



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Language of Service Encounters: A Pragmatic-Discursive Approach* by J César Félix-Brasdefer, María de la O Hernández-López and Lucía Fernández-Amaya

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J César Félix-Brasdefer, *The Language of Service Encounters: A Pragmatic-Discursive Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015; xvii + 276 pp., £65.00/US\$99.00 (hbk).

María de la O Hernández-López and Lucía Fernández-Amaya (eds), *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Service Encounters*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015; xv + 251 pp., €110.00/US\$142.00 (hbk).

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Service encounters (SEs), as a type of discourse and a particular genre, are a daily social practice in which a service provider and a service seeker exchange goods, information and services. Both volumes under review draw the attention of discourse analysts to this phenomenon. Félix-Brasdefer's book studies SEs in public service settings in the United States and in Mexico. Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book regards SEs as a multidisciplinary field of study and presents us with refreshing and insightful studies of SEs in different contexts. A close reading of both books indicates that there are similarities and differences in their scope of study and the perspectives they adopt.

Félix-Brasdefer's book is a monograph of nine chapters, while Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book is a collection of 11 papers. Both volumes adopt empirical methodologies and use authentic data to ensure the credibility and reliability of findings and conclusions. Félix-Brasdefer examines four types of face-to-face SEs: supermarket delicatessens, small shops, an open-air market and a visitor information center. Based on 2482 audio-recorded face-to-face encounters, he explores several areas, including sequential and generic structuring, characteristics of transactional and relational talk, and pragmatic and discursive functions of address forms. Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's edited collection analyses SEs in cafeterias, websites, non-profit organizations, toy-selling companies and SEs with children. The studies use a range of types of data, including online data, written forms, audio and video recordings, field notes, doctor–patient encounters, questionnaires and personal reports. Both volumes conduct their studies qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively, a discourse analysis is carried out of the contextual, generic, lexicogrammatical, stylistic and prosodic resources. Quantitatively, the distribution of linguistic resources such as service requests, pronominal forms, engagement markers and address forms are explored. However, each volume is unique in its own way and displays several distinctive features that merit our special attention.

The first prominent feature of Félix-Brasdefer's book is the pragmatic-discursive approach taken in the study of SEs. Based on the assumption that language in SEs is closely related to sociocultural and cognitive contexts, Félix-Brasdefer proposes an

insightful pragmatic-discursive approach, in which an SE is considered as a joint activity realized by a series of joint actions. The model comprises eight levels: formal, actional, interactional, stylistic, topic, organizational, non-verbal and prosodic.

The second prominent feature of Félix-Brasdefer's book is that it realizes the importance of variation and variety in SEs in different contexts. Based on the retail type, the setting type and the characteristics of each setting, Félix-Brasdefer classifies SEs into commercial retail and non-commercial encounters. Commercial retail types are further subdivided into food retailers, general merchandise retailers and online and tele-commerce. In addition, Félix-Brasdefer explores pragmatic-level variation with regard to gender and regional differences, and prosodic and stylistic variation with regard to changes in participants' role, choices of address forms and pronominal use. Moreover, the study takes into consideration such important factors as the nature of the setting, participants' role, gender, the cognitive context and shifts of alignment from transactional to non-transactional talk, and also examines the discursive functions of small talk, laughter, jokes and phatic exchanges in transactional talk.

The third prominent feature of Félix-Brasdefer's book is the study of cross-cultural, intralingual and intracultural variation in SEs. The cross-cultural perspective studies SEs in US and Mexican supermarket delicatessens and discovers that in the US data indirectness is the most frequently used strategy, while in the Mexican data there is more variation in the use of assertions, elliptical requests and imperatives. The intra-lingual perspective explores variation at the actional and interactional levels in SEs from two regions of the US Midwest and two regions in Mexico. The study of both sets of data brings us the interesting finding that participants from different regions use pragmatic strategies and linguistic resources differently. For example, delaying the service request is more frequent in Mexico City than in Guanajuato, and most customers in Mexico City prefer assertions, implicit requests and imperative forms for service requests. The intracultural study of SEs in a visitor information center at a US university campus indicates that the initial request for information is often realized through strategies such as clarification requests, repairs and reformulated questions.

By contrast, the first distinctive feature of Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book is that it gives special attention to the study of web-mediated online SEs. Blitvich's chapter shows that informed choice is the main antecedent to e-customer satisfaction and the motivating force for e-shopping. Placencia's chapter examines the use of pronominal and nominal address forms in an Ecuadorian online marketplace and shows that the online context is characterized by informal and egalitarian service relationships. Bou-Franch's chapter explores politeness in SEs in the non-commercial sector on 20 websites based in Spain and the UK and brings us the finding that all the websites use saliently positive politeness strategies frequently and provide information on the organization and the services it offers. Pérez's chapter carries out a corpus analysis of the home pages of 150 Spanish, British and US toy-selling websites and shows that interactional markers are more frequently used on British and US toy-selling websites than their Spanish counterparts, while the Spanish websites prefer depersonalization strategies.

The second distinctive feature of Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book is that it includes chapters which address three topics which are not covered in Félix-Brasdefer's book: SEs with children, non-verbal communication and the inclusion of robots in SEs. Merritt's chapter studies SEs in which a customer is accompanied by a child. Merritt considers SEs with children as a major site for socialization practice and indicates that there are many verbal and non-verbal aspects in such SEs, where children are told to use terms like 'please' and 'thank you' and act in accordance with cultural norms. Dorai and Webster's chapter explores the role of non-verbal communication in customers' evaluations of service providers, focusing on kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics and physical appearance. The study enables us to understand that non-verbal cues are effective in reducing psychological distance and enhancing the pleasant affect between the participants. Loth, Huth and Ruiters' chapter analyses a corpus of 108 interactions in German clubs and shows that 'being at the bar' and 'looking at the bar' are the two signals necessary for identifying a customer's bid for attention and thus for attracting the attention of the bartender. Their reason for conducting the study was to test a model for a robotic bartending system.

The third distinctive feature of Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book is that it covers face-to-face SEs in small businesses and interpreter-assisted SEs. Carmona-Lavado and Hernández-López's chapter examines customers' experiences in restaurants in Spain and argues that politeness is a satisfier that can affect delightful and satisfactory encounters and that it is related to friendliness, courtesy and respect. Gutiérrez's chapter explores the role of interpreters in healthcare encounters. Based on the analysis of doctor-patient interactions, the study shows that the use of specialized technical vocabulary is the main indicator of lexical asymmetry and suggests that healthcare professionals try to use devices such as repetitions, explanations and rewordings of both technical and standard terms to reduce the asymmetry.

To sum up, the two books share the interest in service interactions in the commercial sector and the non-commercial sector. Félix-Brasdefer's book examines cross-cultural, intralingual and intracultural variation in SEs from the perspective of pragmatics and discourse studies. Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book studies SEs from the multiple perspectives of linguistics, pragmatics, anthropology, service management and marketing. We can see that Félix-Brasdefer's book is characterized by the depth of its study, while Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya's book is comprehensive in the sense that it covers a wider range of SEs in different contexts. Both volumes provide deep insights and expand our vision and the field of discourse studies, thus enriching our understanding of the workings and mechanism of SEs in service interactions. As there are many contextual factors influencing service perception and production, both volumes highlight the importance of interpersonal communication and the choice of appropriate discourse strategies and behaviors under different contexts to reinforce the solidarity between the service seeker and the service provider and to ensure a desirable outcome for the service. SEs in general and e-service encounters in particular deserve further study. Thus, both volumes can be useful for researchers and students in the fields of linguistics and discourse studies. As the study of SEs can be of benefit to service providers, both volumes can be good references for healthcare professionals, marketing managers and people in the service industry.