SPEAKING SUCCESS: A CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE'S IMPACT IN MARKETING AND SERVICES

Dr. Olivia A. Carter[1]

Abstract

This paper delves into the significance of words in the realm of marketing, both as tools of communication and as instruments that shape the practice of marketing. With a focus on marketing terms and concepts, the discussion oscillates between general marketing and service-specific perspectives, as well as practitioner and academic viewpoints. The pivotal role of words in understanding customers, facilitating transactions, and engaging with the marketplace is acknowledged. The paper highlights the escalating phenomenon of vocabulary creep in marketing and its implications, substantiated by data gleaned from marketing practitioners and services marketing textbooks. The author then offers remedies for managing vocabulary creep. Additionally, the paper explores the consumer's stance on marketing terminology, further enriching the discourse. By delving into the intersections of linguistic nuance and marketing practice, this work contributes to the understanding of how language shapes the dynamics of marketing and service domains.

1.   Introduction

Although I am not a linguist, lately I've been thinking quite a bit about words.* Words, as they are used in marketing. Words, as they are used in service. Words in the form of concepts and terminology that impact marketing educators and researchers. Words that we use to influence the practice of marketing, and words that practitioners use to influence their customers and prospective customers. It's difficult to deny the crucial role that words play in marketing and in service. Obviously, without words as tools of communication, marketers' ability to understand customers and facilitate transactions would be severely limited. Words are primary tools for studying, understanding, describing and communicating with the marketplace.

---

[1] W. Frank Barton School of Business, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas 67260, USA

Accordingly, I would like to share with you a few of the ideas about words that I have been wrestling with -- especially marketing terms and concepts. Like many of you, I have a larger interest in the *marketing* field, in general, accompanied by a more specific interest in *service* and *services marketing,* in particular. So, my comments will bounce back and forth between the more general marketing perspective and the more specific service side. Also, I will be shifting between practitioner and academic perspectives. So, I apologize in advance for any confusion that these various shifts in perspective may create.

First, I will present a very brief background regarding the particularly important role that words play in the marketing of services. Then I'll introduce the issue of vocabulary creep in marketing followed by a few prescriptions for dealing with vocabulary creep. In the process, I will present some data gathered from marketing practitioners and services marketing textbooks. Finally, I will offer a few ideas regarding the consumer's perspective of marketing terminology.

_____

2.   Background for service marketers

The unique nature of service products accentuates the role of communication in general, and words, in particular. First, because service providers and customers often must interact with one another to identify and deliver services -- referred to as inseparability -- the lack of communication between the two can threaten the quality of services provided and the customer's satisfaction with both the service and the service delivery process. For example, patients must feel comfortable enough to describe their symptoms to their physicians. Service providers must be skilled to select the right words during such provider-customer encounters. Indeed, most "how to" service training materials that target customer-contact service workers include lists of what to say or not say to customers in various service settings.

Next are the intangibility and simultaneity factors. Because services are intangible, prospective buyers cannot familiarize themselves with services by viewing or touching them in the same ways they can learn about tangible goods. Because services are produced and consumed simultaneously, there may be very few aspects of services that consumers can evaluate fully prior to purchase. So, consumers rely heavily on words -- words that service providers use to describe the service, its parameters and its outcomes. In this sense, words play a critical role in positioning the service in its most attractive light. That's why food items on restaurant menus are typically served with ample portions of adjectives, e.g., rather than "peas," diners order "sweet, succulent, young peas." Accordingly, Whiting (1957) offers numerous insights and suggestions for painting what he calls "word pictures." Despite the potential role of words to shape their expectations, service customers do not always receive the service they expect. The gaps between what's expected and what's received can give rise to dissatisfaction, which can lead to complaining behavior directed toward the service provider. Not surprisingly, how service providers respond to customers' complaints -- including their choice of words -- frequently has more to do with complaining customers' ultimate (dis)satisfaction than the original unmet expectation that prompted the original complaints (Bitner, 1990).

The difficulty consumers have evaluating intangible services produced at the point of consumption gives rise to consumers' search for surrogate and tangible points of evaluation. From the customer's point of view, the service provider becomes the service and what the service provider says provides evidence that the service will or perhaps will not be provided competently, compassionately, with attention to detail and in a timely manner.

Prospective service customers turn not only to service providers to help them understand the service, but they look to others as well. Word-of-mouth comments about products that spread from consumer to consumer have been recognized for years as playing an influential role in consumers' product evaluations and purchase decisions. In the service sector, we know that the word-of-mouth phenomenon plays an even larger role of influence than in the manufacturing sector, again largely attributed to the intangibility and simultaneity factors associated with services (Bolfing, 1989; George and Berry, 1981; Haywood, 1989). Clearly, whether they are articulated by service providers or by other customers, words are key vehicles by which people initially come to know services. What people say about services says a lot about services.

3. Marketing's vocabulary creep

From more of an academic perspective, as a discipline such as marketing or any other discipline grows, so grows its vocabulary. A discipline is shaped, in part, by its vocabulary -- the terms it uses to describe concepts that form the building blocks of ideas, principles, laws, generalizations, propositions, theories and paradigms upon which the discipline relies. A discipline's vocabulary gives life to swirls of thought that would be difficult to communicate otherwise, and thus not likely to be adopted or applied widely. As a discipline's vocabulary grows by borrowing terms from other fields, or by coining its own, so grows the discipline. As terms move in and out of usage, the discipline evolves, sometimes only incrementally, but sometimes in more dramatic ways. It follows that the investigation of the scope and usage of terminology in the field is a legitimate direction for academic inquiry.

My interest in marketing vocabulary was piqued in the early 1990s when one of the distinguished professors in our college, Dr. Billy Mac Jones, asked my opinion about how to best teach an introductory course in marketing. Having never taught a course in marketing before, he was a bit overwhelmed by the parade of hundreds -- perhaps thousands -- of marketing terms defined and described in the 900+ page textbook adopted for the course. Dr. Jones and I both recognized that it would be impossible to cover all of the terms thoroughly in the course. The questions were obvious, but the answers were not: Which terms should be emphasized in class at multiple points throughout the semester? Which ones should be emphasized only once during the semester? Which ones should not be mentioned in class but left for students to read about in the textbook? Which ones should be bypassed completely?

When I was a new marketing student in the 1970s, perhaps my professors shielded me from many marketing concepts, but I do not recall there being as many marketing terms then as there are today. Now, as a marketing educator myself, I fear that the list of marketing terms may be growing too long. It seems to me that as the list grows longer and we expose students to more and more marketing terms, we run the risk of not sufficiently emphasizing the terms that are most critical -- the ones that should be center-stage throughout students' marketing careers. However, I am grateful to world-renowned marketing scholar, Philip Kotler, for offering a manageable list and discussion of 80 marketing-relevant concepts with which he asserts that all marketing managers should be familiar (Kotler, 2003).

To put the issue of marketing's vocabulary creep in a context that reveals its problematic nature, first consider the marketing vocabulary in the larger context of an individual's overall vocabulary. That is, a nonEnglish speaking person visiting Wichita, Kansas in the U.S. or Manchester in the U.K. would need to be familiar with

about 850 words of "basic English" in order to cope with life on a day to day basis (Richards, 1943). For average citizens in Wichita or Manchester, a vocabulary of only 3,000 words (each word familiar to 80 percent of fourth-grade students) covers about 90 percent of what they have to say, hear or read (Payne, 1951).

Now consider the field of marketing, with about 3,200 terms included in the *Dictionary of Marketing Terms* published in conjunction with the American Marketing Association (Bennett, 1995). I conservatively estimate that at least another 2,000 concepts may be found throughout the marketing literature -- and probably quite a few more. More specifically, in the services marketing area alone, one major textbook discusses 694 concepts (Lovelock, 2001), while another covers 356 (Bateson and Hoffman, 1999).

Beyond my crude estimate of 5,200 "marketing" terms, per se, consider the numerous, highly-relevant concepts derived from accounting, finance, economics, human resource management, strategic management, organizational behavior and other business and non-business fields from which marketers, in general, and services marketers, in particular, could benefit. Further, my estimate of 5,200 excludes industry- or company-specific marketing concepts. Most industries have their own set of concepts conveniently configured to conform to their respective traditions and nuances. For example, Marriott Corporation uses a nine-page guide to company acronyms. As Bill Marriott, Jr. himself admits, "Internal meetings often sound like they're being conducted in a foreign language thanks to the shorthand Marriott-speak we've developed and become accustomed to" (Marriott and Brown, 1997, p. 126).

Considering "basic English's" 850-word vocabulary and the expanded 3,000-word vocabulary needed for most other communications, do we really need 5,200 terms to talk about marketing? To me, something seems a bit out of balance. Apparently Bartels (1974) and Luck (1974) believed so too; although they did not contrast marketing's vocabulary with everyday vocabulary, they did observe that the scope of marketing had become so broad and loosely defined that we will never cut through the ever-growing "semantic jungle" until we clearly define the boundaries of marketing itself. At the extreme, perhaps we need only three "primitive" categories of terms -- sets, behavior and expectations -- from which all of marketing's subject matter can be derived (Alderson 1965, pp. 23-51).

4. Personally coping with marketing's vocabulary creep

Informal discussions about marketing's vocabulary creep with colleagues and faculty at other universities reveals that most academics face the vocabulary creep dilemma at some point in their careers. They do not always couch it in terms of which marketing concepts should be discussed in class and which ones not, but they all recognize that there is more they would like to discuss in class -- marketing vocabulary or otherwise -- than limited time permits.

Curiously, each marketing educator seems to have his or her own heuristics to decide which terms to discuss in class. Those of us with marketing experience as practitioners may emphasize the terms we found most useful in our business careers. Early in our teaching careers we may rely on the terms we know best, the ones with which we feel most comfortable. Or, we may attempt to parallel the textbooks we use; "If a term is emphasized in the textbook," this logic goes, "then it must be an important term, so I'll emphasize it in class." An alternative logic might suggest just the opposite, i.e., "if a concept is *not* emphasized in the textbook, I had better do so in class -- otherwise students may not gain any exposure to it."

5. The pet-p movement

Some marketing scholars have coped with marketing's vocabulary creep by joining alliteration movements to champion their favorite concepts. Apparently fearing that their pet concepts might drown in the vast sea of

marketing vocabulary, they have lobbied for special honorific status for some concepts. In marketing, these efforts gained momentum in the early 1960's with what I call the "pet-P movement" (Martin, 1992).

In 1960 Jerome McCarthy's introductory marketing text was published featuring his well-known pet-P's -- product, place, promotion and price (McCarthy, 1960, pp. 45-48). It wasn't long before the p-parade progressed with a proliferation of pet-P's passionately proffered. Nickels and Jolson (1978) suggested that *packaging* should be included in the honorific pet-P hall of fame. Philip Kotler's (1986) "Megamarketing" article served as justification for the inclusion of *power* in the elite group. Seymour Fine (1990, pp. 4-5) suggested the addition of *probing* (marketing research and information systems), *producers* (source of marketing programs), and *purchasers* (consumers). Likewise, *pizazz* was proposed to signify marketing's important creative element. Further, Martin Baier (1983, p. 306) suggested *picture, promise, prove* and *push* be added to the p-list. Most recently, Martin (2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2018) has made the case for the inclusion of *period* in the marketing mix to reflect the key role that calendar timing plays in the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing efforts. Dozens of other p-terms have been or could be proposed for inclusion in the elite set of pet-P's.

The pet-P movement has not escaped service marketers' attention either. Booms and Bitner (1981) and Magrath (1986) advanced the importance of recognizing three other P's in the marketing mix – *physical facilities, personnel* and *process management*. In addition to these extra P's, Lovelock (2001) included *productivity and quality* in his eight-P model of integrated service management. Elsewhere in the services literature, *professionalism, presentation, planning/preparation* and *personality*, among others, have been proposed (see Martin, 1992).

I'm not sure what McCarthy's rationale was for selecting "P" as the focal letter. Perhaps it was only coincidental. But perhaps he saw the growth of the marketing field that awaited us, so he picked a letter that would facilitate growth of the discipline. The English language facilitates such growth in that more words start with the letter P than with any other letter. In contrast, consider where the marketing discipline might be today if McCarthy had advocated the four X's, the four Q's, or the four Z's. Do marketers everywhere owe McCarthy a debt of gratitude for putting us on the path of P-proliferation providing profits for purposeful purveyors practicing persistent proper performance? Perhaps.

Whether or not the p-movement is noteworthy is a debatable issue. If a list of terms that begin with the same letter are easier for students or practitioners to remember than words found more randomly distributed throughout the alphabet, then fine, but the promise of the p-parade of concepts fades quickly outside of the boundaries of the English language when p-words are translated into those beginning with letters found elsewhere in the alphabet.

6.   **The I-movement**

In an apparent effort to assert their independence from the mother field, service marketers have staked claims for their own letter -- the letter "I" -- so key services marketing terms won't get lost in the clutter of 5,200 marketing terms. Quite likely, readers are already familiar with many of these – including those among the longrecognized IHIP pillars of services marketing: intangibility, inseparability and inconsistency. More specifically, Ellis (2000) offered her expanded list of eight I's of services marketing: intangibility, inseparability, inconsistency, immediacy, intimacy, intermediaries, innovation and inventory. Further, a survey of 115 marketing practitioners (discussed later) found several I-terms among those frequently mentioned by respondents as key; among others, these included: interpersonal skills/relations or related terms, integrated marketing communications, Internet, image and integrity. Considering the frequently noted relationship-building objective of services marketers, Srinivasan (1996) advocated a list of "seven essential I's of enhancing customer loyalty": initiate contact, inform about initiatives, incentivize, infer from behavior, influence key decision makers, increase account share and immunize

against competition. Similarly, Martin (1997) observed six I-roles of building relationships with service customers: introduction, inspiration, intention, integration, initiation and implementation.

I am not necessarily interested in stifling the I-movement, but I do have some questions and reservations. First, can't we do better than the letter "I"? As alluded to earlier, McCarthy's selection of P was perhaps genius in that there is a plentiful plethora of p-words in the English language from which to choose and grow. But "I" seems to offer fewer growth opportunities.

I am also concerned about the "in" prefix which accompanies about 64 percent of all of the I-words in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and most of the prominent I-terms in services marketing. As you may be aware, the "in" prefix has both Greek and Latin roots and the I-movement seems to include both. The Greek prefix means "not" or "non" as in *in*tangible, *in*divisible, *in*separable, and *in*consistency. Given the conceptual impossibility of visualizing something that is "not," are we really communicating what services *are* by choosing words that describe what they *are not*?

Additional confusion could creep into the field when words with the Greek "in" prefix are included on the same lists with I-words utilizing the Latin prefix "in," which means "into." I am not suggesting that service providers will ever face dilemmas as serious as those some manufacturers faced only a few decades ago when they routinely used the Latin prefix to prominently display the word "inflammable" on the gasoline cans they produced (followed by intuitively inevitable explosions that followed), but some confusion seems likely. For example, is it a good thing or a bad thing to be associated with an "*in*valuable" or "*in*variable" service, or perhaps a service "*in*novation"? If we are to speak of *in*tangibility, *in*separability, *in*consistency and *in*divisibility to describe specific dimensions of services, should we also speak in terms of *in*ventory when describing the perishability dimension of services, or would *inin*ventory be more appropriate (or in the lodging industry, *ininnin*ventory)? These incredible (or inincredible?) concerns and observations could lead to insight (or ininsight?) or to confusion (or inconfusion?).

7. Prescriptions for vocabulary creep

It is probably not fair to budding new concepts and topics to put a moratorium on the introduction of new marketing terms. Emerging concepts should not necessarily be held hostage by marketing's history or by those who wrote it. So, I am not completely endorsing any sort of a limit on the number of concepts that find their way into marketing. However, I would like to suggest that we recognize that the proliferation of marketing concepts is not without costs, that there are ways in which new terms can be introduced more palatably, that the relevance or usefulness of concepts should be established before they are widely utilized, and that marketing educators should give some thought to prioritizing the concepts they introduce to students.

7.1 Concept genealogy

One way to make the introduction of concepts more palatable is to insist that the genealogy or family history of terms be specified. Many marketing scholars already do this voluntarily, to some extent, by retaining or implying emerging concepts' family or sir names. For example, even the most casual reader of Kurtz and Clow's (1998) services marketing text can easily surmise that "financial risk," "performance risk," "opportunity risk," "physical risk," "psychological risk," "time loss risk," and "social risk" are all members of the Risk family. Students of marketing can meet and welcome the Risk children without disavowing Father or Mother Risk. Instead, the richness of our understanding of and relationships with the Risk children is enhanced by our preexisting familiarity with the Risk parents.

In other instances, terminology genealogy may be much less apparent and even kept a secret so others will be led to believe that a single set of authors have miraculously given birth to a new species. As examples, service writers

don't always acknowledge that "empowerment" has a parent named "delegation," or that "service recovery" stemmed from "complaint-handling," "coaching" from "on-the-job training" and "engagement" from "involvement." It may not be necessary or practical to trace every term back to "sets," "behavior," or "expectations" on Alderson's three family trees (1965), but neither is it very helpful to suggest that every new term to enter our field is entirely unique or makes a genuine contribution.

7.2   Concept integration

A closely related consideration is to carefully evaluate terminology based on the extent to which concepts are meaningfully related to other concepts. To name and classify phenomena is one thing, but to establish significance (or the potential for significance) beyond themselves is another, more difficult challenge. Renowned scholar Herb Simon has shed some light on the challenge. Simon says that to be an expert on any given subject it is not enough to be familiar with the subject matter's array of concepts, but to be familiar with how each concept relates to other concepts. Therein lies the richness of understanding -- wisdom -- that experts possess.

Considering Simon's perspective, I visualize a huge matrix with 5,200 columns and 5,200 rows -- one row and one column for each of 5,200 marketing concepts. Within the matrix are more than 27 million cells where the concepts intersect. The cells contain the principles, laws, generalizations and propositions that link the concepts and weave them into the fabric of marketing. Unfortunately, too many of the marketing cells appear to be empty or their content not yet articulated. Still, if we adopt Simon's view and acknowledge the existence of 27 million marketing cells, one conclusion seems obvious: *Although the proliferation of marketing concepts creates an exponential growth in the opportunities to research the cells in the matrix, the enormity of the matrix makes it ridiculously impossible for anyone to become a "marketing" expert.* The impossibility of the task is magnified when we try to visualize three-, four- and more-way interactions between the concepts in an ever-expanding multidimensional matrix.

The usefulness of emerging concepts can be established by linking them with concepts that have already proven themselves or by actively using them in the construction of laws or generalizations (Brodbeck, 1982). Given our 27 million cells, the marketing discipline, in my estimation, has failed this test – not that most marketing concepts are useless, but that the case for their relevance is too often weakly argued. I do not believe this was the case a few thousand concepts ago, but it seems apparent today.

With so many terms tossed about in the marketing literature, how can textbook authors adequately define and describe each concept as well as articulate relevant principles, laws, or generalizations related to each concept, or even hypothesized relationships with other concepts?

There are simply too many concepts trying to elbow their way into today's marketing textbooks -- especially the introductory texts which increasingly seem to resemble terminology parades than recipes for marketing effectiveness.

If you are not convinced, consider the introductory marketing course that many universities call "Principles of Marketing" that is taught with a similarly-named textbook. If you teach such a course, consider giving your students a brief quiz near the end of the semester. They may be able to define a few key terms, but how many related principles (or laws or generalizations) can they list?   If your students are like mine, they will probably have a great deal of difficulty articulating even a few principles. In short, the potential richness of a "principles" course too often devolves into a "concepts" course.

A related assignment for the rest of us -- one that should give us reason to pause and think about what is happening (or not happening) in our discipline -- is to open an alleged *Principles of Marketing* textbook and find a clearly articulated principle. Where are the principles? Unless these books have been revised since I examined dozens

of them, the principles are not to be found in the table of contents, nor in the index, nor in any list prefaced by a phrase such as, "Here are the principles the title of the book and the course promised." Sometimes principles are included somewhere in the texts -- sometimes hidden, but rarely identified as such. As a result, I am not surprised that students have difficulty articulating or even finding marketing principles – would-be principles that have been crowded out by the onslaught of marketing terms that textbook authors and publishers seem committed to include.

7.3   Survey of marketing practitioners

One prescription for coping with marketing's vocabulary creep is to look to marketing practitioners for guidance. To what extent do they embrace 5,200 marketing terms? Which concepts do they consider most essential?

In seeking input from practitioners, I recognize that they are burdened with concept challenges that may render their perspectives at odds with those of marketing academics. Not only do they have to be familiar with marketing terms so they can perform their jobs, it is probably safe to say that they do not have the luxury of devoting very much time simply for the purpose of expanding their marketing vocabulary. Time pressures coupled with their experience and bias toward action may mean that practitioners purge their marketing vocabularies of terms and practices they find to be cumbersome, irrelevant, marginally effective or duplicative. They may filter out fringe terms, unnecessarily esoteric terms or unproven concepts -- leaving only the most actionable or otherwise most consequential terms.

Therefore, I have been particularly interested in practitioners' views of the marketing concepts they consider to be most relevant. With this objective, I mailed brief one-page questionnaires to the Marketing Directors of 1,200 large, medium and small firms across the United States. In the cover letters that accompanied the questionnaires, I explained my quest to find the most relevant marketing terms and offered a free copy of the results if recipients would be kind enough to participate and return the completed questionnaire in the postagepaid envelope provided. In addition to a few classificatory questions, the questionnaire asked respondents to: *...list up to 20 concepts (i.e., terms) that you believe to be among the most important concepts with which practicing marketers or students preparing for careers in marketing should be familiar.* The concepts may include those normally associated with marketing, as well as those from other business and non-business fields -- whatever concepts you believe to be essential to marketers' effectiveness.

Gratefully, 115 Marketing Directors responded (9.6% response rate), with the service sector well represented, i.e., 76.5 percent (i.e., 88 of 115) of the respondents indicated either the business they represented was a "service business" and/or that "customer service" was one of their key areas of marketing-related expertise. Interestingly, most respondents did not list 20 concepts (as allowed in the instructions); 12.9 terms was the mean. However, it was not clear if the task of listing 20 terms was too difficult or time-consuming, if respondents could not recall 20 terms, or if they considered the pool of truly important terms to consist of less than 20.

A total of 1,487 responses were offered by the pool of 115 respondents. Of these, 1,075 were grouped into 72 categories of related terms. The most frequently mentioned marketing-relevant terms had to do with promotions, branding, e-commerce, public relations, target marketing and relationship marketing. Refer to the Table below for a list of these and other frequently mentioned terms. Interested readers may contact the author for a more complete list of the survey responses.

--- Table ---

Marketing-Relevant Concepts/Terms Most Frequently Mentioned by Marketing Practitioners

Number
of times   Categories of Concepts/Terms
Mentioned

39 Promotion(s) (31), sales promotions (3), promotion mix (2), etc.

38 Branding (17), brand management (6), brand recognition/awareness (4), brand equity (3), brand marketing (2), etc. (excludes brand loyalty [8])

36 E-commerce/business (7), e-marketing (3), Internet (7), Web (11), online (4), etc. (excludes more general mention of "technology")

36 Public relations or "PR" (28), publicity (4), press/media releases (3), announcements (1) 36 Target market(ing), targeting, etc.

33 Relationship marketing, building relationships, etc. (19); customer relationship management (7); one-to-one marketing (5); CRM (1); customer intimacy/partnership (1)

32 Media (general, without reference to specific media): knowledge of, uses, strengths/weaknesses, buying (3), etc.

32 Price, pricing, pricing strategies, pricing policy, etc.

29 Product (nonspecific) (11), product knowledge (7), product life cycle (6), product management (5) 23 Competition/competitive research/intelligence/analysis, industry analysis (3) 22 Advertise, advertising, advertisements.

21 Distribution channels/system (17), place (4)

20 Communicate, communications, communication skills (nonspecific)

20 Customer service, service, quality service, personal customer service

20 Profitability or cash flow measures: return on investment (7), ROI (4), margins (margin, average margin, gross margin) (4), break-even point (2), profitability analysis (1), cash flow (1), marketing payback analysis (1)

18 Direct mail (9), direct marketing (7), direct response (2)

18 Honesty (5), integrity (4), ethics (4), trust, trustworthiness, sincerity, etc.

18 "Market(ing) research" (nonspecific)

18 "Research" (nonspecific)

17 Segmentation, market segmentation, customer segmentation

16 Personal selling (general): e.g., selling, sales selling techniques, "ask for the sale"

15 Customer needs (11), customer expectations (4)

15 Demographics (14), demographic analysis (1) (excludes geographics [1] and psychographics [1]) 15 Goals (8), objectives (6), sales quotas (1)

15 Loyalty (nonspecific) (4), brand loyalty (8), customer loyalty (1), customer retention (1), retention (1)

15 Product development/launch/placement (excluding concept development [3])

14 Listen/ing and listening skills (9), customer feedback (5)

14 Positioning or product positioning (13), "associate your product with another" (1)

14 Quality: product quality (8) and other "quality" (e.g., quality control, quality management, TQM, etc.) (6) (category excludes service quality)

14 Strategic/long-term plans/planning (8), marketing plans (6)

14 Strategy(ies), strategy development, etc. (nonspecific)

13 Interpersonal skills/relations, etc. (nonspecific)

12 Database, database marketing, database management, customer database (excludes statistics/statistical analysis, data analysis, and data mining) 12 Follow-up, follow-through 12 Value, value added, etc.

11 Benefits (9) and/or features (3)

11 Creativity (8), thinking "outside the box" (2), creative problem-solving (1)

11 Customers, external customers, bill payer, understanding customers

11 Statistics/statistical analysis (4), data analysis (3), data mining (3), work the numbers (1)

11 SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) (7); opportunities, opportunity analysis (4)

10 Customer satisfaction (8), customer astonishment (1), thrill the customer (1) 10 Design (5), graphic design/layout (3), advertising design (1), artwork (1) 10 Writing skills, written communication, grammar, etc.

7.4   Content analysis of services marketing textbooks

To garner some grasp of what marketing educators believe to be the most important services marketing concepts, I reviewed the content of five services marketing textbooks published from 1998 through 2001: Bateson and Hoffman (1999); Fisk, Grove and John (2000); Kurtz and Clow (1998); Lovelock (2001); and Palmer (1998). Of the hundreds of concepts mentioned in these texts, only four were included in all five texts: blueprinting, script theory, service encounters and tangibles. An additional 27 terms were mentioned in four of the five textbooks. Alphabetically, these include: bundling, capacity, competitive advantage (including sustainable competitive advantage), core product/service, critical incident technique or critical incidents, customer expectations, customization, distribution or channels of distribution, franchising/franchise, industrialization of services (including production line approach), intangibility, internal marketing, market segmentation, mystery shopping/shopper, positioning (including positioning maps), relationship marketing/management, service delivery (including service process[es]), service environment (including physical environment, service setting, atmosphere/atmospherics), service quality, services (including service products, service package, service offer), servicescape, SERVQUAL, standardization, technical quality (including technical outcome), unconditional guarantees (including service guarantees), value (including value-added services), and variability/heterogeneity. Contact the author for a list of 44 additional concepts included in three of the five textbooks.

Despite the different objectives and methodologies, the temptation to compare data gleaned from the textbooks with that from the practitioner survey is understandable. Especially given the high degree of "service" representation among the surveyed practitioners, one would expect to see some overlap between the most frequently mentioned concepts in the textbooks and those mentioned by practitioners. Indeed, the following concepts and related terms appeared on both lists: competitive advantage, customer expectations, distribution (or channels of distribution), internal marketing, market segmentation, positioning, relationship marketing, service quality, advertising, brand loyalty, communications, costs and/or cost analysis, direct marketing, Internet and/or World Wide Web, and pricing techniques/strategies. Whether or not more overlap should exist, why it does not, whether or not greater overlap would be found using more comparable research methodologies and if we should be concerned are all debatable issues subject to personal interpretation and future research.

8.   The consumer's perspective

In addition to the need to be familiar with marketing terms in order to practice marketing effectively, marketing practitioners (and marketing educators?) also should be conscious of the vocabulary used to communicate with customers and prospective customers. Indeed, corporate training materials and the extensive literature on service encounters are filled with tips for what service workers should or should not say in the presence of customers.

Clearly, no analysis of marketing and service terminology would be complete without considering the impact that words have on consumers. Accordingly, I would like to offer five ideas for consideration.

First, consider how many of the terms consumers are exposed to have evolved in ways that are likely to impress customers in a positive way. Examples: "Control Counters" have been replaced with "Customer Service Desks." "Gasoline Stations" and "Filling Stations" have become "Service Stations." "Waiting Rooms" are now "Reception Areas." Those who were "employees" are now "Associates" or "Customer Service Reps," and many "customers" or "accounts" have been promoted to "guests" or "partners." The negative stigma associated with "Customer Complaint" departments has been removed with the introduction of "Help Lines" and "Service Centers" with mandates that extend far beyond complaint-handling, per se. And so on. Through our teaching, writing and work with practitioners, marketing educators have the opportunity to continue to identify and reposition a variety of operationally-oriented terms to make them more service-oriented.

Second, conventional marketing wisdom and decades of accumulated copywriting experience suggests that consumers find some words to be more compelling than others. One advertising expert offers a list of words that he believes break through the advertising clutter to command consumers' attention: you, easy, results, benefits, free, sale, money, startling, save, yes, secrets, discovery, fast, safety, health, guarantee, new, how, revealed, proven, why, now, and love (Corbett, 2000, p. 79). In contrast, there are some hints in the literature to suggest that other words may be losing their effectiveness. For example, Tracy warns that some words may be too vague for practical use. He recommends to practitioners: "Don't use words like, 'Quality,' 'Service,' 'Value' or 'Price' as reasons to buy unless your competitors do not offer them at all. Otherwise, you'll just sound foolish" (1997, p. 65). Further, according to The Gable Group's (PR firm) website, jargon-filled promotional messages are becoming increasingly routine on the web. Their research suggests a "jargon trash list" of 17 terms: leading, solutions, robust, seamless, end-to-end, B2B, B2C, turnkey, best-of-breed, scalable, customer-centric, cutting edge, state-of-the-art, mission-critical, first mover, best in class, and customer driven.

To reinforce their concerns, the firm's website quotes one business executive whose office is routinely flooded with promotional messages. He pleads, "Please don't write to me about solutions anymore... they have become a problem" (Anonymous, 2001).

Another problem associated with the rapidly growing use of e-mail is the very ease of use that prompts marketers to use e-mail in the first place. The convenience appeal of e-mail lulls us into using it as an informal channel of communication – so informal that traditional quality checks of proofreading are sometimes bypassed as words are manufactured and widely disseminated without careful consideration of their content. Even if we strip away the jargon as The Gable Group recommends, we still run the risk of sending unintentional messages -- messages we will later regret sending -- if we fail to exercise caution. This point is made quite clearly by the conventioneer who sent his wife a brief e-mail without double-checking its content. It read: "Having a great time; wish you were her."

Fourth, consider the possible impressions that terms with violent or confrontational connotations make on buyers. For example, the images once evoked of relatively harmless marketing "cooks" stirring their brews with their favorite marketing mix "recipes" increasingly are being replaced with images of "warriors" assembling their "marketing arsenals" to be "launched" during a marketplace "blitz" that includes "bombarding" "targeted" buyers with an "onslaught" of "blasted" messages – possibly involving "slashed" prices. What we might have referred to a few years ago as a "sustainable competitive advantage" may now be regarded as a "killer application" intended to "crush" competitors. Of further concern, there's "ambush marketing," "viral marketing," "guerilla marketing," and "category killers," to name a few.

Of course, the competition is the focal point of many of these violent marketing terms and it could be argued that consumers are the ultimate winners when competitors "slug" it out, but how many consumers understand that many of the implicitly violent connotations refer to competitors and not to them? Surely better metaphors are available to describe the marketplace and marketing phenomena – perhaps like the emerging dramaturgical or theatrical perspective of service encounters.

Finally, some terms marketers kick around may be difficult for consumers to understand. The understanding of children should be a particular concern. For example, one study found that most surveyed children under the age of eight did not understand the often used term found on toy packages, i.e., "assembly required." Clearly it is not in marketing's best interest to alienate consumers at such a young age by not telling them in a straightforward manner that they cannot play with the toy until they put it together.

Adults too can be misled by words, as is evident by the extensive literature and regulatory attention devoted to deceptive advertising and consumer contracts.   The previously mentioned case of gasoline cans with "inflammable" warning labels is one example, although I believe another one is far more common, at least in the United States. That is, I believe that most U.S. consumers and many retailers are not familiar with the distinction between a "discounted price" and a "sale price." I suspect that most consumers interpret the terms to be interchangeable, but the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) does not. A discounted price is simply one that is below the retail price *suggested* by the manufacturer. Thus, retailers can advertise "discounted prices" while selling merchandise at the same price or at even a higher price than they always have, as long as the price remains below the manufacturer's suggested retail price. In this sense, "discounted prices" may be maintained forever. In contrast, a "sale" price must be a price that is lower than the price point at which the retailer ordinarily sells the merchandise. Thus, with some exceptions, merchandise cannot remain "on sale" indefinitely, nor can its price be artificially inflated just prior to the sale to magnify a price contrast.

As alluded to earlier, service marketers should pay particularly close attention to the potential of words to mislead consumers -- in that services are often known not by the services themselves, but by the words used to describe services and shape consumers' expectations. Accordingly, the potential to mislead consumers is implied by one estimate that "lip services" account for at least one third of all "services" produced (Gummerson, 1987).

9.   **Summary and concluding comments**

Words play integral roles in marketing -- to understand, inform and persuade buyers, to facilitate transactions, and to share information and ideas between and among marketing practitioners and academics. Given the unique characteristics of services, service marketers should be particularly conscious of the roles that words play. For example, many services are known largely by the words used by service providers to describe them – service providers who do not sell services, per se, but wordy promises of services. Words communicated from one consumer to another -- "word-of-mouth" -- potentially influence most purchase decisions, but particularly so with services given the difficulty people have fully evaluating many services prior to purchase. In so many ways, words shape buyers' purchase decisions and their relationships with customer-contact personnel and organizations.

As the field of marketing has grown, and especially the area of services marketing, the use of words to represent marketing concepts has grown as well. Today, the field of marketing includes an estimated 5,200+ terms or concepts and more than 27 million potential points of intersection between the concepts. Accordingly, in this article I have directly or indirectly discussed a number of related questions:

•   Is 5,200 concepts too many?

• Can we realistically expect students of marketing to learn all 5,200? If not, should we establish priorities and focus on smaller subsets of those terms, and if so, what criteria should we use to emphasize, discount or exclude concepts?

• As our marketing vocabulary grows and our textbooks thicken, do we, as marketing educators, jeopardize the richness of our field by covering concepts to the exclusion of principles, laws, generalizations, propositions and models that give meaning to concepts and reveal important relationships between them?

• What are the costs associated with the creep (proliferation?) of concepts in marketing?

• Can marketing academics and practicing marketers better manage the vocabulary creep? Can (should?) new concepts be introduced more palatably or scrutinized more carefully prior to widespread dissemination?

Some efforts to encourage the marketing field to focus on key concepts have used letters as common rallying points -- most notably the letter "P" and more recently the letter "I". The upshot implied by these movements is that key concepts will be more easily remembered (and honored?) in English-speaking countries if they share the same first letter. Both the P- and I-movements were discussed and reservations expressed.

In an effort to garner some clues as to the most essential concepts in marketing and services marketing, I surveyed 115 Marketing Directors in the U.S. (more than three-fourths reporting either working in a service business or claiming "customer service" expertise). Further, I conducted a content analysis of five services marketing textbooks. Some overlap between the two lists was noted. Still, I expect both lists of concepts to help marketing educators, researchers and textbook authors to develop insights regarding the most important terms in marketing and in services, so marketing educators will know which terms to emphasize in the courses they teach.

Other potential insights may be lurking beneath the surface of this research stream. That is, the research promises to reveal important distinctions as to how practitioners and academics think about or define the scope of marketing. For example, a disproportionate number of advertising terms might suggest that respondents equate advertising with marketing. Similarly, some terms may imply more of a tactical than a strategic orientation to marketing, or more of a firm-focused rather than customer-focused orientation. And so on.

Additional issues I leave entirely to other researchers -- especially issues regarding buyers' reactions to marketers' word choices. Are words like "guarantee," "save," "secrets," and "proven" really as magical as Corbett (2000) implies? Is the use of jargon on the Internet and in e-mail messages as big of a problem as The Gable Group asserts? What impressions do poorly chosen words in e-mail messages leave with recipients? What words do consumers find particularly offensive, confusing or misleading? Should we purge the field of violent phrases like "ambush marketing," "category killers," "killer aps" and "marketing arsenals"?

It seems obvious that we all have plenty of work ahead of us, so I will close with the two-word phrase that I believe should be near the top of every marketer's vocabulary: Thank you.

10. References

Alderson, W. (1965). *Dynamic Marketing Behavior*. Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin., pp. 23-51.

Anonymous (2001). "Stories not getting through? You could be trapped in a media Bozo/jargon filter." *The Gable Group*.

Baier, M. (1983). *Elements of Direct Marketing.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Bartels, R. (1974). "The identity crisis in marketing." *Journal of Marketing*, 38 (October), 73-76.

Bateson, J. E. G., & Hoffman, K.D. (1999). *Managing Services Marketing: Text and Readings*. (4th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Bennett, P. D. (1995). *Dictionary of Marketing Terms. (*2nd ed.). Chicago: NTC Business Books.

Bitner, M. J. (1990). "Evaluating service encounters: The effects of physical surroundings and employee responses." *Journal of Marketing*, 54 (April), 69-82.

Bolfing, C. P. (1989). "How do customers express dissatisfaction and what can service marketers do about it?" *Journal of Services Marketing*, 3 (Spring), 5-23.

Booms, B. H. & Bitner, M. J. (1981). "Marketing strategies and organization structures for service firms." In J. H. Donnelly, & W. R. George (Eds.), *Marketing of Services* (pp. 47-51). Chicago: American Marketing Association.

Brodbeck, M. (1982). "Recent developments in the philosophy of science." In R.F. Bush, & S. D. Hunt (Eds.), *Marketing Theory: Philosophy of Science Perspectives.* Chicago: American Marketing Association.

Corbett, M. (2000). *The 33 Ruthless Rules of Local Advertising*. New York: Pinnacle Books.

Ellis, R. S. (2000). "The I's have it: Seeing service opportunities by using the 8 I's of services marketing." *Working Paper*. Sydney, NSW Australia: Mt Eliza Business School (susan.ellis@mteliza.com.au).

Fine, S. H. (1990). *Social Marketing: Promoting the Causes of Public and Nonprofit Agencies*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Fisk, R. P., Grove, S. J. & John, J. (2000). *Interactive Services Marketing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

George, W. R., & Berry, L. L. (1981). "Guidelines for advertising of services." *Business Horizons*, 24 (July), 52-56.

Gummerson, E. (1987). "Lip service: A neglected area in services marketing." *Journal of Services Marketing*, 1 (Summer), 19-23.

Haywood, K. M. (1989). "Managing word of mouth communications." *Journal of Services Marketing*, 3 (Spring), 5567.

Kotler, P. (1986). "Megamarketing." *Harvard Business Review*, 64 (March-April), 117-124.

_____ (2003). *Marketing Insights from A to Z: 80 Concepts Every Manager Needs to Know*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Kurtz, D. L. & Clow, K. E. (1998). *Services Marketing*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Lovelock, C. (2001). *Services Marketing: People, Technology, Strategy.* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Luck, D. J. (1974). "Social marketing: Confusion compounded." *Journal of Marketing*, 38 (October), 70-72.

Magrath, A.J. (1986). "When marketing services, 4 P's are not enough." *Business Horizons*, 29 (May-June), 44-50.

Marriott, J.W., Jr. & Brown, K. A. (1997). *The Spirit to Serve: Marriott's Way*. New York: Harper Business.

Martin, C. L. (1992). "Marketing's pet-p hall of fame." *Journal Services Marketing,* 6 (Fall), 3.

_____ (1997). "From reactive to proactive: Customer service's leadership role in customer relationshipbuilding." *Customer Service*, 7 (Spring), 5-9.

_____ (2016a). Calendars: Influential and widely used marketing planning tools. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 5(2), 1-14.

_____ (2016b). How nature, culture and legal calendars influence the calendrical timing of consumer behavior. *Journal of Customer Behaviour*, 15(4), 337-368.

_____ (2017). Calendar-led-marketing: Strategic synchronization of timing. *The Marketing Review*, 17(1), 73-86.

_____ (2018). Introduction to calendar-led marketing: 'Period' as the 5th P [Online video] Available:

https://tthree.wichita.edu/LMS1.0/Content.aspx?ZeyaKbSZ%2fzo2I7ax9npVHIip1XZXCoybxi2jyS6G CUC8G2tzQLeKnTl0BNakWVo4qIwxJe5Q%2fZ1OIuE%2fBr6hQM0ZXpaWehckz7utEDpE2wIogkE 2FhygN5v5Lka7zWiz425riZZNwzZQs5ioIPhS1w%3d%3d (January 10, 2023).

McCarthy, E. J. (1960). *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach. Homewood*, IL: R. D. Irwin.

Nickels, W. G., & Jolson, M. A. (1978). "Packaging -- the fifth 'P' in the marketing mix?" In M. A. Jolson, *Marketing Management: Integrated Text, Readings, and Cases* (pp. 393-398). New York: Macmillan Publishing.

Palmer, A. (1998). *Principles of Service Marketing.* (2nd ed.). London: McGraw-Hill.

Payne, S. L. (1951). *The Art of Asking Questions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Richards, I. A. (1943). *Basic English and Its Uses*. W.W. Norton & Company.

Srinivasan, M. (1996). "When it comes to loyal customers, the I's have it." *Marketing News,* 30 (July 1), 4.

Tracy, B. (1997). *Great Little Book on Successful Selling*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press.

Whiting, P. H. (1957). *The Five Great Rules of Selling*. (revised ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Zeithaml, V. A., & Bitner, M. J. (2000). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm.* (2nd ed.). Boston: Irwin, McGraw-Hill.