyable. Dave explains how he never switches language with customers who want to practice their English unless the customer is rude.

I definitely continue to speak to them in English [...] It's an English pub and they make an effort to speak English... But if he's an asshole, I'll switch to French.

While some service employees react like Dave by switching to French in order to show that their French is better than the customer's English, a different language reaction to a rude customer is to step up the use of English to make the customer lose face by not understanding, as Dan details.

If people are rude and I've given them a chance but they have been rude for the entire service [...] and then when I get a little bit annoyed with them because I find it rude that they are now speaking to me in English. And their English isn't that good. Then I would reply to them in English, really ... bashfully. And it might seem a bit impolite and I would say it with a strong Irish accent. Even if they don't understand. So the mood will affect that, yes.

The service employees who use language as a way to cope with rude customers all emphasize that this is exceptional, but that this situation sometimes happens late at night and particularly with drunk customers who have been speaking French up to that point, in which case the service employee is more likely to switch to French than with customers who really want to speak English from the start of the service encounter. Harry explains how they have:

... drunk and annoying customers who say silly things. Some people they just say random phrases in English. They don't necessarily understand very much. So if I do reply, I can see that they don't understand what I said. So then I have to switch because there's not much communication going on.

The interviews and observations all confirm that language use does not play just one role, instead language appears to play multiple roles for many different customer groups, adding to a complex picture that the service employees need to master. Harry sums up how speaking English might have different meanings depending on what customers look for when engaging with the service provider.

Some people don't really... they just feel it's like a gimmick and they come once in a blue moon and think "oh, this is interesting." They say a few words in English. [...] But they're not the ones I'm really talking about. They are the minority who don't really care where they are [...] But for others, they are learning English. They are going to the UK soon. They are going to the US. They have been there and have come back. They miss something about it. They haven't eaten this in a long time. They miss conversing in English. Things like that [...] We get French

English teachers, language students at the local universities. Couples, we get a lot of those actually, families who are half Anglophone, half French.

5. Discussion

The current service literature on language use focuses almost entirely on the customers, and only addresses situations in which customers want to use their own first language. This paper extends this line of research both by looking at service employees and on situations in which customers may wish to practice their second language. The findings in this regard represent three main contributions to the field of service research, particularly to the field of language use in service contexts.

Addressing language use from the perspective of the service employee, the first contribution consists of adding to the extant service literature by uncovering a continuum of different motivations for language use in service encounters, rather than the relatively clear-cut picture in previous studies. The second contribution consists of analyzing service employees' language switch, identifying the different kinds of situations in which the service employee decides to switch language as well as the underlying reasons behind this switch. The third contribution looks at service employees' language use from an HR perspective. The findings extend the extant literature on authentic service employees by combining this managerial practice with how service employees themselves perceive customer reactions. The findings show that allowing service employees to be themselves not only makes their work more enjoyable, as the extant HR literature reports, but that service employees also perceive that customers receive a better and more authentic service experience.

5.1. A typology of language use and authenticity in services

The continuum of different motivations for language use is evident in the data and represents the paper's first contribution to the literature. Setting out to uncover the role of the service employee's language use, the findings reveal a rather intricate situation. Combining how service employees perceive customers' desire to speak a foreign language as well as their desire for an authentic experience, the findings reveal four different typologies applicable to a wider service setting; Fig. 1 presents an overview of these four typologies.

Looking first at the customers' desire for language use, service employees report a large proportion of customers who want service in their first language when visiting a pub; either they do not speak a foreign language, English in this study, or they have no desire to speak a foreign language when going for a beer or a meal in their home town. This kind of situation corresponds almost exactly to the extant service literature on language use, which reports a strong customer preference for speaking the customer's first language in service encounters (Holmqvist et al., 2014; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014).

At the other extreme of the continuum the findings show the opposite situation; customers who desire to speak a different language. The service employees describe customers who come to the British pub with the explicit purpose of speaking their second language, English. According to the respondents, some customers may want to show off their second language skills in front of their friends. Most customers who come to speak English, however, seem to come because they want to practice English, they enjoy speaking the language, and they see the language use contributing to an authentic British experience. While this situation is absent in the service literature on language use, these findings echo findings in the psycholinguistic literature reporting how individuals may want to practice a second language to feel good about themselves when able to do so (Clément et al., 2003; MacIntyre et al., 1999).

		Importance of specific language	
		Low	High
Importance of authenticity	High	<p>You hear stories like probably every week. “I was in Dublin and that’s why I came here to drink some Guinness.” And then they’ll tell me about the places that they visited [...] And we have Irish books as well so then they look at the pictures.</p> <p>And then they go like “Oh it’s so beautiful” and they try to speak in English with us. [...] And they talk with each other. With family or friends “Oh do you remember when they were serving the Guinness. It’s the same.” And they just remember everything. How it was in Ireland. (Mike)</p>	<p>We get a lot of tourists that are sick of speaking French or trying to speak French. [...] There’s also a fair amount of expats, from the English pub community. (Gill)</p> <p>If it’s expats that we’ll just speak in English to each other. (Lisa)</p>
	Low	<p>It’s a novelty as well; I think, for French people – you know, a pint of beer. [...] There’s thousands of wine bars and brasseries and stuff and maybe they come for a novel night out, or to poke a bit of fun at the English, I don’t know, just to have a quirky pint of beer and a plate of fish and chips. You know, let’s have a laugh about our cuisine. (Tim)</p>	<p>We get a lot of young professionals and they are in the business world where there is a lot of English so they want to learn English. (Carol)</p> <p>I have families where the kids are studying English and then the parents insist that they order in English and I’ll then try my best to go along with it. (Harry)</p>

Fig. 1. Four types of value creation.

Turning to authenticity, the findings reveals a similar continuum. At one end, the service employees report having a lot of customers who come to the British pubs simply to drink a beer and socialize with friends, but for whom the Britishness of the pubs appear to be of no, or very little, importance. They are simply interested in a pub or bar in which to meet. At the other end of the continuum, the service employees also report having customers for whom the authenticity of the service establishment is an important part of the experience. Several service employees explain how French customers come to the pub to reminisce about their experiences in the UK and/or Ireland as a student, tourist, or expatriate. For these customers, the authenticity of the establishment appears to be highly important. The wooden interior, pictures of the British Isles or British/Irish authors on the wall, British beer and cider brands, typical British dishes, and a British atmosphere are important as these will put the customer in the right environment to start their reminiscing experience.

Combining the language continuum and the authenticity continuum, the findings thus identify four different typologies. The first is the kind of consumer who simply wants to visit a pub or a bar, perhaps to meet friends, socialize or watch some sports. For these consumers, neither the language nor the authenticity of the place is of any particular importance. The second type represents customers who find the language use important, but do not care much about the authenticity of the establishment. The service employees report about customers who come to practice their English; for these customers the important thing is that they get to speak English with English native speakers, but the overall atmosphere of the place is of less importance. The third type is a consumer who is not interested in the language, but wants the place to have an authentic feel. In the case of British pubs, they may enjoy the cozy atmosphere that adds to their experience, while they have no particular interest in speaking English. The same kind of customer would visit a good Italian restaurant for the dining experience,

not because of wanting to speak Italian but for an authentic place bringing Italy to mind. The last typology includes customers who want an authentic experience where language plays an important part. The service employees report both British expats and other foreigners who come to the pubs to reconnect with what they know from back home, have a real English pint or authentic English pub food as well as enjoying the opportunity to speak English or to have a discussion in English. The observations reveal on several occasions that a single British person sits at the bar, having a drink and talking with the bar staff. As with the other typologies, this kind of customer is not restricted to English pubs, they could equally well be somebody who visits a Cuban salsa festival both for the authentic salsa experience and to speak Spanish, or a beer festival for speaking German. The important thing is that language use and authenticity complement each other for the overall customer experience.

These four typologies represent the four extremes. However, even though these opposite situations appear to be relative common according to the service employees, the findings further reveal that the overall picture is more complex. Rather than finding just these extremes, the results uncover a continuum of different attitudes and motivations for language use in services. Both the observations and the interviews confirm that service employees regularly come into contact with customers who conduct the main part of the service encounter in their first language, but still sprinkle the conversation with a few words and phrases in their second language. Many of the service employees also report how they tend to use at least a few basic phrases in their first language, the customers' second language, and how they perceive that the customer response to this kind of occasional language use is overwhelmingly positive. In addition, several service employees report of customer feedback on how hearing English contributes to give the customer experience a more authentically British feel, even for those customers who speak only French themselves.

5.2. Language use in service sabotage

The second contribution addresses service employees' reasons for switching language. The findings show that the service employees recognize that their own language use influences customers, and that their speaking English when working in British pubs can contribute to how authentic customers perceive the entire experience to be. As the findings show, the service employees try to be congruent with the pub environment and usually accommodate customers by speaking English to anyone who wants to practice the language.

While all service employees emphasize that they try to accommodate the customer by using the language of the customer's choice, several respondents report deviations from this rule of thumb in specific cases. In order to cope with rude customers, two different tactics for what Harris and Ogbonna (2002) refer to as service sabotage, the service employee deliberately worsening the customer service, emerge in the interviews. The first tactic is for the service employee to switch back to the customer's first language if the customer is rude. The other tactic is to speak even more authentically British or Irish, deliberately using a stronger dialect when facing rude customers.

Although these two tactics could appear different at first sight, one switching to French and one using broad English, this paper posits that the underlying motivation is the same in both situations, and aims to convey the same message. Faced with a customer whom the service personnel finds rude, the service employees' choice of language signals: You have gone too far. The service employee thus breaks rapport with the customer, either by deliberately switching away from English, as in Dave's case, or by deliberately using an English the customer will not understand, as in Dan's case. For customers who want to make a point out of speaking their second language, perhaps to show off in front of friends as Harry reports, the service employees' message by either switching to French or by making sure the customer does not understand their English, sabotages the service for the rude customer who loses face. This reaction presents the other side of Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2014) who recommend that service employees accommodate the customer by speaking their language, whereas this paper finds that service employees can sabotage the service by deliberately not speaking the language the customer wishes to speak. Even though what the service employee says in such situation remains factual, their choice of language signals their dissatisfaction, underlying how language use can take on many different forms, including that of a coping mechanism in the case of a rude customer. While these situations are comparatively rare, and most service employees are happy to indulge the customer by speaking the language that the customer wants to speak, this different form of language use adds further insight into the already complex situation of language use in service contexts.

5.3. Aligning the authentic service employee with the authentic customer experience

From an HR perspective, the findings further underline how staffing practices can facilitate the work of service employees while simultaneously strengthening customer perceptions of authenticity. The extant HR literature emphasizes that service employees are happier when allowed to be who they are; conversely, asking service employees to take on a role that differs from their real identity comes at a considerable personal cost (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2012), increasing the risk of a burnout for the service employee (Grandey, 2003) as well as the risk of the service employee sabotaging the service (cf. Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Kao et al., 2014). The findings in this paper show the benefits of recruiting English-speaking foreign service employees in British pubs, while running British pubs with French personnel acting British appears to backfire. Similarly, asking foreign service employees working in an Irish or British pub to use fake Irish or British accents also risk backfiring, not only because customers may find the practice fake, but also because

of the increased emotional costs for service employees when forced to be inauthentic in their interactions with customers (e.g. Erickson & Wharton, 1997). The findings thus add to the understanding of successful HR practices in service environments by showing that allowing service employees the "expression of their true selves in interactions with customers" (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2012, p. 475) not only decreases the human costs for the service employees, as long reported in human resources literature (e.g. Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Grandey, 2003), but also translates into a more authentic service experience for the customers.

5.3.1. Limitations, research implications and future research

This paper deliberately focuses on the role of the service employee. While sociolinguistic research looks into aspects of employees' language use (Callahan, 2005, 2006), a relative lack of research on service employees still remains in the extant service literature. This lack is particularly noticeable in the field of language use in service encounters, where all extant articles take a customer perspective (see Holmqvist et al., 2014 for a review). One limitation in the current paper, albeit a deliberate one, is thus that the paper only looks at the service employee's language use. The authors believe this choice to be justified but recognize that future research could stand to gain from comparing the service employees' language use with the customers' language, as combining customer data with insights from service employees would allow for a more complete picture. Part of the findings in British pubs align with the findings of Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2013, 2014) in restaurants, but complement them by looking at the same situations from a service employee perspective.

However, the findings also uncover situations markedly different from the encounters in the current service literature on language use; contrary to studies emphasizing that customers prefer their first language (Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2013; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014), the findings show that service employees perceive that customers may prefer to use their second language in some contexts, either because they want to feel good about themselves (see Clément et al., 2003 for a review of psychological motivations) or because they feel that using the language connected with the theme of the customer experience may render the experience more authentic.

Future research could look more closely at this second type of situation. In which service contexts may customers want to use their second language, and what are their reasons for wanting to speak a second language? One possible extension of the findings would be to analyze the identified typology in different contexts. The findings are relevant to understand the interactions between language use and authenticity in wider consumer experiences. In these settings, future research could find fruitful avenues for managing the role of language for authenticity. Contrary to English pubs, fewer customers are likely to visit an Italian, Chinese, Lebanese or other ethnic restaurant to practice their language skills, but that does not mean that the service personnel's language use will not influence customers' authenticity perceptions even if the customers do not understand the language. Identifying how a language that customers do not understand could influence authenticity would be an interesting extension of the current research. Furthermore, the roles of different languages present another pertinent possibility. This study focuses on English, the world's most spoken second language, which sociolinguistic research sometimes recommends as a neutral language in business settings (see Callahan, 2005). This recommendation resonates relatively well with the findings, in which service employees feel that many customers want to speak English, not just hear the language as part of the authentic overall customer experience. Future research could address whether less spoken second languages mainly matter for perceptions of authenticity, or whether they also attract customers wanting to speak these languages.

Future research could also benefit from studying potential effects of language authenticity and cultural appropriation (see Lacoste, Leimgruber, & Breyer, 2014) on the service experience of customers. This study focuses on perceptions of international staff who have a good level of English in a context where many customers do not have full proficiency in their second language. Future research could address how bilingual customers perceive the use of that language by international staff, especially if the staff pretends to be from the concerned country or region. During the observations one of the British staff members made a referral to his visit to an Irish pub in the United States. According to this person, the clearly American service employee put on a fake Irish accent, which in turn put him off. The inclusion of the appreciation of appropriation in future studies could shed light on how customers perceive service employees in these specific settings.

5.3.2. Managerial implications

The findings carry several implications for service managers about the role of the service employee's language use. Given the rather complex situation the findings uncover, common to all four pubs in the study, the need for bilingual service personnel stands out as an important managerial implication. Several respondents describe what they perceive to be an important difference between the pubs with English staff and some other, similar British pubs in the same French metropolis, which strive for the same British pub atmosphere but with mainly French staff. According to respondents who have visited some of these latter pubs as ordinary customers, the use of French-speaking staff results in a much less authentic customer experience perception among the participants. Adding to the findings of Sirianni et al. (2013) on the importance of service employees' behavior as authentic, the results indicate that managers of service establishments providing a foreign customer experience need to understand that language use can play a role in how customers perceive the service. These findings extend beyond British pubs; similar results may emerge in customer experiences such as French or Italian fine dining restaurants in other countries, and of course in ethnic restaurants where customers may appreciate hearing the language connected with the cuisine of the restaurant's country of origin (cf. Ouellet, 2007).

At the same time, the results also indicate that managers need to apply this strive for authenticity with moderation; even though some customers appear to cherish the possibility to use their second language, others want to speak their first language. For any ethnic service establishment, the best practice thus appears to consist of service employees who speak both the local language and the language corresponding to the origin of the establishment. This approach caters both for customers who want to speak their first language and for customers who perceive foreign language use as either an additional element of their experience or as an indicator of the authenticity of the service establishment.

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