

“You Lost Me at Hello”: How and When Accent-Based Biases are Expressed and Suppressed

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ABSTRACT

This research examines customer biases relating to employee accents in call service encounters. Extant research and practitioners generally assume that customers automatically evaluate call service employees with a nonstandard accent lower than employees with a standard accent. However, using the justification-suppression model as a framework, we argue that customers frequently suppress accent biases toward call service employees. We conduct three empirical studies, and our findings indicate that customers rate employees with an accent receiving a negative bias lower only when a service outcome is unfavorable for customers. In contrast, accents receiving a positive bias only impact customer evaluations when service outcomes are favorable for customers. Additionally, we demonstrate that the suppression and justification of accent biases rely on both cognitive and affective mechanisms. Finally, we show that customers who are informed of the frequency of a favorable vs. unfavorable outcome are more likely to suppress biases.

Key Words: employee accent, call service, justification-suppression model

1. Introduction

"Are you calling from India?"

"No, I'm calling from Modesto, California."

"Well, you sound Indian."

"I've only been here for two months and haven't got the accent right." A conversation between a potential U.S. customer and a 22-year-old Indian call center worker (Nadeem, 2011).

*"I remember the first time it happened. I had just started. I introduced myself, and the customer immediately demanded to know where I was calling from. I told him India and he just said 'F*** off you job-stealing Paki' and slammed the phone down. It left a really sour taste to hear that from an Englishman. I was shaking with anger"* (Foster, 2005). This experience was told by Ian Hussey, a young British student who briefly worked as an intern at an Indian call center, calling British customers to switch telecom services—Reported in the Telegraph.

While there have been a few highly publicized cases of companies (e.g., Apple, CapitalOne, Dell, Delta) closing their foreign call centers due to customer dissatisfaction and moving operations back to the U.S., the trend points to an increasing overseas movement of service call centers owing to the compelling cost savings. Accordingly, there is a need to understand U.S. consumer sentiment toward foreign call service employees (Thelen, Yoo, and Magnini, 2011). While extant research has found that customers evaluate call services differently based on call center location and cultural similarity (Bharadwaj and Roggeveen, 2008; Roggeveen, Bharadwaj, and Hoyer, 2007), consumers usually do not know where a call center is located and, even if they ask, employees are sometimes instructed to lie (Poster, 2007).

Consistent with Thelen, Yoo, and Magnini (2011), we opine that consumers use the employee's accent to surmise employee nationality and call service characteristics. However, to our knowledge, there are no rigorous studies explaining how U.S. customers use accent as a feature when evaluating call service employees. Based on research in linguistics and social psychology, we address this research gap by examining U.S. customer biases toward foreign-accented employees in a call (i.e., voice only) service environment.

Accented speech, especially in the absence of visual cues (as is the case in call communications), provides two pieces of information for the listener: (1) linguistic, relating to the content of the speech, and (2) indexical, relating to inferences about the speaker (Levi and Pisoni, 2007). With respect to content, the main issue is intelligibility: Can the customer understand what the employee is trying to communicate? While unintelligibility could be a major source of frustration and customer dissatisfaction, we argue that accent-revealed indexical information is also a major issue. Research shows that listeners can still hold negative biases toward nonnative accents even when the content of the speech is entirely understood (Hosoda and Stone-Romero, 2010).

A nonnative speaker's accent triggers categorization in a prompt, automatic, and occasionally unconscious manner (Rakić, Steffens, and Mummendey, 2011). Listeners can identify an accented speaker's ethnic or cultural group membership by just listening to 30 milliseconds of speech (Flege, 1984) or as soon as the speaker says, "hello" (Baugh, 2000). Indeed, even when listeners do not recognize a speaker's specific accent (e.g., Korean), they still tend to make snap judgments about the speaker (Lindemann, 2003). Individuals with a nonstandard accent or dialect may be perceived as less competent, less intelligent, and less industrious (Edwards, 1982).

Several factors have contributed to the increased negative stereotyping of foreign-accented employees in call service encounters, including the bleak U.S. economic climate, with high unemployment rates, heightened media attention to outsourcing as a tool for exporting jobs overseas, and negative publicity about foreign-accented service employees' competence and professionalism (Modic, 2007; Sandberg, 2007). Two things are noteworthy, however. First, not all accents are created equal. In the U.S., people who speak with a standard British accent (often called the 'Queen's English') or with a French accent may be perceived as sophisticated, cosmopolitan, and well-educated (Cargile and Giles, 2000; Stewart, Ryan, and Giles, 1985). Asian-accented English speakers, on the other hand, are perceived less favorably, considered to be poorer communicators and less effective (Hosoda and Stone-Romero, 2010). Second, it is not inevitable that these biases will alter customer attitudes toward the employee and the employee's service abilities. According to the justification-suppression model (JSM), prejudice toward a group or individual may be suppressed for any number of reasons, including ideologies promoting liberalism, humanitarianism, and social equality; the desire to maintain a non-prejudiced self-image; and social norms promoting anti-prejudice or "political correctness" (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). Stereotypes are also less likely to be applied when individual group members do not "fit" stereotypical perceptions (Brewer, 1988). For example, King et al. (2006) found that obese people who wore attire inconsistent with stereotypes of obesity were less likely to be negatively stereotyped.

Given the number of employees with nonnative accents providing call service to U.S. customers, it is important to understand customers' accent-induced prejudices. To this end, the purpose of our research is to examine how accent biases influence customer evaluations of call service interactions. Consistent with the JSM model, we propose that customers tend to suppress

overt negative biases toward an accented employee if the outcome of the service encounter is favorable for the customer. However, if the outcome of a service encounter is unfavorable, customers will be less likely to suppress biases because they will have less emotional control and because they will use the negative accent bias as an explanation for the unfavorable service. In contrast, we argue that positive biases will manifest when outcomes are favorable because a positive bias is consistent with a favorable outcome, and people generally do not feel the need to suppress positive biases. Finally, we contend that providing information about the likelihood of a particular outcome should reduce the interaction between accent biases and outcome. When customers know the probability of obtaining a favorable outcome, they are less likely to relate a particular outcome to their accent biases.

We begin with an overview of relevant literature in marketing, sociolinguistics, and social psychology on stereotyping and accent prejudice. Next, we present hypotheses regarding the moderating role of service outcome on the relationship between negative accent biases and customer evaluations of call service employees. These hypotheses are then tested in Study 1 using both a lab and a field test. In Study 2, we develop and test hypotheses regarding the cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying accent biases. Study 3 extends the first two studies by developing and testing hypotheses pertaining to positive accent biases (standard British accent) and negative accent biases (Indian accent). Study 3 further discusses and tests the impact of accent-based biases when customers have more information about typical service outcomes. We conclude with a discussion of the main findings, including their theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Accent as a basis for stereotypical judgments

In the context of voice-to-voice service encounters, employee accent is likely to play a crucial role in stereotypical inferences. Accent is defined as “a manner of pronunciation with other linguistic levels of analysis (grammatical, syntactical, morphological, and lexical) more or less comparable with the standard language” (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010, 215). A common way to categorize accent relies on its standardness or “the systemization and acceptance of a formal set of norms defining correct usage among language users” (Morales, Scott, and Yorkson, forthcoming). In the U.S., the accent considered to be relatively free of regional influence is referred to as the ‘standard American accent’ (Ghorshi, Vaseghi, and Yan 2008).

Prior research has shown that a nonstandard accent can be disadvantageous (Cargile and Giles, 1997). Frequently, there are negative biases against nonstandard accents, particularly those associated with disadvantaged and low-prestige minority groups, and listeners may display irritation or other forms of prejudice toward a speaker with such an accent (Hosoda and Stone-Romero, 2010). For example, in the context of criminal investigations, suspects with regional, nonstandard accents appeared significantly guiltier or ‘typically criminal’ to respondents compared with standard-accented counterparts (e.g., Dixon and Mahoney, 2004). Similarly, in employment decisions, Spanish-, Asian-, and African-accented speakers—particularly those with heavy accents—receive lower employability ratings than their counterparts with a standard American accent (Purkiss et al., 2006).

These accent-based inferences, in turn, affect marketing outcomes. Among U.S. respondents, Mexican- or Greek-accented spokespeople and salespeople were perceived as less

intelligent, honest, credible, and professional than their standard American-accented counterparts, thus leading to lower purchase intentions among buyers (DeShields and de los Santos, 2000). Expanding this line of research, we suggest the possible existence of similar accent-based biases in call service encounters. Talking to a nonnative-accented employee may evoke a customer's negative predispositions about that employee's competence and professionalism, heighten the customer's dislike, and/or increase the customer's annoyance. These negative biases could be exaggerated further by direct cultural learning or intergroup conflict. Mass media and various consumer-generated contents encourage accent stereotypes and often emphasize negative assessments of foreign-accented service employees (Modic, 2007; Sandberg, 2007). The tactic of outsourcing jobs to foreign countries also has received negative publicity, such that many people believe that outsourcing reduces the number of U.S. jobs available and hurts national interests.

Even when listeners have little linguistic expertise or knowledge, they can make basic distinctions among broad accent categories (e.g., Spanish-accented vs. British-accented English), although they generally cannot distinguish between more nuanced categories, such as varieties of Spanish-accented English (e.g., Cuban, Costa Rican, Argentinean, Puerto Rican) (Podberesky, Deluty, and Feldstein, 1990). As previously mentioned, Lindemann (2003) found that, even when listeners do not recognize a speaker's specific accent, listeners still make stereotypical inferences about the speaker. Therefore, our intent is not to provide a comprehensive catalog of accent biases or to investigate the accuracy of customers' accent perceptions but rather to determine whether customers' accent-based biases are suppressed or reinforced in certain conditions.

2.2. Suppression and expression of accent-based biases

Building on recent research in social cognition, we propose that biases resulting from accent-based stereotypes may be more complex than previously believed. Although stereotypes are recalled reflexively, people do not automatically act on their prejudices (Lowery, Hardin, and Sinclair, 2001). According to the JSM (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003), people instead confront two competing motivations: (1) the automatic impulse to apply quick stereotypical evaluations and (2) the need to suppress any evaluations that appear inappropriate (Lowery, Hardin, and Sinclair, 2001). Stereotypical evaluations, particularly negative ones, are often suppressed (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). Modern U.S. culture indicates a strong dislike for unsuppressed prejudice and for those who exhibit it (Mae and Carlston, 2005), who are often described using negative terms such as “bigot” or “chauvinist.” Thus, many people work to suppress their prejudices (King et al., 2006).

The initial uncontrolled prejudice that people feel is called “genuine” prejudice, which is then either suppressed or justified. However, if new information appears that is consistent with the negative bias, the individual may switch from suppressing to justifying the prejudice; hence, prejudice is a dynamic process (Hegarty and Golden, 2008). When people are able to justify a genuine prejudice that had been previously suppressed, it causes a sense of psychological “relief.” This urge for relief motivates people suppressing prejudice to look for information that is consistent with the negative bias (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003).

Just as customers are subject to the processes that lead to accent-linked biases, they are also subject to social norms about prejudice or stereotypical judgments. It is the norm in the U.S. to suppress most types of prejudice (King et al., 2006); hence, accent prejudices are also likely to

be suppressed. However, we opine that information from the service encounter, which is consistent with a customer's genuine prejudice, can be used by customers to justify their prejudice, in which case the accent prejudice will be expressed. Arguably, the most salient information about the service encounter is the degree to which the service outcome is favorable or unfavorable for the customer. If the service outcome is favorable for the customer, it is not consistent with a negative bias, and thus, it cannot be used to justify an accent prejudice.

Accordingly, the prejudice will remain suppressed. However, when the outcome of a call service encounter is not favorable, it is consistent with a negative bias, and the customer can use the service outcome to justify their prejudice. In that case, the accent prejudice will be expressed and can then be used to make attributions about the cause of the service failure. This argument is consistent with research by Sinclair and Kunda (2000), who find that women are given lower teaching evaluations than men, but only when students receive lower grades. Formally:

H₁: Customers will rate employees with an accent receiving a negative bias lower than employees with a standard accent only when a service outcome is unfavorable for customers.

2.3. Service attributions as assessments of the suppression–expression process

After a service encounter, customers feel satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the outcome (e.g., Bitner, 1990; Cowley, 2005), and people try to find explanations for the success or failure of an experience, especially if the encounter is important to them (Taggar and Neubert, 2004). Consistent with the JSM, people find relief when they are able to justify genuine prejudice. Accordingly, we expect that people will feel inclined to elaborate more on the employee's

contribution to the service encounter when they are able to justify genuine prejudice. Therefore, when service outcomes are unfavorable for customers, we argue the customers will provide lengthier attributions about the employee when the employee has an accent receiving a negative bias compared to when the employee has a standard accent. This bias in customers' attributions should not be observed when the service outcome is favorable because that scenario leads to the suppression of prejudice. Formally,

H₂: Customers will describe the employee contribution to an unfavorable service outcome in more detail when the employee has an accent receiving a negative bias compared to when the employee has a standard accent.

3. Study 1

Study 1 investigates how consumers' judgments of a service encounter may be biased by employees' accents. As previously discussed, we expect a negative bias toward call service employees with Indian accents (e.g., Modic, 2007), and accordingly, we will compare the Indian accent with the standard American accent. Study 1 consists of a lab test that will examine H₁ and H₂ and a field test, where we will further investigate H₁.

3.1. Lab test

Participants were asked to listen to a recorded phone conversation in which a customer calls into a bank to update address information. The phone conversations were designed by the researchers based upon real cases described on a consumer website about banking services. The

outcome of the service was manipulated to be either unfavorable or favorable. We define the service outcome according to whether customer requests are granted (i.e., the customer receives what he or she is asking for). For example, in the unfavorable condition, the customer could not update address information over the telephone and was required to make an inconvenient trip to a local branch. In the favorable condition, the customer smoothly updated the address information during the service call.

Generally, classic sociolinguistic research on attitudes toward accents (e.g., Giles and Powesland, 1975) has employed a matched-guise technique in which the same speaker imitates different accents. However, more recent research has recommended using native speakers to enhance reliability (Stockwell, 2002). Consistent with that recommendation, we employed two female voice actors with genuine accents to play the part of the employee, one with an Indian accent and one with a standard American accent. The customer was voiced by a male actor with a genuine standard American accent and remained the same in all conditions. The actors were asked to maintain a neutral voice (neither happy nor sad) during the conversation. Different accent versions were carefully matched in terms of the pacing of the conversation, speech intonations, pitch, and intensity. We analyzed these voice qualities using PRAAT freeware (available at www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/).

3.1.1. Design, participants, and procedure

This study used a 2 (accent: standard American vs. Indian) × 2 (service outcome: favorable vs. unfavorable) between-subjects design. One hundred twenty-two undergraduate students at a large U.S. Midwestern university participated in the study in exchange for extra

credit. Upon their arrival at a computer lab, the participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. As a cover story, participants were told that we were interested in understanding how to improve employees' quality of service over the phone. Similar to the role-playing technique used by Bitner (1990), participants were asked to listen to a recorded customer service call in which they were instructed to take the perspective of the customer. Because service duration has been shown to influence customer evaluations (Yeung and Soman, 2007), all recordings were of comparable length (between 2 minutes 30 seconds and 2 minutes 45 seconds). Finally, participants completed a post-service questionnaire that measured the dependent variables.

3.1.2 Dependent measures

Our dependent variable for the lab test was the rating of customer–employee rapport, defined as the “customer’s perception of having an enjoyable interaction with a service provider employee, characterized by a personal connection between the two interactants” (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000, 92). We chose rapport as our main dependent variable because it offers a proximal and narrow measure of the customer–employee interaction, unlike more distal measures, such as overall service quality or customer satisfaction, that depend on factors other than the employees’ speech. The construct also reflects customers’ affective and cognitive evaluations of the interaction (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). We measured customer–employee rapport using a 4-item scale adopted from Hennig-Thurau and colleagues (2006).

In Study 1, we also sought to examine H₂ by investigating attribution biases for different accent conditions. Consistent with Matta and Folkes (2005), post-service attribution was

measured by asking respondents to describe the employee's contribution to the service outcome using an open-ended question and then counting the number of words devoted to the explanation. Lengthier elaborations about employees' behaviors should be an indication of a stronger bias. The items for the measurement scales are shown in the Appendix.

3.1.3. Manipulation check

The manipulation of employees' accents was successful. Participants rated employees' speech, anchored at 1 = "very accented" and 7 = "unaccented (native-like)." The Indian-accented employee was perceived to have a significantly stronger accent than the American-accented employee ($M_I = 2.02$, $M_A = 5.37$; $F(1, 118) = 116.81$, $p < .01$). No other effects were significant ($F_s < 1$), although the Indian-accented employee received lower ratings with respect to understandability ($M_I = 4.45$, $M_A = 6.23$; $F(1, 118) = 44.57$, $p < .01$). However, all employees' understandability ratings were above the midpoint of the scale, and there were no significant differences in participants' comprehension of the conversation.

3.1.4. Lab test results

For customer perceptions of rapport, the full-factorial 2 (accent) \times 2 (service outcome) analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed the predicted two-way interaction ($F(1, 118) = 4.42$, $p = .02$), shown in figure 1. With an unfavorable service outcome, participants reported significantly lower rapport with the Indian-accented employee than with the American-accented employee ($M_I = 3.00$, $M_A = 3.91$; $F(1, 118) = 4.89$, $p = .03$). However, when the service outcome was

favorable, customer–employee rapport ratings did not differ across the Indian and American accent conditions ($M_I = 4.16$, $M_A = 3.90$; $F(1, 118) = .47$, *NS*). These findings support H_1 .

----- INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE.-----

Next, we examined post-service attributions. A 2 (service employee’s accent) \times 2 (service outcome) ANOVA showed a significant two-way interaction ($F(1, 118) = 5.71$, $p = .02$), as shown in table 1. Contrast analyses further revealed that, in support of H_2 , when the service was unfavorable, respondents in the Indian accent condition described the employee contribution in more detail compared with the respondents in the American accent condition ($M_I = 37.80$, $M_A = 23.13$; $F(1, 118) = 9.62$, $p < .01$). However, when a service outcome was favorable, employee accent had no impact on the description of employee contribution ($M_I = 21.24$, $M_A = 21.79$, $F(1, 118) = .02$, *NS*).

----- INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE.-----

3.2. *Field test*

In our experimental design, only a limited amount of information was provided to respondents, thus allowing us to ensure the internal validity of our manipulations. For instance, we used a fictitious bank in the scenarios so that respondents would not know the firm’s history or brand image. However, in real-life settings, customers are generally familiar with the firms they call through branding and previous experience. Additional information could influence how much attention respondents devote to accent and service outcome. Accordingly, to ensure that

the interaction between service outcome and accent applies in real call service encounters, we retested H_1 using survey data from actual customer experiences with call-in service interactions.

Additionally, our previous experiments were tested using a student sample. It is possible that students are more likely to repress negative biases toward accents because they are exposed to international students and are less likely to have been in a job threatened by foreign outsourcing. Therefore, it is important to survey a more diverse sample in terms of age and background. Furthermore, our experimental scenarios were set in a single industry, banking. As customers may have different attitudes toward foreign accents in other industries, this study will examine customer experiences across a broad range of industries. Finally, our lab test measured only customer-employee rapport, a direct assessment of the employee. However, service providers have a direct and profound influence on the service experience itself (Bitner, 1990). For example, Bitner (1990, 69) explains that, in many cases, “discrete encounters *are* the service from the customer’s point of view” (italics added). Hence, it is possible that customer biases directed toward employees also impact overall customer satisfaction with the transaction. Accordingly, the field test will measure both customer-employee rapport and customer satisfaction with the transaction, defined as “the cognitive assessment of a customer’s emotional experience” as it relates to a single interaction (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006, 60).

3.2.1. Design, participants, and procedure

For this study, we used an online survey about a recent call service experience. The sampling frame included U.S. participants of a large crowdsourcing marketplace, Mechanical Turk. A number of researchers have supported the efficacy of using MTurk respondents

(Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2012; Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling, 2011). For example, Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema (2012, p. 1) explain that “MTurk offers a highly valuable opportunity for data collection.” Respondents were screened to ensure that they were from the U.S., spoke English as their first language, had called for customer service within the last month, and had maintained sufficient work quality on previous MTurk assignments. Respondents were paid \$0.50 cents to complete the survey. A total of 595 qualified respondents completed the survey.

Qualified respondents were asked to recollect a phone call made to customer service within the last month. Service outcome was then measured by asking respondents to describe the result of the service encounter in an open-ended response and by directly asking respondents whether they felt the service outcome was favorable or unfavorable. As accent is usually the only information customers have regarding the location of a call service employee, employee accent was measured by asking respondents to guess as to whether the employee was located in the U.S. or in a foreign country, and if in a foreign country, which country. Of the 91 calls where respondents thought the employee was located in a foreign country, the majority guessed an Asian country. Only 4 guessed the employee was from a Western country, and those responses were excluded. As such, this study compares the standard American accent with non-Western accents. Early analysis indicated that considerably more respondents believed that the call service employee they spoke to was located in the U.S., particularly with respect to calls that were rated as having favorable outcomes. Littell, Stroup, and Freund (2002) suggest that sample size imbalance when comparing groups results in unstable findings. Accordingly, we randomly selected 25% of the call service employees located in the U.S. to reduce the imbalance.

To decrease bias between satisfaction with the call and the service outcome, two coders independently categorized the open-ended responses about the service outcome as either favorable or unfavorable. Ninety-seven respondents were dropped due to unclear open-ended answers. The inter-rater agreement for the remaining respondents was 81.7%, and differences were resolved by a third independent coder. Next, we assessed the agreement between the respondent's evaluation of the outcome and the coder's evaluation. The agreement between the respondents and the coders was approximately 96%. For hypothesis testing, we used the coder's assessment of service outcome. The final sample size was 197. The breakdown by outcome and accent is shown in table 2.

----- INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE.-----

3.2.2. *Dependent measures*

H₁ was tested using two dependent variables, customer perceptions of rapport with the employee and customer satisfaction. Consistent with the lab test, *customer-employee rapport* was measured using a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006). *Customer satisfaction* was also measured using a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006). Control variables included employee gender, respondent gender, respondent age, and whether the phone call included a transfer, as a transfer could impact recollection about the service employee who was primarily responsible for assisting the customer.

3.2.3 *Field test results*

The hypothesis was tested using ANCOVA. For the model used to test rapport, the interaction between service outcome and accent was significant ($F(1,196) = 5.36, p < .05$). When the outcome was unfavorable for the customer, the perception of rapport was significantly higher for employees with an American accent than for employees with a non-Western accent (American = 2.59 vs. non-Western = 1.73, $F = 11.47, p < .001$). However, when the outcome was favorable for the customer, the perception of rapport was not significantly different (American = 5.75 vs. non-Western = 5.64, $F = 0.00, ns$). The interaction means are shown in table 1 and figure 2.

Similarly, for the customer satisfaction model, the interaction between service outcome and accent was significant ($F(1,196) = 7.40, p < .01$). When the outcome was unfavorable for the customer, customer satisfaction was, again, significantly higher for employees with an American accent than for those with a non-Western accent (USA = 2.16 vs. non-Western = 1.34, $F = 9.12, p < .01$); however, when the outcome was favorable for the customer, customer satisfaction was not significantly different (American = 5.78 vs. non-Western = 5.95, $F = 0.92, ns$). The findings for both rapport and customer satisfaction support H_1 . Hence, evidence suggests that the interaction between accent and service outcome holds in real call service environments.

----- FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE-----

3.3. Post-test of accent bias

Using both a student sample and a broader online sample, we found that employees with non-Western accents were only rated lower than employees with standard American accents in the unfavorable outcome condition, but not in the favorable outcome condition. However, it is unclear whether respondents were truly suppressing a pre-existing bias or whether the bias

manifested as an explanation for the service failure. Accordingly, we conducted a post-test with 121 students and 75 U.S. respondents from MTurk to establish whether the biases found in Study 1 were pre-existing. Consistent with the procedure used by Morales and colleagues (2012), we used a between-subjects design in which respondents listened to five recorded statements spoken by either a standard American-accented speaker or an Indian-accented speaker. After each statement, respondents were asked to rate the likability of the speaker on a 7-point Likert scale. Likability ratings for the five statements were averaged together to create a single measure of likability. Controls, including respondent age, respondent gender, and respondent pre-study mood, were measured using a 4-item, 7-point Likert scale adapted from Tsai and Huang (2002) and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006).

An ANOVA test was used to analyze the results. As shown in table 3, the American accent was rated as significantly more likable than the Indian accent by students ($F(1, 120) = 41.14, p < .001$) and by MTurk respondents ($F(1, 74) = 15.89, p < .001$). This finding suggests that there is a prevalent pre-existing bias in the U.S. against speakers with an Indian accent.

----- INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE-----

3.4. Discussion

Consistent with the findings from our post-test, it is commonly believed that nonstandard accents (e.g., Indian) will always be received less favorably than standard accents (e.g., standard American). As such, managers have adopted a number of costly measures to reduce accent biases such as adopting speech training programs or moving customer service centers out of countries

subjected to negative accent biases. On the basis of such beliefs, managers may be tempted to reject employees with Indian accents, even in circumstances without accent-linked biases. However, the results of Study 1, demonstrated in both a lab test and a field test, indicate that negative biases against employee accents only reduce employee ratings when a service outcome is unfavorable for customers. Furthermore, the lab study shows that respondents only offer lengthier explanations about employee contribution to the service outcome when the service outcome is unfavorable. Thus, U.S. customers appear to suppress their accent biases when service outcomes are favorable.

However, while Study 1 demonstrates when customers express negative biases against accented call service employees, it does not explain the underlying mental mechanisms for these biases. According to Crandall and Eshleman (2003), suppressing prejudice requires both cognitive and affective effort. It is not clear from Study 1 whether unfavorable service outcomes are used cognitively as an excuse by customers to justify prejudice or whether unfavorable service outcomes cause customers to lose emotional control such that they are no longer able to suppress prejudice. Therefore, in Study 2 we investigate the role of cognition and mood in the suppression/expression of accent prejudice.

4. Study 2

In Study 2, we examine the role of cognition and affect in accent prejudice. Whereas the mental processes used to justify biases are cognitive, the mechanism underlying suppression requires both affective and cognitive effort (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). Crandall and Eshleman (2003, 422) explain that suppressing prejudiced thoughts, emotions, and feelings

requires ongoing “mental energy” and leads to a negative feeling. When service outcomes are unfavorable for customers, we expect that they will frequently become upset and agitated. People who are in highly emotional states are less able to maintain control over their biases and prejudices (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). Hence, when a service encounter has an unfavorable outcome, it is possible that customers may no longer be able to suppress their prejudices. As customers become increasingly less able to suppress the accent prejudice, the stereotypical inferences provide the most accessible source of information to use in service attributions. Therefore, we contend that service failure may bring forth prejudice using two pathways, 1) the cognitive pathway, which provides justification for prejudice, and 2) the affective pathway, which makes it more difficult for customers to continue suppressing prejudice. Taken together, we expect that this suppression and justification process will reduce or release the private experience of prejudice (affective responses and cognitive inferences) and public expression (e.g., reported judgment of the service encounter). Formally:

H₃: The outcome-moderated accent stereotyping effect is mediated by both affective (changes in customers’ mood) and cognitive (customers’ cognitive inferences) mechanisms.

4.1. Design, participants and procedures

Study 2 used a 2 (service employee’s accent: standard American vs. Indian) × 2 (service outcome: favorable vs. unfavorable) between-subjects design. Sixty-three undergraduates at a large U.S. Midwestern university participated in this experiment in exchange for extra credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and listened to a taped telephone

call between a customer and a bank employee, from the perspective of the customer. After listening to the call, participants completed a questionnaire that was inclusive of the dependent measures and control variables.

Moreover, we adopted a mood-neutralizing procedure to ensure that participants' pre-encounter moods were comparable. With this treatment, unlike a simple measurement of pre-encounter mood, we could rule out the confounding effect of pre-encounter affective states on the accent stereotyping effect, such as their ability to increase or decrease a person's propensity to use stereotypical heuristics (Park and Banaji, 2000). Immediately after the service encounter, we measured post-service mood. Finally, we asked participants to rate employee performance on a multi-item scale.

4.2. Measures

The dependent measures included an evaluation of employee performance, customer satisfaction, and change in the respondent's emotional state. *Evaluation of employee performance* was measured using a 7-item scale ($\alpha = .87$), adapted from Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000), that focuses on perceptions of employees' competence, trustworthiness, friendliness, and understandability. *Customer satisfaction* relied on a 4-item scale, adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006).

We used a two-step procedure to measure the *changes in the customers' emotional states*. First, before listening to the service call, participants underwent an adapted version of Velten's (1968) mood induction procedure—reading 50 neutral sentences (e.g., scientific facts), each displayed on a screen for 10 seconds—to neutralize their pre-encounter moods. Participant pre-

encounter moods were measured on a 4-item, 7-point scale (sad/happy, bad mood/good mood, irritated/pleased, depressed/cheerful; $r = .77$) and did not differ significantly across experimental conditions ($F(1, 59) = 3.32, NS$). Second, after listening to the service call, emotional state was measured using a 6-item scale (warmhearted, pleased, cheerful, upset, angry, annoyed), adapted from Tsai and Huang (2002) and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006). A change in the emotional state represents a difference between the respondent's pre- and post-call mood. Note that we strategically chose different scale items for the pre- and post-service mood measures to avoid raising participants' suspicion about the association between the two parts of the study.

As a manipulation check of employee accent, we asked participants to guess the locality of the service provider (i.e., somewhere in the participant's state, somewhere in the U.S., or a foreign country).

4.3. Results

4.3.1. Customers' evaluations of the service encounter

We created an index for each customer outcome variable: customer-employee rapport, customer satisfaction, and future behavioral intentions. We provide the means and standard errors of these dependent variables in table 1. Because the results of the 2 (employee accent) \times 2 (service outcome) ANOVAs were strikingly similar, we report only one set of ANOVA test results: those of the customer-employee rapport index. The predicted interaction of employee accent and service outcome ($F(1, 59) = 3.96, p = .05$) arose, such that when the service outcome was favorable, employee accent had no effect ($M_A = 4.50, M_I = 4.02; F(1, 59) = 2.34, NS$), but when the service outcome was unfavorable, customer satisfaction ratings fell significantly in the

Indian accent condition relative to those in the standard American condition ($M_A = 3.86$, $M_I = 3.09$; $F = 6.04$, $p < .05$, one-tailed).

4.3.2. Multi-mediation test

For this analysis, we conducted a multi-mediation test because it allowed us to investigate more than one mediator simultaneously. Specifically, we examined the extent to which accent \times service outcome \rightarrow service evaluation mediated by both affective mechanisms (e.g., changes in customers' positive and negative feelings) and cognitive mechanisms (e.g., customers' inferences about the employees' competence and reliability). If either affect or cognition fully mediates the model by itself, then the finding would suggest that one mechanism plays a greater role in accent prejudice. However, if neither cognition nor affect fully mediates the model by itself, but together they do, then we find that a service failure elicits prejudice using both cognitive and affective pathways.

Following Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005) and Preacher and Hayes (2008), we derived a mediated moderation model with customer mood and employee performance as two potential mediators (figure 3). These procedures generated a 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect, and mediation exists if zero falls outside of that confidence interval. Bootstrapping procedures (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes, 2007) for multiple mediator models (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) are appropriate for our study for three reasons. First, when working with small samples, bootstrapping overcomes the traditional constraint of assuming a normal distribution (MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams, 2004). Second, as all proposed mediators can be tested simultaneously, a common problem for mediation tests in which an omitted mediator could lead to a biased parameter estimate is not an issue (Judd and Kenny, 1981). Third, the specific

indirect effect of each mediator can be tested while controlling for all other variables in the method, and specific indirect effects can be compared for mediation strength. Thus, the analysis and bootstrap estimates were based on 5000 bootstrap samples.

----- INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE.-----

The total effect of accent \times outcome on customer–employee rapport was significant ($b = -1.25$, $t(63) = -1.99$, $p = .05$), whereas the direct effect was not ($b' = .10$, $t(63) = .24$, *NS*). The total indirect effect through two mediators was significant, with a point estimate of -1.35 and a 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence interval (CI) ranging between -2.48 and $-.34$. The proposed mood and cognitive mechanisms fully mediated the association between accent \times outcome and customer service evaluations. The specific indirect effects for each proposed mediator showed that changes in customers' feelings and employee performance were unique mediators, with point estimates of $-.79$ and $-.56$ and 95% CIs of -1.60 to -0.15 and -1.15 to $-.06$, respectively. A contrast test between the significant indirect effects revealed that the specific indirect effects of customer mood and employee performance were not significantly different (95% CI = -1.04 to $.37$). The estimates for each specific path, which we report in figure 3, thus support H₃.

4.4. Discussion

Study 2 supports our assertion that both cognitive and affective mechanisms play a role in the suppression/justification of accent biases. When a service outcome is unfavorable, customer

interactions with nonstandard-accented employees lead to changes in the customer's emotional state (i.e., feeling less pleasant and more annoyed) and expressions of stereotypical beliefs (i.e., Indian-accented employees are not as competent). Both mechanisms are unique mediators and not significantly different in terms of mediation strength. Additionally, in Study 2, we replicate the findings of Study 1 using multiple measures. Accent biases influence not only customers' judgments of interpersonal interactions but also their overall satisfaction with the encounter and their future loyalty intentions.

5. Study 3

To test the boundary conditions of the proposed outcome-moderated accent-linked biases, in Study 3, we made three extensions. First, we examined both positive (British) and negative (Indian) accent biases and compared them with the standard in-group condition (standard American). Second, we explored whether informing customers about the frequency of a favorable outcome for this type of service call would cause them to be less likely to rely on accent stereotypes. Third, we increased the generalizability of the previous findings by considering another service context, also described on a consumer website about banking service, in which the customer requested an overdraft fee cancellation—a more complex service transaction than simple address updating. In the favorable outcome condition, most of the overdraft fee was reimbursed (\$66 of \$99); in the unfavorable outcome condition, none of the overdraft charges were refunded.

5.1. Positive accent biases

In Study 1 and Study 2, we consistently found that a negative accent bias occurs when service outcomes are unfavorable. However, we have not determined whether positive biases toward employees with certain accents exhibit similar trends. In addition to negative accent biases, research has found that some accents, such as the standard British accent, are viewed positively (Cargile and Giles, 2000; Stewart, Ryan, and Giles, 1985). Positive biases are less well understood because of the widespread belief that they are less detrimental to society (Crandall and Eshleman, 2003). However, understanding accents receiving a positive bias is important for managers because a positive bias could enhance customer outcomes and, accordingly, could influence a variety of call service decisions.

We anticipate that customers in the U.S. will have a positive bias toward employees with British accents because a British accent has conventionally been associated with prestige and professionalism (Stewart et al., 1985). That is, customers are likely to evaluate British-accented employees more favorably and experience more positive feelings while interacting with them compared with interactions with American- or Indian-accented employees.

Unlike negative accent biases, positive biases are unlikely to be suppressed. Suppression requires mental effort, so people only suppress biases when they believe it is important to do so. Because positive biases seldom feel disruptive, we expect that they are suppressed only when the contextual information clearly contravenes such positive accent-based stereotypes. For example, an employee's British accent should evoke favorable perceptions, and this positive prejudice is likely to be experienced and expressed in its genuine form. However, if the service delivered by this British-accented employee does not provide favorable outcomes for customers, the customers will suppress their positive reactions. Hence, when a service outcome is unfavorable,

accents receiving a negative bias will be rated lower than standard accents and accents receiving a positive bias will lose their advantage over standard accents. Formally,

H₄: Customers will rate employees with an accent receiving a positive bias higher than employees with a standard accent only when a service outcome is favorable for customers.

5.2. Attributions

Consistent with our earlier findings, we expect that the result of the service outcome will influence customer attributions. Customer attributions of service outcomes can be dispositional, that is, assigned to the inherent traits of the actor, or situational, that is, assigned to external conditions (Cowley, 2005). Research on stereotype maintenance shows that people attribute stereotype-consistent behaviors to internal, dispositional causes but stereotype-inconsistent behaviors to external, situational causes (e.g., Crocker, Hannah, and Weber, 1983). We predict that people will err toward dispositional attributions for unfavorable outcomes when accents are negatively perceived and for favorable outcomes when accents are positively perceived.

Formally,

H₅: When the outcome of the service outcome matches the accent-based bias (e.g., Indian-accented employee–negative outcome, British-accented employee–positive outcome), customers are more likely to attribute the outcome to the employee rather than to external causes.

5.3. Information about typical outcomes

According to Szymanski and Henard (2001), one of the most important antecedents of customer satisfaction is the degree to which customers feel they have been treated equitably, which they estimate by making comparisons with other customers. However, customers often cannot observe other customers' service interactions, particularly in call service encounters. When customers cannot make reliable comparisons, we expect that they will depend more on stereotypical information to make service evaluations. Therefore, providing customers with information about the treatment of other customers should reduce their reliance on stereotypical information. Previous research on stereotyping has shown that giving people more information about a situation can reduce the effects of stereotyping (Kunda and Thagard, 1996; Locksley et al., 1980). Thus, we propose that providing information about the frequency of an unfavorable vs. a favorable service outcome will decrease the customer propensity to use accent stereotypes. For example, if customers know that outcomes are usually unfavorable, customers will be less likely to rely on stereotypical information about the employee. Formally,

H₆: Accent biases are less likely to impact service evaluations if customers have information about the frequency of a favorable vs. unfavorable service outcome.

5.4. Design, participants, and procedure

As before, we used an Indian accent for the negative bias and a standard American accent as the standard. Consistent with the findings of Stewart et al. (1985), we used the standard British accent to represent the positive bias. Study 3 used a 3 (employee accent: Indian, British, and standard American) \times 2 (service outcome: favorable vs. unfavorable) \times 2 (information about

typical service outcome: available vs. unavailable) between-subjects design. Two hundred ten students at a large U.S. Midwestern university, who participated in the experiment in exchange for extra credit, were randomly assigned to one of the twelve experimental conditions. Consistent with Study 2, we adopted a mood-neutralizing procedure to ensure that participants' pre-encounter moods were comparable.

The service scenario in this study is a customer calling to request the cancellation of overdraft charges. We manipulated the information availability by providing or withholding information pertaining to the frequency of favorable vs. unfavorable outcomes. Specifically, when the information about the typical service outcome is available, customers are told that it is common for banks to charge an overdraft fee as a condition of their contract. The average of an overdraft charge is \$33. Only 10% of the overdraft fees are ever reimbursed based on customer request. In the conditions where information about the typical service outcome is unavailable, participants read the same introduction about overdraft charges, but the information that "Only 10 % of the overdraft fees are ever reimbursed" is not provided to the customer.

5.5. Dependent measures

For Study 3, we used two dependent variables, customer satisfaction and post-service attribution. *Customer satisfaction* was measured using the 4-item, 7-point Likert scale from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006). To measure post-service attribution, respondents were asked to describe their experience with the service encounter using an open-ended response. Then, two independent coders judged whether the respondents attributed the service outcome to the

employee's disposition (e.g., employee competence or care for the customer) or external causes (e.g., organizational policy or luck).

5.6. Manipulation check

In this experiment, we asked participants to guess the employee's accent. Most participants identified the accent correctly (86% for the Indian accent, 96% for the American accent, 91% for the British accent), which provided further confirmation that our manipulation worked. The mood neutralizing procedure was also successful because customers' pre-encounter moods did not differ significantly across experimental conditions ($F(1, 198) = .12, NS$).

5.7. Results

5.7.1. Customer satisfaction

We constructed the customer satisfaction index by averaging the four relevant items (coefficient $\alpha = .96$). The means and deviations appear in table 2. The results of a $3 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA of customer satisfaction (figure 3) revealed a main effect of service outcomes ($F(1, 198) = 301.98, p < .01$) and the predicted three-way interaction of accent, service outcome, and information ($F(2, 198) = 2.96, p = .05$). Accent stereotypical effects should have decreased when customers were informed about the industrial norms. Thus, in support of H_6 , the follow-up tests for each information context revealed that when no other objective information was available, the results were consistent with those from Study 1. The main effect of the service outcome ($F(2,85) = 229.48, p < .01$) was qualified by a significant two-way interaction between accent and service outcomes ($F(2,85) = 4.37, p = .02$). Planned contrasts revealed that when the service outcome was favorable, a British accent led to significantly higher customer satisfaction than did

the USA accent ($M_B = 5.70$, $M_A = 4.76$, $F(1, 85) = 6.16$, $p = .02$). Customer satisfaction in the Indian accent condition did not differ significantly from that in the standard American accent condition ($M_I = 5.20$, $M_A = 4.76$, $F(1, 85) = 1.67$, $F < 1$, *NS*). However, when the service outcome was unfavorable, customer satisfaction ratings were not notably different in the British and standard American accent conditions ($M_B = 2.21$, $M_A = 2.52$, $F < 1$, *NS*), whereas the Indian accent condition featured significantly lower customer satisfaction ratings ($M_I = 1.67$, $M_A = 2.52$; $F(1, 85) = 5.94$, $p = .02$). Thus, the results support H_4 and replicate H_1 . When customers had other objective information to evaluate their service outcomes (knowledge about typical service outcome), only the main effect of the service outcome was significant ($F(1, 113) = 119.89$, $p < .01$; all other F s = *NS*). That is, customer satisfaction ratings were not significant when customers had more objective information. Thus, H_6 is supported.

----- INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE-----

----- INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE-----

5.7.2. Service attributions

We again analyzed customers' attributions of the service outcome, but instead of asking participants directly about their employee attributions, we requested that they write open-ended responses to an oblique question: "If you were to describe your experience of this service encounter to your friends, what would you say?" Two judges, unaware of the research purpose, independently coded the responses and resolved any differences through discussion, although they agreed on 96% of the responses. The responses could be assigned to one of two categories: the employee's disposition (e.g., competence, warmth, caring for customers) and external factors (e.g., bank policy, customer luck). With a binary logistic regression, we regressed attribution (external = 0, dispositional = 1) on employees' accents (American = 0, Indian = 1, British = 2),

service outcomes (favorable = 0, unfavorable = 1), the information context (no other information provided = 0, objective outcome information provided = 1), and their interactions. The test of the model was significant ($\chi^2 = 39.18, p < .01$), although the three-way interaction was not ($\beta = -.24, NS$). Both the accent \times outcome interaction ($\beta = -1.98, p = .02$) and the service outcome ($\beta = -2.29, p = .04$) were significant. Following Wood's (2010) example, we analyzed the model using indicator contrasts of the variables. When the service outcome was unfavorable, the probability that customers would attribute the outcome to employee disposition increased in the Indian accent condition compared with the American accent condition ($\beta = -1.54, p < .01$), but this effect was not evident when the service outcome was favorable. Instead, when the service outcome was favorable, the probability that customers would attribute the outcome to employee disposition increased in the British accent condition compared with the American accent condition ($\beta = -.99, p = .05$), and this relationship also disappeared when the service outcome was unfavorable. These findings support H₅.

5.8. Discussion

Using a different service context (i.e., request for overdraft fee cancellation), Study 3 provides further support for the justification and suppression model. As before, when a service outcome is unfavorable, accents receiving a negative bias are rated lower than standard accents. However, when an outcome is favorable, accents receiving a positive bias lead to higher ratings than standard accents. Additionally, both positive and negative accent stereotyping effects decrease when customers have other diagnostic cues—in this case, knowledge about the frequency of an unfavorable vs. favorable service outcome—to influence their judgments.

6. Conclusions and implications

Given the prevalence of employees with nonnative accents providing customer service by phone, the paucity of research examining accent biases in call service encounters is surprising. Even without sufficient research, many companies are adopting costly measures to reduce negative customer bias toward nonstandard accents, such as relocating call centers and implementing speech training programs. Using self-reported measures and open-ended questions in both lab and field studies, our research addresses this gap by (1) applying the JSM to call service interactions to explain when accent biases impact customer evaluations, (2) exploring the underlying mental mechanisms of suppressing and justifying accent biases, and (3) providing evidence that not all accent biases are negative.

First, to our knowledge, our study is the first to apply the JSM framework to a service encounter. To date, the consumer research into customer biases regarding employees and psychological research on the suppression and justification of prejudice have existed more or less independently. Most customer behavior research has focused on how consumers use stereotypes to make judgments about products, service providers, or fellow consumers. For example, customers stereotype employees on the basis of their age (Kang and Hillery, 1998), gender (Matta and Folkes, 2005), race (Jones et al., 1998), and appearance (Kang and Herr, 2006). However, research has not examined whether customers also suppress or justify their prejudices toward employees, particularly in call service encounters. Our research shows that the justification and suppression model applies even in a relatively impersonal phone service context. This important finding means that the compulsion to justify or suppress prejudice is not

limited to face-to-face service encounters in which social norms or political correctness discourage negative prejudice.

Second, our research shows that the suppression of negative biases requires both cognitive and affective effort. The role of affect in suppression is particularly interesting because it means that when customers are upset, they are less able to suppress their negative biases. According to Munichor and Rafaeli (2007, 517), when providing call service, “organizations cannot avoid making customers wait on hold because the required costs would be prohibitive.” Munichor and Rafaeli (2007) find that messages apologizing to customers for the hold time results in the most negative customer reactions, while messages providing customers with information about their location in the queue leads to the most positive customer reactions. Hence, before even speaking to a call service employees, customers are often already annoyed or agitated. We argue that when customers begin a service call already frustrated, they will be less able to suppress negative biases. Therefore, mechanisms for reducing negative accent biases should begin prior to the customer-employee interaction.

Finally, although previous research has been unable to provide convincing evidence that people may be positively biased toward outgroups (Mullen, Brown and Smith, 1992), our results indicate that customers can be positively predisposed toward certain accents. One possible reason why previous research has not found consistent evidence of positive biases toward outgroups is that negative and positive biases manifest under different circumstances. In our study, positive accent biases only influence customer evaluations when outcomes are favorable; when outcomes are unfavorable, the benefits of positive biases disappear. Thus, although people suppress their negative prejudices unless evidence justifies them, people do not suppress positive prejudices unless there is evidence that contradicts them.

6.1. Managerial Implications

By exploring the triggers of accent prejudice in call service settings, we derive three main actionable recommendations for reducing prejudice against employees with nonstandard accents. First, consumers in the U.S. suppress their negative prejudice, but not their positive prejudice, when service outcomes are favorable. Therefore, services that are likely to result in a favorable outcome for customers are more appropriate assignments for employees with nonstandard accents than services that are likely to lead to unfavorable outcomes. It might be tempting to outsource unpleasant and time-consuming tasks to international call centers to reduce costs, but the prevalence of employees with nonstandard accents could cause customers to become more upset than they would have been if they had dealt with standard-accented employees. Even using employees with accents receiving a positive bias to relate bad news will be ineffective because customers suppress their positive bias when they confront unfavorable outcomes. Hence, activating new accounts or providing good news represents better tasks for nonstandard-accented employees than relaying bad news or providing service where the probability of an unfavorable outcome is high.

Second, call service managers should work diligently to provide high-quality, favorable results for customers whenever they canⁱ. Our results show that customers in the U.S. suppress their negative accent biases and maintain their positive ones as long they feel a service outcome is favorable. It is noteworthy that many employees residing in the U.S. also have nonstandard accents, so even domestic businesses providing service by phone will benefit from ensuring that customers receive favorable outcomes.

Finally, providing customers with transparent and accurate information reduces their use of prejudicial information in making service outcome attributions. We therefore extend the findings of Roggeveen, Bharadwaj, and Hoyer (2007): providing information about firm reputation reduces prejudice against call service employees. When using nonstandard-accented employees to provide customer service by phone, managers should provide customers with information about industry norms, such as wait times, conditions in which service contracts can be terminated, and customer rights. This information must be based firmly in facts; otherwise, customers will disregard it. Customers base their expectations on their own or others' previous experiences, so they likely can recognize when they receive inaccurate or misleading information. For example, some firms tell customers that they never waive certain fees, even if waiving or reducing fees is commonplace in the industry. Instead, managers should inform customers about when fees can be waived because even if the customers do not meet those conditions, they are less likely to make damaging attributions when they have such information.

6.2. Limitations and Further Research

While this research was limited to consumers in the U.S., businesses hire nonstandard-accented employees to provide call service in many other countries, as well. As such, we recommend that future research explore accent biases in call service encounters in other countries and cultures. Additionally, we used the JSM to explain accent bias in the call service setting. However, it would be interesting to apply the JSM to other types of customer biases and in other customer-employee settings. Further, we only investigated one mechanism, information availability, for decreasing customer bias when the service outcome was unfavorable. Research

extensions should determine whether there are other mechanisms that also decrease customer bias. Finally, we used the Indian accent in our lab studies and the Indian accent was the most common non-Western accent reported in the field test. Although our findings apply to other accents, it should be noted that the biases toward them may be weaker or stronger than the Indian accent. It is possible that a negative bias could be so weak that it is not managerially relevant even when the bias is not suppressed. Hence, even in light of our findings, knowing the strength of accent bias remains important.

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Table 1

Service evaluations as a function of employees' accents and service outcomes

| Dependent Variables | | Favorable Service Outcome | | Unfavorable Service Outcome | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| | | American | Non-Western | American | Non-Western |
| <i>Study 1: Lab</i> | Customer–Employee Rapport | 4.01 (1.14) | 4.30 (1.37) | 3.78 (1.14) | 2.84 (0.83) |
| | Elaboration on employees' performance | 21.79 (11.77) | 21.24 (12.11) | 23.13 (11.48) | 37.80 (30.90) |
| | Total number of words | | | | |
| <i>Study 1: Field*</i> | Customer–Employee Rapport | 5.75 (1.25) | 5.64 (0.58) | 2.59 (1.52) | 1.73 (0.85) |
| | Customer satisfaction | 5.78 (1.32) | 5.95 (0.62) | 2.16 (1.57) | 1.34 (0.74) |
| <i>Study 2</i> | Customer–Employee Rapport | 4.02 (1.28) | 4.50 (1.58) | 3.86 (1.14) | 3.09 (0.92) |
| | Customer satisfaction | 4.34 (1.41) | 4.87 (1.56) | 3.39 (1.72) | 2.59 (1.08) |
| | Future behavioral intentions | 4.54 (1.31) | 5.20 (1.09) | 3.73 (1.57) | 2.52 (1.13) |
| | Changes in customers' mood | 5.01 (1.25) | 5.22 (1.05) | 4.09 (1.06) | 3.02 (0.86) |
| | Employee performance | 5.29 (0.71) | 5.33 (0.91) | 5.06 (1.04) | 4.03 (1.01) |

Standard deviations are in parentheses.

*Controls include respondent age, respondent gender, employee gender, and whether the call involved at least one transferred.

Table 2
Sample break-down for Study 1 Field test

| | | Outcome | | |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Accent | | <i>Unfavorable</i> | <i>Favorable</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| | <i>Non-Western</i> | 60 | 26 | 86 |
| | <i>USA</i> | 45 | 66 | 111 |
| | <i>Total</i> | 105 | 92 | 197 |

Table 3

Post-test ratings of speaker likability by accent

| Sample | American | Indian | F-value |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|
| <i>Student</i> | 4.33 (1.20) | 2.92 (1.22) | 41.14*** |
| <i>Field</i> | 4.80 (1.30) | 3.63 (1.37) | 15.89*** |

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** P < .001

Standard deviations are in parentheses.

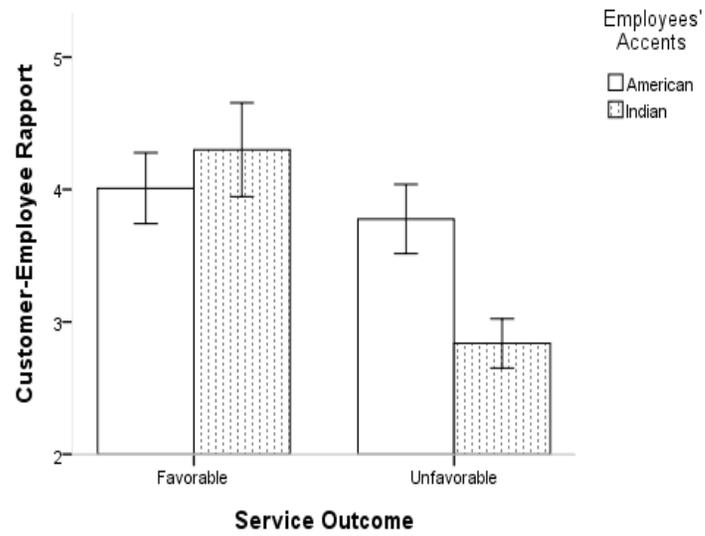
Controls include age, gender, and mood.

Table 4

Service evaluations as a function of employees' accents, service outcomes, and information context in Study 3

| | Transparent Information Context | | | | | | Ambiguous Information Context | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|
| | Favorable Outcome | | | Unfavorable Outcome | | | Favorable Outcome | | | Unfavorable Outcome | | |
| | American | British | Indian | American | British | Indian | American | British | Indian | American | British | Indian |
| Customer satisfaction | 5.04 (1.20) | 4.77 (1.60) | 4.49 (1.67) | 2.12 (1.15) | 2.26 (1.18) | 2.00 (.95) | 4.76 (1.32) | 5.70 (.83) | 5.20 (.72) | 2.52 (1.15) | 2.21 (1.00) | 1.67 (.57) |
| Percentage attribution to dispositional factors | 50.00 | 73.70 | 31.60 | 14.30 | 20.00 | 47.60 | 55.60 | 76.50 | 35.30 | 11.80 | 33.33 | 35.00 |

Figure 1
Rapport as a function of employees' accent and service outcomes



Note: Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2

Rapport and customer satisfaction as a function of service outcome and employee's accent

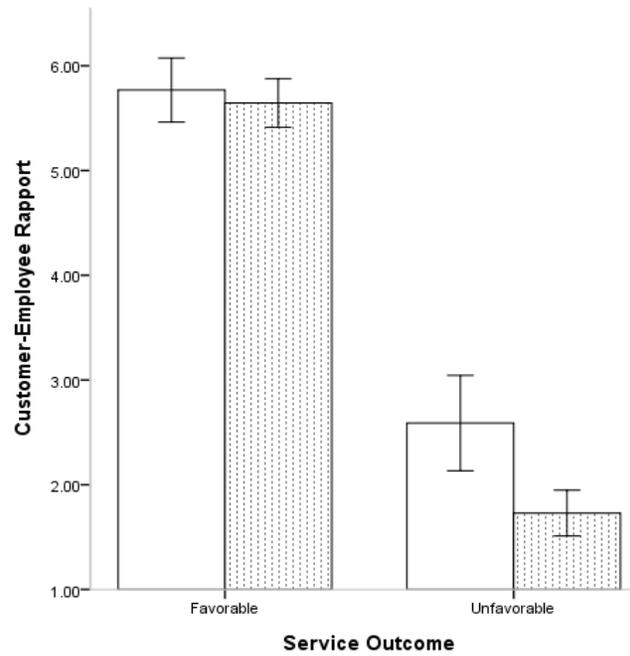
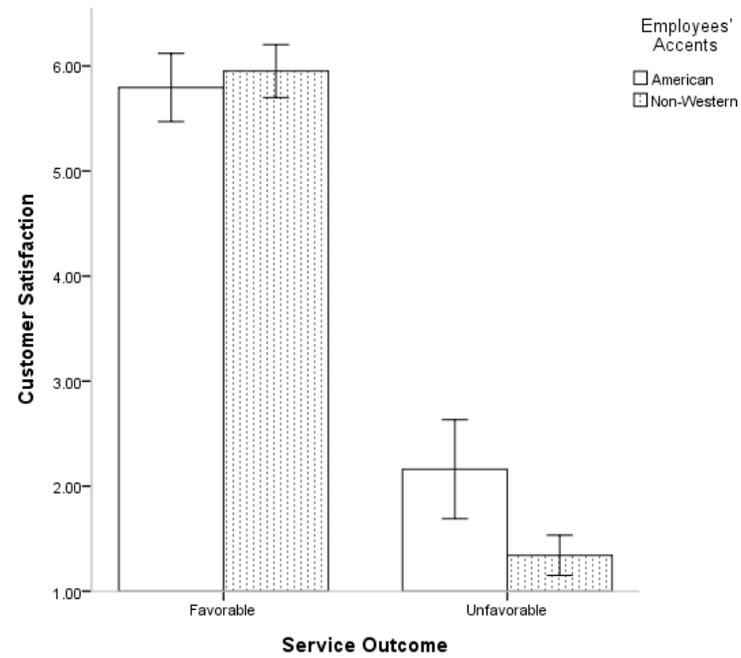
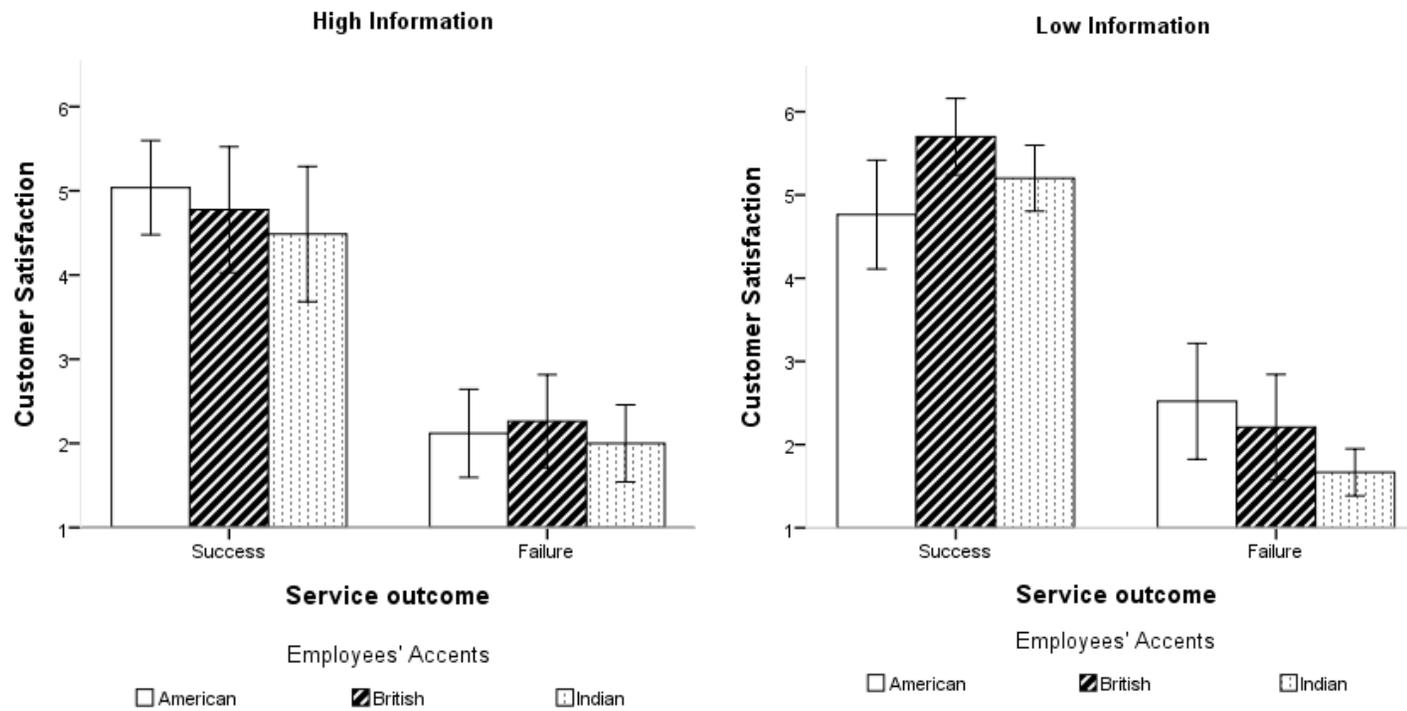
a. Rapport**b. Customer satisfaction**

Figure 4

Customer satisfaction as a function of employees' accent, service outcomes, and information context in Study 3



Notes: Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.