

BOOK REVIEWS

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J. CÉSAR FÉLIX-BRASDEFER, *The language of service encounters: A pragmatic-discursive approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xvii, 276. Hb. \$99, €65.

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Service encounters are a fundamental activity in everyday life whereby commodities and/or information are exchanged between a service provider and a customer. A service encounter is by nature a goal-oriented speech event. Goals in service encounters, however, are not simply limited to achieving business transactions; on the contrary, they incorporate a range of social and discursive practices. This book engages the reader with a new methodological framework for the study of service encounters, utilizing the tools, methods, and theories of discourse analysis and pragmatics, and applies it to face-to-face interactions in the US and Mexico in commercial and noncommercial settings. It consists of nine chapters with a brief introduction.

Félix-Brasdefer sets the scene in the introduction by reviewing three fundamental concepts underpinning service encounters from a pragmatic-discursive perspective—namely, language, social action, and context—along with a brief introduction to settings, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Although the author did not intend the study to be a ‘frame analysis’, these concepts seem to be echoing Goffman’s (1974) influential conceptualization of a frame, defined as a set of concepts and theoretical perspectives that organize experiences and guide the actions of individuals, groups, and societies. Frame analysis, then, is the study of the organization of social experience. Accordingly, an understanding of framing can be useful in the analysis of how an issue is defined and problematized in service encounters.

In chapter 1, Félix-Brasdefer selectively and critically reviews the current understanding of the term ‘service encounter’ from various research perspectives. In this chapter he is at pains to bring to the fore those perspectives that have adopted an eclectic approach to the study of service encounters including Speech Act Theory, Conversation Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and so forth. To address the complexity of the interactions in service encounters, Félix-Brasdefer has employed an integrated pragmatic-discursive framework for the analysis of social action embedded in service encounters. Central to this framework, as the author argues, is the complexity and intricacy of social action grounded in the practices of service encounters.

Chapter 2 explores the term *service encounters* from different theoretical and methodological perspectives in a wide variety of fields from commercial to non-commercial settings. For Félix-Brasdefer, a service encounter is defined as an interaction taking place in either a commercial or noncommercial setting between a service provider and a service seeker. Thus, the author has outlined four features of service encounters that were considered in the data analysis and presented in chapters 3–8, including ‘setting, Goal-or-task-oriented, participants’ roles, and constrained topic’ (p. 80).

It is surprising, however, that the foregoing chapters do not include an account of Scollon’s (2001) Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA). In order to understand the complexity of face-to-face interactions between participants and to work out what they do with language, as the author has repeatedly stressed throughout this book, they have to be positioned socially, situated in the moment, and we need to seek to engage with an inside account of what is going on in a particular situation. From this perspective, interactions between service providers and clients can be viewed as a very relevant domain of investigation for MDA in that it focuses on how the social practices imbricated in service encounters are always mediated by a range of means, of which wording and text is only one (see also Izadi 2015). Facework and changes of frame, footing, and pragmatic variation with a focus on region and gender that the author has presented throughout the book emerge out of a nexus of practice.

The next six chapters (3–8) are empirical in nature and provide an integrated pragmatic-discursive analysis of the interactions in service encounters in the designated settings. Chapter 3 sets out to explore cross-cultural variation in Mexican and US service encounters in supermarket delicatessens, focusing on the basic communicative activities of service encounters, those of (a) greetings, or openings, (b) negotiation of the business exchange, and (c) closing of the encounter. The analysis was based on different levels of pragmatics, namely, actional (request variants), interactional (joint actions), and organizational (turn-taking systems) levels. It analyzes variation in the discursive patterns that the foregoing regions employ to open and close transactions. The author concludes that even the most basic communicative exchanges depend on sociocultural background knowledge and assumptions (i.e. frame analysis) that systematically permeate communicative behavior, often at levels that seem to be largely unconscious (see also Gumperz 1992).

Chapter 4 explores intra-lingual pragmatic variation in service encounters in supermarket delicatessens from two regions in Mexico and of the US Midwest. Each section includes a synopsis of the settings and data collection procedures. Pragmatic variation was analyzed based on coordinated joint actions that took place across the interaction and at various levels of pragmatics. The analysis of the interaction also brings to the fore shifts of alignment in the roles the participants adopted during the talk changing from transactional to relational talk.

In chapter 5, the author attends to some interesting service negotiation in an open-air market in southern Mexico. This open market characterizes intercultural negotiations and interactions in that the sellers are from rural areas who speak

Yucatec Maya and Spanish, whereas the buyers are Spanish monolingual speakers. This chapter investigates two levels of pragmatic analysis, namely, actional and interactional and one macro-social variable—gender. The author concludes that request modification (request variants) and requests for service are co-constructed across multiple turns and are the result of the coordinated joint actions between the service provider and the customer between the participants.

Unlike the previous chapters where the analysis mainly focused on commercial service encounters, chapter 6 explores negotiation of service at a noncommercial setting in a US visitor information center on a university campus. The analysis examined the interactional resources (e.g. request variants, openings, preferred and dispreferred responses) employed during information-seeking interactions between US clerks and US visitors. Furthermore, this chapter has included a pragmatic-discursive analysis of some of the prosodic resources used when a request for information is conducted. These prosodic resources have been analyzed using Gumperz's (1992) contextualization cues in the sense that they are interpreted as interpersonal markers of affective meaning such as politeness or tentativeness.

Chapter 7, to my mind one of the most valuable of the book, is concerned with the social and discursive functions of interactional talk in service encounters in two US commercial and noncommercial settings. The chapter explicates the role of participation frameworks, which participants (the servers and clients) jointly display to each other's performance, and explores different types of talk including phatic, small talk, and the transactional/relational talk. This signals their definition of the situation where the participants interact and form a community of practice in lieu of exclusively adhering to the merchant and customer relationship. This chapter is likely to prove useful as a reference guide for researchers and students looking for explication of a particular feature of interaction studied by conversation analysts and pragmaticians.

Chapter 8 turns to the pragmatic and discourse functions of address forms (vocatives and pronominal forms) that clerks and clients implement in the service encounters analyzed in the previous chapters (3 to 5). After providing an overview of research on forms of address focusing on English and Spanish, the author presents the results of the use of vocatives and pronominal forms from a cross-cultural perspective in US and Mexican supermarket delicatessens, along with the use of address forms at a Mexican open-air market. In addition, the chapter looks at pragmatic variation in pronominal use in Spanish as a discourse strategy to convey solidarity politeness, deference, or respect.

Finally, in chapter 9 Félix-Brasdefer concludes by summarizing the main research findings of the study focusing on the following aspects: the dynamic process of service encounters, pragmatic discourse variation and the pragmatic variable, and formulaic language use in service encounters. He discusses a variety of contributions of his research and reflects on limitations and recommendations for future directions (e.g. incorporating audiorecorded data and participant observation).

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If any criticism were to be leveled at the book, it would be the coverage of the notion of community of practice. It seems as though the community of practice was seen throughout this book as a product of text rather than as a social phenomenon, which stems from mutual engagement; a further detailed analysis of actual interaction (i.e. language and nonlanguage elements) would have provided a better picture of what can be achieved through action and talk in the settings discussed in the book. A community of practice is locally organized and defined by the specific group of participants who make meanings and make sense of meanings in various sites within the shop by carrying out action at a specific social field.

Nonetheless, this book provides a theoretical framework built upon concrete examples of everyday topics in the fields of pragmatics, discourse analysis, language and social interaction, interpersonal and intercultural communication, and conversation analysis. Specifically, the book contributes to the field of service encounters, and more broadly pragmatics, by providing readers with profound insights into both intra-lingual pragmatic variation and cross-cultural pragmatic variation. It is, therefore, highly recommended for all levels of researchers and students working in linguistics, politeness theories, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis.

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JAN BLOMMAERT, *Ethnography, superdiversity and linguistic landscapes: Chronicles of complexity*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013. Pp. xiv, 127. Pb. £17.95.

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For years, Jan Blommaert has been advocating an ethnographic approach to the study of contemporary sociolinguistic situations, the complexity of which, he has argued, can no longer be sufficiently described as multilingual or culturally

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