

**MANIPULATION OF HUMAN MIND THROUGH THE POWER OF DISCOURSE;  
A STUDY ON BANGLADESHI CALL CENTER CONVERSATIONS**

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**BRAC UNIVERSITY  
DHAKA, BANGLADESH**

**MANIPULATION OF HUMAN MIND THROUGH THE POWER OF DISCOURSE;  
A STUDY ON BANGLADESHI CALL CENTER CONVERSATIONS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & HUMANITIES  
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**BY  
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## **DECLARATION**

I, hereby, declare that this dissertation is my sole work that consists of all the original works conducted by me except the quotations and citations. The concepts or ideas taken from other sources have been cited properly. Moreover, this dissertation has not been submitted previously or concurrently in any other institution or organization.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focused on the power of discourse and how it is being used by the call center agents to manipulate human mind. The specific objectives of this study are: 1) to explore the usage of discourse in Bangladeshi call center as a power to manipulate human mind and 2) to examine the variation of the discourse based on the role of the speakers (as a caller or agent), gender and the type of calls. The research design follows a combination of qualitative and quantitative method and the research data came from a reputed call center of Bangladesh while some interviews and survey from the call center agents has been incorporated. Finally, this study sums up with some key findings that can help an individual discourse to be more powerful in action.

**KEY WORDS:** Discourse, Manipulation, Power, Call Center, Bangladesh

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**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The call center industry is a significant new type of customer service work and is rapidly increasing in size of the range of sectors and number of employees within the industry (Datamonitor, 1998). This business [in Bangladesh] is gaining momentum as a number of large companies have outsourced work to third parties recently (Mamun, 2016). According to a news report of the Daily Star, the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, including call centers, is now worth around \$12 million, of which 50 percent is accounted for by the domestic market, according to its trade body and the local demand for such services is growing by around 20 percent every quarter, said Ahmadul Hoq Bobby, president of (BACCO)<sup>1</sup>. A positive trend in the business is that big companies are becoming confident of local service providers. Mobile operators like Airtel and Citycell have recently outsourced their call centers to local companies, while Robi has outsourced work to an Indian company (Mamun, 2016). Another telecommunication company Banglalink has also choose a third party to handle their call center according to the news.

Besides many of the companies has set up and running their own call centers just to make their data safe and the product and service quality up to the mark of those companies brand and reputation. Many private banks such as Eastern Bank, Standard Chartered, Brac Bank and some telecommunication company like Grameenphone are one of those companies that has their own call centers. More or less all the call centers has the same sort of customer services like problem solving, receiving request and complaint and product sell order. In spite of the same sort of services; one difference can be found throughout all the call centers and that is the variety of discourse (Islam, 2016). To figure out the nature of this variety and the usage of the discourse, I will use Grameenphone<sup>2</sup> call center agents discourse as the primary source of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh Association of Call Center and Outsourcing

<sup>2</sup> Grameenphone is one of the largest telecom company of Bangladesh which is a part of the Telenor group based in Norway.

Grameenphone call center has around 2000 employees in its call center while approximately around 1200-1500 are being active throughout the different parts of a day (Islam, 2016). The agents receive calls from all over Bangladesh and from abroad as well to handle its roaming service holder customers. According to Mr. Islam, discourse of these call center agents differ because of their behavior, previous experience, company policy, gender, educational or occupational background and the role of the speakers in a telephone conversation. Besides, the diverse group of people that called from different corner of the country has also an impact for the discourse to be different. As the call type (request, complaint, general) differs, the way of the service delivery differs as well (Islam, 2016). More or less every time, the agents has to fulfill the customer's desire with their discourse while many of the agents admire that discourse is the one and only option they has to get help from. So, they use discourse as their power in profession. This phenomenon has created a venue for cross cultural communication between the agents and the callers (Friginal, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Discourse and Power:***

Discourse is the ways we think and talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject (Foucault, 1980). Given that the ways we think and talk about a subject influence the ways we act, in relation to that subject, these adversarial discourses of power can be problematic because they obscure the mutualistic dimensions of power that have played a significant role in human history and that will need to play an even more significant role if we are to learn how to live together peacefully in an increasingly interdependent world (Karlberg, 2005). Besides, focusing on the meaning of a given discourse, the distinguishing characteristic of this approach is its stress on power relationships. These are expressed through language and behavior, and the relationship between language and power (Given, 2012).



### ***2.2 Power as Domination:***

Karlberg in his article titled "*The power of discourse and the discourse of power; pursuing peace through discourse intervention*" mentioned that, the academic study of power has been approached in many ways, in the *Western Social Theory* as a central concept. He also mentioned that in the latter half of the twentieth century, theorists of power began to invoke what has become a widely-used distinction between two broad ways of thinking and talking about power. This distinction is made by contrasting the expression "power to" with the expression "power over" (Connolly, 1974). Though, (Connolly, 1974) Dahl, conceptualized power in simple behavioral terms, explaining that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (1996, p.80).

### ***2.3 Discourse and Manipulation:***

There are a number of crucial notions in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that required special attention because they imply discursive power abuse and "Manipulation" is one of them (Dijk, 2008). Manipulation not only involves power but specifically abuse of power that is domination.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, manipulation implies the exercise of a form of illegitimate influence by means of discourse; manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interests of the manipulator and against the best interests of the manipulated (Chouliaraki, 2005). Indeed, many forms of contemporary communicative manipulation, e.g. by the mass media, are multimodal, as is typically the case in advertising (Day, 1999). The crucial difference in this case is that in persuasion the interlocutors are free to believe or act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader, whereas in manipulation recipients are typically assigned a more passive role: they are victims of manipulation besides, the negative consequence of manipulative discourse typically occurs

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to <http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Discourse%20and%20manipulation.pdf>

when the recipients are unable to understand the real intention or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator (Dijk, 2008). This may be the case especially when the recipients lack the specific knowledge that might be used to resist manipulation (Wodak, *Language, Power and Ideology*, 1989).

#### ***2.4 Discourse and Mind Control:***

In his book Dijk mentioned that, if controlling discourse is a first major form of power, controlling people's mind is the other fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony<sup>4</sup>. Within a Critical Discourse Analysis CDA framework, "mind control" involves even more than just acquiring beliefs about the world through discourse and communication (Dijk, 2008). To describe the ways that power and dominance are involved in mind control, Nesler et al said the first point is, recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge and opinions (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy or credible sources such as scholars, experts, professionals or reliable media. Secondly, in some situations participants are obliged to be recipients of discourse, e.g. in education and in many job situations. Lesson Learning materials, job instructions and other discourse types in such cases may need to be attended to, interpreted and learned as intended by institutional and organizational authors (Giroux, 1981). Third, in many situations there are no public discourses or media that may provide information from which alternative beliefs may be derived (Downing, 1984). Finally, Wodak mentioned that, recipients may not have the knowledge and beliefs that are needed to challenge the information or discourses that they are exposed to (1987).

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<sup>4</sup> Note that "Mind Control" is merely a handy phrase to summarize a very complex process. Cognitive psychology and mass communication research have shown that influencing the mind is not as straightforward a process as simplistic ideas about mind control might suggest (Dijk, 2008).

### ***2.5 Conversation Analysis:***

Conversation or interaction with each other is an essential part of our regular lifecycle without which livelihood cannot be a success. The two great American sociologists Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel first introduced the idea of conversational analysis (CA). They define Conversation Analysis as the way people interact with one another in a society; the way can be both ordinary and extraordinary (Sidnell, 2010). In addition, Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel prepared the ground in which Conversation Analysis arose—Goffman with his study of cultural rules and rituals in face-to-face interaction and Garfinkel with his investigations into the situated and normative character of shared understanding in everyday courses of action (Heritage, 1984). Besides, the basic rules of conversational analysis is to focus on “social rules which are maintained in and through talk-in interaction” rather than structural aspects of language (Sidnell, 2010). Moreover, conversation analysis is not only sturdy the distinction between formal and non-formal conversation about everyday life, but also understand the situation in which that particular conversation occurred (Liddicoat, 2007).

### ***2.6 Critical Discourse Analysis and Telephone Talk:***

Hopper, in his book titled *Telephone Conversation*, provides evidence that talking on the telephone is a significant part of everyday life, noting, for instance, that “US citizens spent 3.75 trillion minutes on the phone during 1987” (Hopper & Doany, 1998). He also traces the historical evolution of the telephone and the ways that face-to-face talk differ from telephone talk, and then introduces conversational analysis and argues why it is particularly helpful approach for understanding communication on the phone (Tracy, 2003). There is also a growing interest in extending the typical focus on vocal and language features of talk to considerations of the way interaction is physically embodied, performed and materially situated

and in extending study of conversation processes in informal conversation to medical and therapy settings (Tracy, 2003).

### ***2.7 Intonation, Turn Taking & Overlap:***

In conversation analysis, the process begins with the record of a naturally occurred conversation. These recordings are carefully transcribed according to specific conventions (Jefferson, 2004). There are many features of a recorded conversation that can be taken into account for analysis, while the three features; intonation, turn taking and overlap have been adopted in this literature as the main focus of this study is to analyze telephone discourse (Harvey, Emanuel, & Gail, 1974). Intonation is the tonality and pitch of the speaker's voice that determines the meaning of the delivered speech which often depends on the context of the speakers. Pitch of voice plays a role of good turn-yielding [and] people raise their voice tone when they want to take the floor (Pöhaker, 1996). This often led the conversation into turn taking. According to (Liddicoat, 2007) turn-taking means change of speaker in a conversation. To give an overview about the turn-taking process Sidnell (2010) referred Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff's two components of turn taking system<sup>5</sup> which are turn-constructive component and turn-allocation component. Sidnell also added that Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff, defined turn-constructive component as speaker change can occur or turn may pass to another speaker at the end of the unit and turn allocation means how turns are allocated among participants. Overlapping is the common feature of telephone conversation that occurs frequently. While another person is talking often creates overlapping in conversation and [according to] Nofsinger<sup>6</sup>, people often talk in the middle of other speakers' turn, even knowing that it is another speaker turn to talk as well knowing that the possibility to create overlapping in conversation (Pöhaker, 1996).

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<sup>5</sup> Please see [http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~julia/cs4706/Sacks\\_et\\_al\\_1974.pdf](http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~julia/cs4706/Sacks_et_al_1974.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Nofsinger (1991) notes that one frequent cause of overlap in FTF conversation occurs when more than one listener self-selects at the same time.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This study focused on the usage of discourse in Bangladeshi call center as a power to manipulate human mind and the variation of the discourse based on the role of the speakers (as a caller or agent), gender and the type of calls and this in this chapter I will highlight the strategy of research design and the relevant methods that has been used in it. Along with these, the detailed data collection process, description of participants, time frame, equipment and the limitations will be described chronologically.

#### ***3.1 Objective of the Paper:***

The objective of the paper is to explore the usage of discourse in Bangladeshi call center as a power to manipulate human mind and the variation of the discourse based on the role of the speakers (as a caller or agent), gender and the type of calls.

#### ***3.2 Research Questions:***

This research will try to find out the answer of the following research question besides of the objectives of the paper.

1. Does the call center agents use discourse as a manipulating tool?
2. Is manipulation through discourse in a call center intentional or unintentional?

#### ***3.3 Research Design:***

This research has been directed based on two forms of data. Both the qualitative and quantitative methods has been used. To collect the data both structured and semi-structured question has been used while the result of the structured questions has been converted into charts and diagrams to get an overall or general idea and the ratio of the respondents so that the results can be easily included in the research. The structured question has been broadly used to

collect data from the call center agents and customers who usually get involved into telephonic conversation. On the other hand semi-structured question has been used for manager or supervisor level positions to get some specific and extra information regarding the call conversation, service delivery, call handling process and the company policy about the discourse.

### ***3.4 Settings and Time Frame:***

As the scope of getting information from every call center is not possible because of the different company policy, I choose Grameenphone as being a former employee it was easy for me to get interacted with the call center agents and supervisors. This is why the entire call sample, opinion and experience came from this specific place. The data collection process started from November 6, 2015 which ended on February 18, 2016.

### ***3.5 Participants:***

People from diverse group were engaged in the data collection process. The major participants for this survey were the call center agent of Grameenphone, while 3 supervisor level employee has share their view, opinion and experience through the semi structured survey and interview questions. The call generator or the customer of Grammenphone has been chosen randomly from different parts of the country. The number of call center agent participated in this research data collection survey is 20 among them the gender ration is 50:50 having 2-3 years of experience in call center as an agent. The supervisor level employee gender ratio is 2:1 and their average year of experience in a call center as a supervisor is 8. The number of the customers in this research is 10 among them 6 are male and 4 are female and their average experience of call center conversation is three times in a month.

### ***3.6 Equipment:***

To collect the data there were three sets of questioner among them 2 were structured and 1 was semi structured. The structured questioner contains ten question while the structured question contains five questions. A set of fifty recorded calls has been collected randomly from the centers record section that has an average duration of 4 minutes of natural conversation between the agent and customer has been analyzed while five among them has been mentioned in details in this paper.

### ***3.7 Data Collection and Procedure:***

The questioner form was delivered through customized website and the call center agents were requested to fill the questioner form online. Along with this, the supervisors were interviewed over phone. Besides, five of the agents has been interviewed over phone to gather general knowledge about the conversation process. The results of the survey converted into diagram and charts to get the response summary so that it can be used in this research easily.

### ***3.8 Scope of this Study:***

Though this study is only focusing on exploration of the usage of discourse in Bangladeshi call center as a power to manipulate human mind and the variation of the discourse based on the role of the speakers (as a caller or agent), gender and the types of calls, further study can be initiated based on the research findings. As the research deals with discourse, power and manipulation, some anthropological research like domination, hegemony and inequality through discourse can be done. Along with these, the result of this research can be used to formulate some in depth research on discourse, register variation and corpus based linguistic analysis. Due to the limitations and requirements those research possibilities are kept aside.

### ***3.9 Restriction and Limitations:***

This research however, is not beyond its limitations. As I have mentioned earlier, due to the requirement and the time frame of this different scope of this study has been omitted and only focused on a particular point. Firstly, the call center has a few calls that has conversations in English, for which I used all the Bangla conversation and translated those into English. While translating, by nature the flavor or meaning of source language is not equivalent enough which a great challenge that I have faced while doing the conversation analysis. Secondly, as the agents has to pass day full with workload, it was hard to get response from them easily along with this, to get information from the ordinary caller was hard as they were not feeling easy to provide information, which is another limitation of this research. Finally, as the study is only on a particular call center and based on a limited number of records and interviews it may not be compared to a study that has been done on other call centers. The research contains some dialogues or conversations that has been directly taken from the recorded audio conversation which is the property of Grameenphone and may not be used any purposes without having the authority of the company.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS**

This research contains data from three sources and they are: 1) Survey data from call center agents, 3) Interview report from supervisor level employees and 4) Recorded conversation between the agents and customers.

### ***4.1 Survey Data results from Call Center Agents:***

The call center agents were given a link to fill the survey form online. Approximately 26 agents were contacted and requested to fill the form where the response came from 20 agents. The form has a set of 10 questions.



*Question number 1: What type of call do you receive most?*

The options were: a) Query b) Complaint c) Request d) Other

Among the 20 respondents 60% (APPENDIX C) of them mentioned that they get calls that is a type of complaint regarding the product. Besides, 20% of them mentioned that most of the received call type is query and another 20% mentioned that their average call type is request category. So, from this result it can be assumed that, when a caller used to call to make a complaint, s/he definitely is not happy or in better mode to have a smooth conversation. Along with this, this types of conversation has more possibility of overlapping and turn taking.

*Question number 2: How much time in average do you take to handle a customer?*

The options were: a) Less than 1 minute b) 1-3 minutes c) 3-5 minutes d) More than 5 minutes

To answer this question, 40% (APPENDIX C) mentioned that their average conversation duration with a customer is in between 1-3 minutes, where 60% of them pointed out the time range between 3-5 minutes. Nobody has chosen the option A or D. To figure out the reason, it has been explored that the agents who usually get a request type call, has to spend less time in conversation. On the other hand, those who receives complaint type call, has to spend more time than usual. This is because the request call do not require any additional task from the agent side, while to convince the customer who has a complaint, the agents has to use some extra words or line beside the regular one. Various sort of discourse markers are also used to handle these sort of issues.

*Question number 3: Out of 10, how many customers are knowledgeable about the product they are using, do you think?*

The options were: a) 2 b) 6 c) 4 d) 8

This question has been set to identify the nature of the customers that the agents identify and their knowledge about the product that they are using. Among the 20 respondents, 40% (APPENDIX C) said that, among each 10 customers, only 2 customers has sufficient knowledge about the product that they are using. On the other hand, 60% mentioned that only

4 among each 10 customers has knowledge about the product. When the agents asked to provide their opinion about this status on customers (whether it is good or bad to have knowledge about the product) the agents mentioned that, in the context of Bangladesh, sufficient knowledge is not good for everyone. To validate this statement agent said that, they receive call from different level of people of the society and from different people having different level of education. It is really easy to convince a customer about a product when they do not have sufficient knowledge about it, on the other hand, those who has knowledge may not be convinced even if the right information is provided (Ferdous, 2016).

*Question number 4: If you do not understand any customer, what do you do?*

The options were: a) Request to repeat b) Request to call back again  
c) Request to go service center d) Hang up the call with dialogue

To response this question, 40% said that they request the customer to go to nearest service center, because they think that face to face interaction is far better than conversation over phone. Rest of the 40% (APPENDIX D) said that they request the customer to call back again because they are not sure about the service delivery process or there is a system challenge. Among the respondents, 20% mentioned that they request the caller to repeat his/her words so that they can try to understand the customer and if fail then they take another procedure like: to request to go to the nearest service point.

*Question number 5: In which way do you think you can control your customer?*

The options were: a) Through apology/appreciate b) Through service recovery action  
c) Giving offer d) None of these

Among the respondents, 60% (APPENDIX D) said that they control their customer through apology or appreciation, while 40% of them mentioned that they offer various free products to convince their customer. When asked, the agents informed that discourse makers like thanks, apology and sorry can help the customer to be clam from a hyper position, which is a pre-

requisite to convince an angry customer. Offering any free product can help the original topic can be diverted to the agents preferred one (Ferdous, 2016).

*Question number 6: Which word you use most in daily conversation with customers?*

The options were: a) Yes or No b) Thank you c) Sorry d) None of these

60% (APPENDIX D) of the respondents said that sorry is a very common but powerful word in the call center to handle customers and probably this is the most used word in the entire call center. To illustrate this, Ferdous said, that due to system down or up gradation many customer gets effected hence while they call, a humble apology works quicker than any other forms. The rest of 20% selected for the “thank you” and 20% selected for the word “yes/no”. These are the most common words that works like a magic in the conversation, according to Ferdous.

*Question number 7: How often do you face overlap in a 2 minutes conversation?*

The options were: a) 2-3 b) 4-6 c) 7-10 d) One or no overlap

Among the four options only two has been chosen. 60% (APPENDIX E) of the agents said that in a two minutes conversation they or the customers overlap on each other’s conversation and the rate is 2-3 times. Rest of the 40% said that only once or no overlap occurred in their conversation process. The company has a strong policy to let the customers speak freely while the agents has been instructed to listen to their customers first (Ferdous, 2016). To establish this rule, Grameenphone has set a motto which is “Customer First”.

*Question number 8: In which way you thing is easy to deal with customers?*

The options were: a) Face to face b) Over Phone c) By post or Email d) All of these

Among the respondents, 40% (APPENDIX E) said that face to face conversation is easy because it has facial expression, body language and overall scope to show the helpful attempt of the agent, while another 40% said that by post or email is the easiest way to deal with customer as facial expression, intonation or body language is absent here and these are often

influential for a discourse to go wrong (Afrin, 2015). 20% of the agents think that over phone is the easiest way to deal with the customer as it is the most available option and the customer and agent gets chance to express themselves and an interaction occurs which often leads a discourse to success (Afrin, 2015).

*Question number 9: Do you think your customer will accept whatever you will say?*

The options were: a) Yes b) No c) May Be d) Do not know

Among the 20 respondents 60% (APPENDIX E) said that the customers will accept whatever the agents will say just because either the caller do not have sufficient knowledge or the call center has the only option to get the service from. 20% believe that it is not easy to make all the customers to accept whatever they said and this is because of the diversity of the customer's background, experience, level of education and their control over the product (Afrin, 2015). Rest of the 20% said that they are not sure whether the customers will accept their statement because the customer's intention and nature is not predictable and the situation of acceptance depends on the context (Ferdous, 2016).

*Question number 10: When you face trouble to solve any customers problem what do you do?*

The options were: a) Keep Listening b) Take more time c) Say sorry and request to call later d) Hang up with dialogue

80% (APPENDIX F) of the respondents said that they say sorry and request the caller to call back again because of the strict company policy and also as they believe that an "apology" can work and modify the customers mind (Akther, 2016). 20% acknowledge that they do not want the customer to hang up the phone without getting the service hence take more time and meanwhile the agents talk about the feelings about the service and want the customers to share their experience, suggestion or comments so that they can divert or transform the customer from their original point to another (Akther, 2016).

#### ***4.2 Interview Report from Supervisor Level Employees<sup>7</sup>:***

*Question number 1: According to the data, Grameenphone has some set of unique dialogue that the agents use in a common situation. Why do you think it is necessary to have such specific set of arranged conversation?*

Call center usually run by the speech and Grameenphone believe that conversation and dialogues can solve any problem (Islam, 2016). Everyday there are thousands to people calling to the center and it is needed to ensure that all the customers get treated equally. Through language and discourse domination and discrimination can be establish and to avoid that situation a fixed set of dialogue has been set so that, in a common situation all the customers get the discourse and the possibilities of domination and discrimination can be avoided (Sen, 2015).

*Question number 2: Why Grameenphone focus on agent-customer conversation too much while grading the agent's conversation, rather than service delivery?*

As it is already mentioned, that it is believed that discourse can solve any problem, it is important to have a selective discourse to handle the customer. For example: When the system do not work or there is a technical difficulties, the agents are instructed to inform the customer that “*due to technical up gradation*” the service delivery is not possible and even to add the line “*technical up gradation is due to give you better service*” so that the customers get diverted and remain calm and wait for the requested resolution time (Sen, 2015). This techniques works almost all the time as many of the customers are not aware about the technical fault by any mean (Islam, 2016).

*Question Number 3: As we know overlapping is a part of a two way conversation which natural but why the agents are demarked for overlapping?*

To the company overlapping created by the agent is similar to disrespect the customer and it is often treated as dominating over the other speaker (Zaman, 2016). The agents already

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<sup>7</sup> Interview Question can be found in APPENDIX B

instructed that if the customer wants to say anything, let them to finish first even if they are wrong. In this process, the wrong information from the customer is not being accepted by the agents but it helps to create a moment to say “*as I have listened to you, you should listen to me now*” in the conversation (Sen, 2015). Here, the customer is being dominated as he is informed to listen to the agent by any mean, while the customer has nothing to do but listen as one logic has been established in the favor of the agent. In these case the agents are free to use any additional formal dialogues that is convenient for the discourse to continue (Zaman, 2016).

*Question number 4: Do you think through discourse or using some extra words in conversation, one agent can manipulate the customers mind?*

As the agents has to handle different customers, the most difficult customers to handle is those who have a complaint to place. Besides, customers come from diverse background and the requirement of all the customers is not the same. This is why different set of words and sentences are being used in telephone conversation. For example: If a very dissatisfied customer calls the agent usually add “*I would feel the same if I was in your place....*” Or “*as you called us spending your valuable time...I am trying to help you with my level best*”. (Islam, 2016)These sentences or words are not necessary to deliver the service but to make the customers mind satisfied with the service. Here only discourse works as a repairing tool as the agents has no solution or the loss of the customer is beyond the agent’s control. So, in the sense of business, the customers are getting manipulated and diverted from their topic through the usage of discourse (Zaman, 2016).

*Question number 5: To you, what sort of words or sentences the agents are using or you recommend to control the customer?*

Various types of words like thank you, please, sorry, appreciate etc. are very common in the call centres discourse which seems are not much effective now a day. It is always observed that in conversation, every speaker wants to get priority or to get notice (Islam, 2016). This is why

while speaking among a group, refereeing to previous speaker's speech, and giving credit to others in self discourse can make individual speech or discourse more powerful and effective (Zaman, 2016). Avoid of overlapping and waiting for the turn taking is also important for the success of discourse. As forceful turn taking often mislead the discourse, it is better to wait for the other speaker to finish his/her turn first (Sen, 2015).

#### ***4.3 Recorded Conversation Between the Agents and Customers:***

A set of fifty recorded calls has been collected randomly from the centers record section that has an average duration of 4 minutes of natural conversation between the agent and customer. In this section I will mention and analyze five of them. Based on the given list of linguistic features in TABLE 1<sup>8</sup>, the call has been analyzed.

TABLE 1. *Linguistic Features used in the analysis*

<i>Linguistic Features</i>	<i>Description / Example</i>
1 Word Count	Total number of words per agent/caller
2 Private verbs	e.g anticipate, assume, believe, feel think, show, imply
3 Contractions	Can't, I'm, doesn't
4 Present tense verbs	All present tense verbs identified
5 Second-person pronouns	You, your, yours, yourself
6 Verb do	Do, does, did
7 Demonstrative pronouns	That, those, this, these
8 First-person pronouns	I, me, myself, mine
9 Pronoun	It
10 Verb b	Forms of b verb
11 Discourse particles	e.g. oh, well, anyway, anyhow, anyways
12 Possibility modals	Can, could, might, may
13 Coordinating conjunctions	And, or, but
14 WH clauses	Clauses with WH (what, which, who) head
15 Attributive adjective	e.g the small table
16 Prediction modals	Will, would, shall
17 Average length of turns	Total number of words divided by the number of turns
18 Filled pauses	Uhm, uhh, hmm

<sup>8</sup> This table is adopted and modified from the following paper Friginal, E. (2008). Linguistic Variation in the Discourse of Outsourced Call Centers. *Discourse Studies*, 715-736.

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19	Respect markers	Ma'am, Sir
20	Politeness markers, thanks	Thank you, thanks, appreciate
21	Politeness markers, please	Please
22	Politeness markers, ok	Ok
23	Politeness markers, I mean	I mean and You know
24	Politeness markers, because	Because, 'coz, so

***Call Sample 1: Call type: Complaint (Overcharging in super fnf number)***

Agent: Nahida speaking, how can I help you?

Caller: Actually..I have created a super fnf number..

Agent: Hmm..

Caller: now, it is charging much..thats why..

Agents: Sorry..over charging? I am checking that your super fnf is ok or not? Allright? Please..stay with me. Huh? In this number.. that you talking..right?

Caller: Yes

Agent: [after 3 sec], Thank you. Super fnf has been activated already..but you my zone service is on..thats why it is overcharging actually. Then should I stopped the my zone service

Caller: you...[caller wanted to say something but the agent continued. Callers attempt to take turn failed]

Agent: Then you should stop the my zone service?

Caller: How can I stop that?

Agent: I...[agent wanted to say something but the caller continued. Agent attempt failed]

Caller: How can stop that?

Agent: Yes, I am looking if I can stop it from here, if it is then I will stop it. Yes, it is happening, so I am stopping the service from here. From now on try to call in your super fnf number, I am hoping the normal charge will deduct. Okay?

Caller: All right.

Agent: All right. Thank you, stay well.

In this call, the agent always tried to make a polite environment among the whole conversation with the call. The agent in her discourse, used the politeness marker “thank you” and “sorry” multiple times. As Zahirul said, that these sort of discourse markers help the customer to transform their intention, the policy applied here in a positive manner. Along with this the call has two overlapping session. Firstly, the caller wanted to say something at the middle of the conversation and while the agent was giving instruction about how to solve the problem. But, despite of hearing the caller’s words, the agent continued her speech. This happened because the agent already got to know that the caller has not sufficient knowledge and whatever she



will say, the customer will accept as the information is helpful for him. Secondly, the caller overlapped while he came to know the reason of his problem and wanted to get rid of it. As it was a complaint type call, the overlapping and turn taking is expected.

***Call Sample 2: Call type: Complaint (Caller is not getting any bonus)***

Agent: Shahida speaking, How can I help you?

Caller: Sister, There is a bonus of on recharge? I am not getting the bonus offer. Can you tell why I am not getting the bonus offer?

Agent: aaah.. by 100% bonus on recharge you want to mean..aah..i mean.. how much you have been told to recharge Sir?

Caller: I have been told that if I recharge 38 taka, I will get 38 taka bonus, and I recharged 38 taka but still I did not get the bonus...I recharged.. may be the day before yesterday. That mean, in my calculation 72 hours has been over.

Agent: ok. 72 hours is not required for this..it should come any time. Sir, was there any emergency balance taken from your account before recharging..

Caller: [caller immediately take his turn] No No.. there was no emergency balance taken..that time I have more than 50 taka after recharging 38 taka.

Agent: Ok ok...all right, give me some moment, I am checking..why you did not get the offer..[3sec later]..Sir, you are saying that recharge..the day before yesterday you recharged?

Caller: Probably, the day after yesterday.

Agent: yes. It is showing that you recharged taka 38 on June 8. Sir..

Caller: Hmmm..

Agent: You are saying that the bonus has not been given but there is a bonus given on that day.. I am seeing. If you would dial \*566\*9# then you could see the balance sir.

Caller: I have dialed 8# though. Anyway, when this amount will be charged?

Agent: Sir, the time is from morning 9 to afternoon 5 and if it is on the day before yesterday maybe today the validity is over as well.

Caller: Ohh, and..

Agent: [Overlapped]. And still you have. You have 38 taka 78 paisa in your account, you can use it till today.

Caller: Till today?...ohh.. and this will be charged except fnf number right?

Agent: Yes. Except fnf number, sir.

Caller: Only except super fnf and fnf, and in all other GP number I can use it?

Agent: Yes, in any GP number you can you..but Sir, is the sim in djuice package? Checking..

Caller: No, Mine is probably is Amontron package.

Agent: Then you will not have any problem sir, except fnf and super fnf you can talk to any GP number.

Caller: oh, Okay all right.

Agent: Thank you, Stay well.

In this call the agent started using the word “Sir” after hearing the caller’s complaint. Before using that word it seems that the agent is very confident, but after getting the complaint, the agent got a bit confused which reflected into her intonation. In the context of Bangladesh the respect markers are superior in position in a discourse and usually the addressee has a prominent role in the conversation. That is why this is a common practice that the call center agents use that marker in their need and obviously by intention and not in nature, according to Ferdous. Usually when the agent fail to solve any problem they want to divert customers mind to another or a lower level topic, she added.

***Call Sample 3: Call type: Request (Caller wants to deactivate her value added service)***

Agent: Mowtushi speaking, how can I help you?

Caller: Hello..that time I told that my balance is deducting..by sending message...

Agent: yes

Caller: Again deducting my balance by giving messages.

Agent: I am sorry for your problem. Kindly can you please tell me from which number the message is coming and deducting your balance, please?

Caller: aah..ahh.. You check.. I can not remember..

Agent: Kindly, it has to be said please, from which number the message is coming and deducting your balance please?

Caller: what is the number...022580..

Agent: 022580?

Caller: Yes.

Agent: Thank you for giving this information. In your number, what do you want to do with this service? Want to turn it off?

Caller: Turn it off.

Agent: Should I turn this from here?

Caller: Yes

Agent: Ok, Kindly give me some time, I am turning this service from here and letting you know.....give me a moment please...[4 sec] Kindly give me some time...it is taking some time....[6sec].. Thank you so much for giving me time. I have turned the service off from here, within a moment you will get a message, after getting that you will be sure that your service has been turned off.

Caller: Ok, Hanging up.

This conversation is a perfect example of the usage of politeness markers in discourse. The caller called for the second time to fix the same problem and she also informed that the problem has not solved yet. When you make a complaint, it should be over but when you face the same problem again, control of your anger may not be possible (Akther, 2016). The agent used politeness markers 2-3 times in a single sentence after realizing the customer's possibility to show anger. To divert that intention she intentionally use the words frequently. In addition while she was solving the problem, requesting the caller to wait multiple times within 6-8 seconds though the company policy is to inform the customer to wait once in every 20 seconds (Ferdous, 2016).

***Call Sample 4: Call type: Query (Caller wants to know the procedure of setting of welcome tune)***

Agent: Suriya speaking, how can I help you?

Caller: I want to set Islamic tone sitting in my home, how can I do that?

Agent: welcome tune?

Caller: Yes, welcome tune.

Agent: Ok, how can you set welcome tune, I am sending the procedure in your mobile.

Caller: Ooo... [Customer wanted to say something but turned back]

Agent: Watching this process please set the songs, sir.

Caller: Ok.. how can I get the tones?

Agent: how can you find..Sir, if you have any preferred welcome tone sir, how can you set...

Caller: [Interrupted] No.. not that one..

Agent: No no..how can you find those.. I am also sending that process in your mobile through sms. Seeing this you should set the tone. Sir, all right?

Caller: Thank you , Stay well.

In this call, the agent did not use much discourse markers except a politeness one, which she did just to make the caller understand that he is in a superior position who understands everything easily (Zaman, 2016). The pitch of the agent was very normal and the intonation was flat. While she told the process once and the caller did not understand, she used the word “Sir” so that the caller accepts her information.

***Call Sample 5: Call Type: Query (Caller wants to migrate his tariff plan)***

Agent: Nasim speaking, How can I help you?

Caller: Brother, the topic is, in which package this Grammen sim is?

Agent: The number from which you are talking, this number?

Caller: Yes.

Agent: Thank you for your cooperation. Your number at present is in.. that is showing in my system is..it is in smile package.

Caller: Ok, if I want to convert it in Bondhu package?

Agent: Obviously you can do.

Caller: Ok.. is it ..do I have to do it by four 4?

Agent: Alright, do you want to change the package now?

Caller: Yes.

Agent: Thank you, In that case, the process of changing to Bondhu package I am sending and after 1.5 hours how can you create fnf and super fnf, I am also sending that process. Ok?

Caller: Ok

Agent: Thank you, Stay well.

The caller in this call only called to know the process of changing the tariff plan but the agent sent the sms of fnf creation process as well. To figure out why, Sen said, the process is a business policy. Besides, it is also a process to make the caller happy so that he can mark the conversation as successful in a post evaluation process.

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION**

It has been already proven that discourse and power has a close connection and these two concepts can be used in a larger political, social and economic contexts. From the literature it has been identified that discourse can be used for manipulation whenever there is a lack of knowledge among any of the participants of a conversation and people intentionally or unintentionally use their discourse in manipulation. According to the research, it has been identified that the agents of Bangladeshi call center often use their set of discourse to manipulate and to shift the main focus and topic of the conversation to another. These process often led the conversation to finish in a lower level topic. Along with these, it has also been explored that almost in every cases, where special discourse and discourse markers used were intentional.

As the context is important for the discourse, different discourse markers that are appropriate for one context may not be able to make an impact in a different context. Hence, it is required to observe the cultural and social context of the place where the discourse is going to be executed. Because of the multi-dimensional use of discourse can create manipulation among others, it is also likely to create discrimination and domination in the society. That is why in general, the usage of discourse should be set and a reasonable control over it should be imposed that can avoid manipulation.

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**APPENDIX A****Survey for Call Centre Agent**

This survey is anonymous and the result will be used for research purposes only.

- a) What type of call do you receive most? \*
  1. Query
  2. Complaint
  3. Request
  4. Other
- b) How much time in average do you take to handle a customer? \*
  1. Less than 1 minute
  2. 1-3 minute
  3. 3-5 minute
  4. More than 5 minute
- c) Out of 10, how many customers are knowledgeable about the product they are using, do you think? \*
  1. 2
  2. 6
  3. 4
  4. 8
- d) If you do not understand any customer, what do you do? \*
  1. Request to repeat
  2. Request to call back again
  3. Request to service center
  4. Hang up the call with dialogue
- e) In which way do you think you can control your customer? \*
  1. Through apology/appreciate
  2. Through Service Recovery Action
  3. Giving Offer
  4. None of these
- f) Which word you use most in daily conversation with customers? \*
  1. Yes/No
  2. Thank you
  3. Sorry
  4. None of these
- g) How often do you face overlap in a 2 minutes conversation? \*
  1. 2-3
  2. 4-6
  3. 7-10
  4. One/No overlap
- h) In which way you thing is easy to deal with customers? \*
  1. Face to face
  2. Over phone
  3. Post or Email
  4. All of these
- i) Do you think your customer will accept whatever you will say? \*
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. May be
  4. Do not know
- j) When you face trouble to solve any customers problem what do you do? \*
  1. Keep Listening
  2. Take more time
  3. Say sorry and request to call later
  4. Hang up or Do nothing



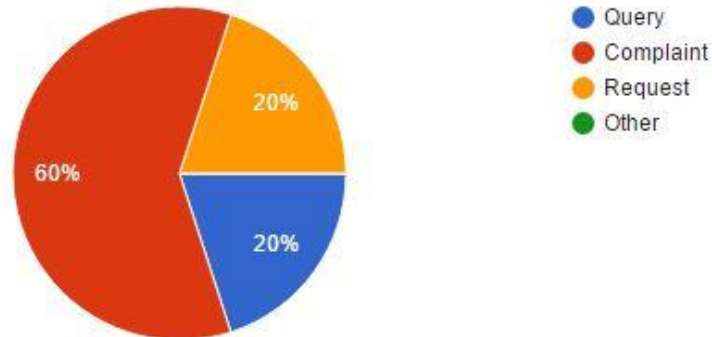
**APPENDIX B**

## Questioner for Supervisor level Employees

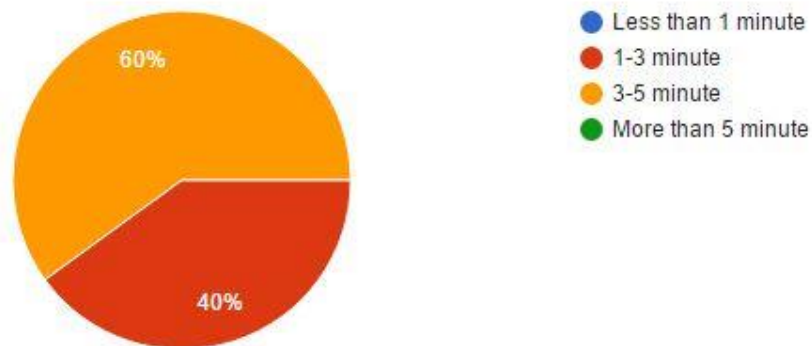
- 1) According to the data, Grameenphone has some set of unique dialogue that the agents use in a common situation. Why do you think it is necessary to have such specific set of arranged conversation?
- 2) Why Grameenphone focus on agent-customer conversation too much while grading the agent's conversation, rather than service delivery?
- 3) As we know overlapping is a part of a two way conversation which natural but why the agents are demarked for overlapping?
- 4) Do you think through discourse or using some extra words in conversation, one agent can manipulate the customers mind?
- 5) To you, what sort of words or sentences the agents are using or you recommend to control the customer?

**APPENDIX C**

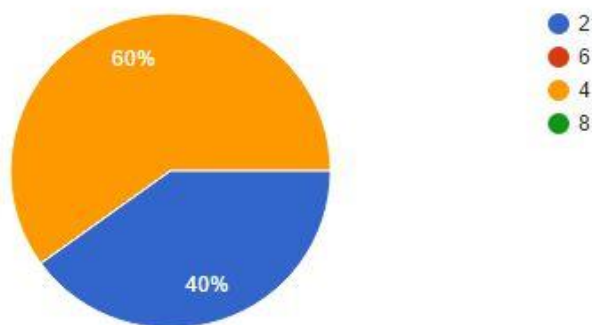
What type of call do you receive most?



How much time in average do you take to handle a customer?

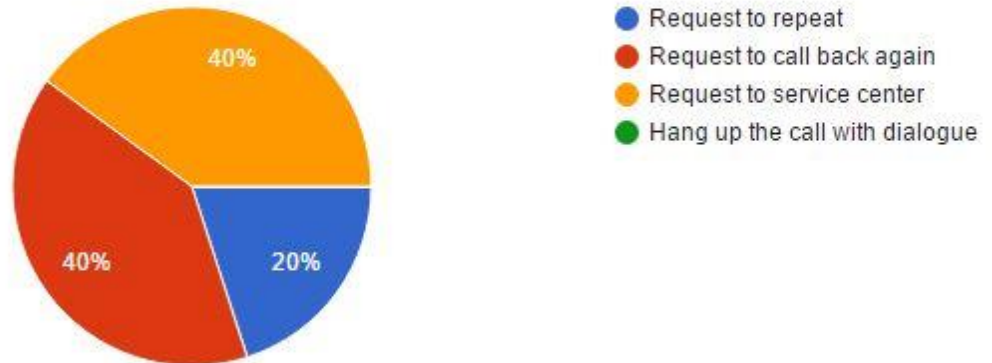


Out of 10, how many customers are knowledgeable about the product they are using, do you think?

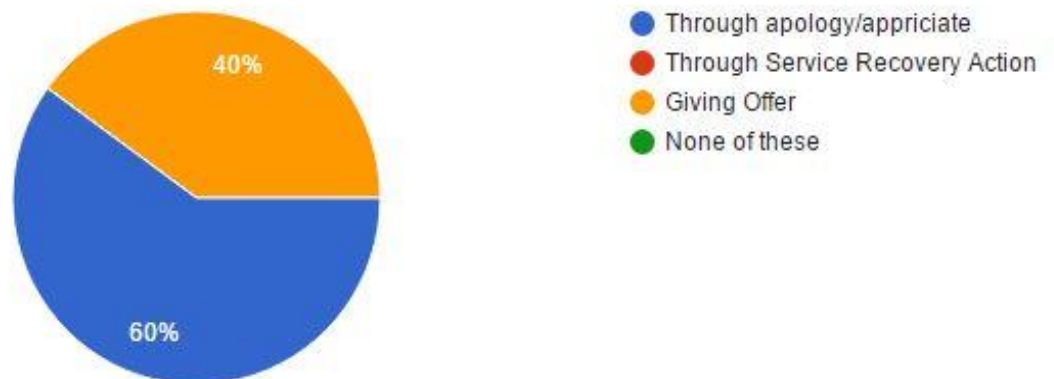


**APPENDIX D**

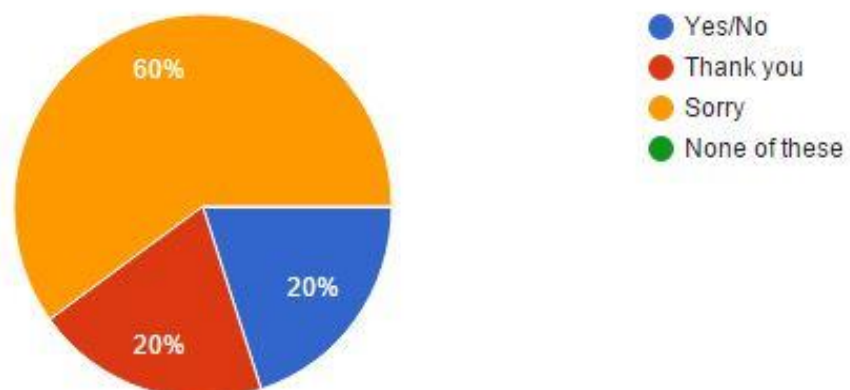
If you do not understand any customer, what do you do?



In which way do you think you can control your customer?

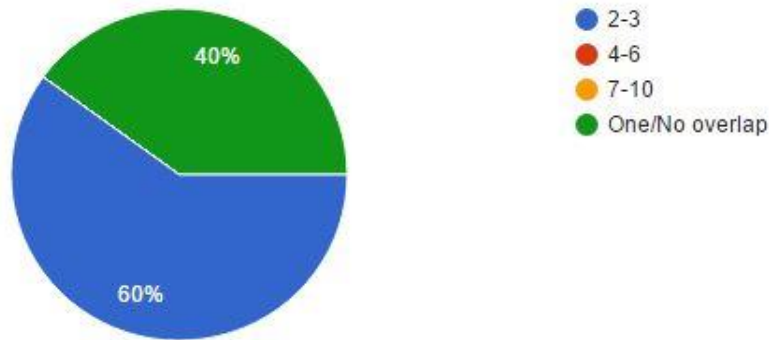


Which word you use most in daily conversation with customers?

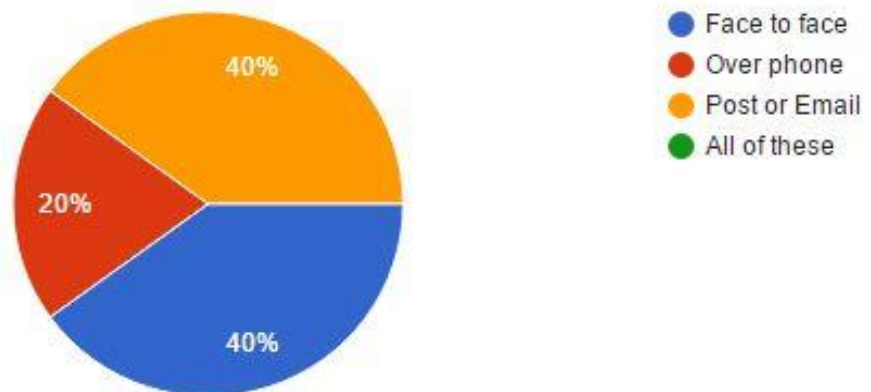


**APPENDIX E**

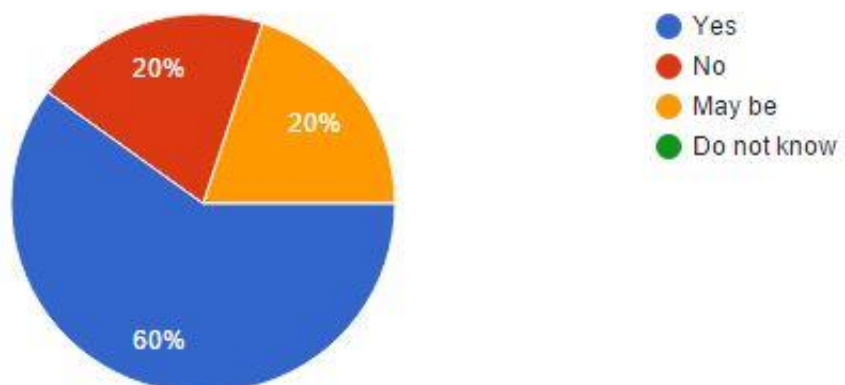
How often do you face overlap in a 2 minutes conversation?



In which way you think is easy to deal with customers?



Do you think your customer will accept whatever you will say?



**APPENDIX F**

When you face trouble to solve any customers problem what do you do?

