

Exploring
(Im)politeness
in Specialized
and General Corpora

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*Converging Methodologies
and Analytic Procedures*

Edited by

Şükriye Ruhi and Yeşim Aksan

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ŞÜKRIYE RUHİ AND YEŞİM AKSAN

1.1 Background to the volume

Whether or not the term ‘corpus’ is used in research on (im)politeness when referring to the data employed in the study, research in the field is increasingly reliant on authentic spoken or written language data that are usually compiled within a single or a small number of situation types. Such data are either collated for specific research purposes or come from larger resources collected for broader research projects (see, e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005; Taylor, 2011). In corpus linguistic terminology, these data are fairly similar to the concept of a specialized corpus in that texts come from specific genres and settings (see Baker, Hardie, & McEnery, 2006). From the perspective of corpus linguistics, however, even though any collection of more than one text can be called a corpus (McEnery & Wilson 2001), corpus usually means a large, principled, computerized, searchable, and finite set of naturally occurring written and/or transcribed spoken texts that can be used as a reference point for investigating a particular language variety (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998; McEnery & Wilson, 2001). The use of such balanced reference corpora in (im)politeness research (e.g. the British National Corpus, the International Corpus of English, and the Corpus Oral de Referencia del Español Contemporáneo) is a fairly recent development. There are only a handful of studies exploring (im)politeness in the broad range of interactions that such corpora offer (e.g. García & María, 2007). Even in these cases, scholars often restrict investigations to specific domains and interactant features and relations (e.g. Kallen, 2005; Santamaría-García, 2011). This is not to deny the existence of a wealth of studies on discourse phenomena that inter-relate with (im)politeness in pragmatics research. Here we observe, for instance, studies exploring face-sensitive speech acts (e.g. Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen & Breustedt [2008] on compliments in the

British National Corpus; Adolphs [2008] on suggestions in the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) and other pragmatic phenomena such as deixis, discourse markers and turn-taking phenomena (see, e.g. Aijmer [2002] on discourse particles; Rühlemann [2007] on overlaps and discourse markers).

Given the post-structuralist and discursive turns in (im)politeness research (see Mills, 2011; Haugh, Davies & Merrison, 2011), which considers (im)politeness as an essentially evaluative, attributive phenomenon (Culpeper, 2011; Ruhi, 2008) and where data are approached as “discourse as process and social action” (Virtanen, 2009a, p. 62), it is understandable that scholars in the field of (im)politeness generally scrutinize texts manually—an analytic procedure that is not typical of corpus linguistic research (Baker, 2010; Virtanen, 2009b). This analytic technique is arguably best achieved with small sets of data—hence the tendency to work with what may be described as specialized corpora. Recent corpus-based and corpus-driven studies on (im)politeness, however, are developing methodologies and analytic procedures that combine discourse-analytic trends (broadly construed here as including conversation analytic approaches) with corpus linguistic tools of investigation, the latter of which enable researchers to move bi-directionally between the micro and the macro levels of discourse as represented in corpus texts (see Santamaría-García, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

With the increasing availability of large-scale corpora for a growing number of languages and methodological and data-analytic innovations in pragmatics research at large, we believe that the time is ripe to explore the insights that may be gained on (im)politeness in both specialized and general corpora by bringing together scholars who work with these types of corpora. As argued in Baker (2010) for the case of the contacts between corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, and conversation analysis, corpus linguistic methods can provide frequency information on what are typical and atypical uses of particular linguistic and non-linguistic (im)politeness phenomena. Frequency information, however, is not the only type of knowledge to be gained from corpus linguistic methodologies. Research on corpus-driven language use has opened new windows on lexical and syntactic patterning in language, the nature of formulaicity in language use, and the multi-modal nature of interaction (see Hunston & Francis, 2000; Knight & Adolphs, 2008; McCarthy & Carter, 2004). Thus corpus linguistic methods provide new avenues for (im)politeness scholarship to reflexively evaluate its understanding of communication and language use (see Leech, 2011) on the theoretical contributions of corpus linguistics to

the linguistic sciences. In this sense, bringing together the discourse-analytic approach (which is becoming more and more characteristic of scholarship in [im]politeness research on specialized corpora) with corpus linguistic research in (im)politeness (which employs general corpora) is a project that goes beyond the dichotomy of depth versus breadth in investigation.

Discourse-analytic (im)politeness research, with the rich information that it provides on the institutional features of interactions and the close scrutiny it performs on the minutiae of discourse, earns crucial insights into the management of relations and the performance of social actions. It thus provides foundational concepts for conducting corpus linguistic (im)politeness research with regard to the what and the how of searching for (im)politeness in large corpora (Ruhi, forthcoming; see Santamaría-García [2011] for similar arguments concerning the complementary research techniques of corpus linguistics, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis). It also sheds light on the social significance of (linguistic) acts—a significance that may not easily be perceived if working solely with traditional corpus linguistic methodology. The affinity between discourse-analytic (im)politeness research and corpus linguistic studies on (im)politeness goes beyond the former (which lends starting points for research in the latter) as the corpus-driven approach to language use is also characterized by a theoretical stance to avoid approaching data with pre-existing categories on the functions of language forms and the social acts performed therein (see Tognini-Bellini, 2001; Sinclair, 2004). It is thus all the more worthwhile to create a venue for increased dialogue between the two strands of research on (im)politeness.

Within the context of research developments summarized above, this volume is a unique contribution to (im)politeness scholarship. It aims to showcase studies in the field that employ specialized and general corpora, with methodologies that range from the speech act to the discourse-analytic and conversation analytic traditions. It thus brings into closer contact scholarship that has hitherto remained in relatively different streams of the scientific investigation of (im)politeness. A notable strength of the volume is that it devotes much attention to impoliteness in authentic (mediated) discourse in both specialized and general corpora of contemporary languages and cultures as people go about in their “everyday business” of societal interaction.

The volume comprises a selection of papers from the sixth of the symposium series endorsed by the Linguistic Politeness Research Group

(<http://research.shu.ac.uk/politeness/index.html>), namely the *Sixth International Symposium on Politeness: Corpus Approaches*, held at Middle East Technical University, Ankara, between 11-13 July 2011 (<https://www.arber.com.tr/isp2011.org/index.php/home>). Three of the chapters originate from the panel entitled “Counterpoints: (Im)politeness Research Through the Lenses of Corpora and Corpora Through the Lenses of (Im)politeness Research” (Y. Aksan & Demirhan; M. Aksan & Mersinli; Çelebi & Ruhi). Two chapters are contributions based on papers presented at the parallel sessions of the conference (Karafoti; Uçar & Yıldız), and two chapters have been specially invited for the volume (Orthaber & Márquez-Reiter; Warren). With these contributions, the volume covers the major trends in research orientations in scrutinizing (im)politeness through specialized and general corpora. In collating these chapters, care was taken to turn a gaze to languages that have been studied extensively in (im)politeness scholarship (varieties of English—British English and Englishes in Hong Kong—and Greek), and languages that are only recently gaining more visibility in the field (Slovenian and Turkish).

1.2. Overview of the volume

A unifying theme of the chapters is that (im)politeness phenomena are situated within the institutional and genre-specific expectations of participants to an interaction. Each of the chapters identifies the situatedness of (im)politeness from varying perspectives. The chapters in the volume are sequenced from specialized to general corpora, and simultaneously move from conversation and discourse

-analytic perspectives to contributions that address issues surrounding the identification and extraction of (im)politeness in general corpora.

Chapters Two and Three employ data compiled in special settings. In their chapter entitled “‘Thanks for nothing’—Impoliteness in Service Calls,” Sara Orthaber and Rosina Márquez-Reiter look into a corpus of mediated discourse comprising 29 hours of calls to a public utility in Slovenia. Employing a conversation-analytic perspective that draws on Goffman’s (1967) concept of face, they examine different interactional sequences where impoliteness is indexed. Orthaber and Márquez-Reiter account for their data through the institutional socioeconomic factors in terms of the type of company and the kind of service offered that partly account for the impoliteness observed in the calls. Significantly, they find both transactional (e.g. withholding of information) and interpersonal

moves (e.g. disaffiliation through tone of voice) can function as impoliteness. This finding points to the importance of conceptualizing impoliteness within frameworks that attend to all of the interactional goals of participants in discourse. The findings also show the importance of using multi-modal data in (im)politeness research.

Also working with a specialized corpus, Uçar and Yıldız's chapter, "Humour and Impoliteness in Turkish: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Television Show *Komedi Dükkânı* 'Comedy Shop,'" examines laughter as a cue showing impoliteness in a corpus constructed from a popular comedy show in Turkish. Humour has been the object of research in (im)politeness research, especially in the studies carried out by Holmes and colleagues on the corpus of the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (e.g. Holmes & Marra, 2002) but laughter per se has not been studied as an index to impoliteness. Uçar and Yıldız discuss the relationship between the intensity of laughter in the audience and strategies of impoliteness between the comedian and the stage director. They observe that off-record impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and bald on-record impoliteness are the strategies most frequently resorted to in the texts. As noted in the study, the data explored in Uçar and Yıldız's chapter unravel a wealth of lexical chunks and longer formulaic sequences of impoliteness in Turkish and serve as a resource for extracting impoliteness in general corpora in Turkish.

The ensuing chapters in the volume all explore general corpora with an eye to researching (im)politeness at the discursive level or the speech act level. Eleni Karafoti examines the function of presence or absence of second pair parts in relation to impoliteness in her chapter entitled "Absent Second Pair Parts and their Relevance for (Im)politeness." She uses conversations retrieved from the Corpus of Spoken Greek (<http://corpus-ins.lit.auth.gr/corpus/index.html>) as data and employs a conversation analytic perspective in the tradition of Heritage (1984). Considering the various types of second pair parts, Karafoti observes that (im)politeness can be viewed as a single phenomenon which addresses the issue of association functioning and arrangement between the co-participants. Karafoti's chapter is significant in addressing the issue of identifying impoliteness through the analysis of turn management.

In the chapter entitled "yeah so that's why I ask you to er check": (Im)politeness Strategies when Disagreeing," Martin Warren combines corpus-based methods with discourse analysis in conversations in the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English (HKCSE) (Cheng et al., 2005) to

investigate the performance of disagreements in conversations. He finds that politeness rather than impoliteness is the norm in the disagreements studied with a preference for positive politeness strategies. Among other points, Warren's chapter is significant in addressing impoliteness that is closer to the meso-level of discourse in large corpora (see Culpeper, Crawshaw & Harrison [2008] and Baker [2010] on the demands of analyzing corpus data for activities that may range over several sequences in turn-taking).

As has often been the case in research on pragmatics in general corpora, the next two chapters address the use of extracting and analyzing speech act realizations in the Turkish National Corpus (Aksan et al., 2012). In "Expressions of Gratitude in the Turkish National Corpus," Yeşim Aksan and Umut Ufuk Demirhan describe lexico-grammatical patterns of gratitude expressions. In their analysis they underscore the significance of analyzing the co-occurrence of specific gratitude expressions with specific situational and co-textual features. In this manner they respond to the need of corpus linguistic methodology to develop ways of unraveling situation-specific (im)politeness phenomena.

The chapter by Mustafa Aksan and Ümit Mersinli, "Retrieving and Analyzing Requestive forms: Evidence from the Turkish National Corpus," is particularly noteworthy for its data-analytic procedure on corpus-based studies of (im)politeness in agglutinative languages. It devotes considerable attention to carrying out concordancing of morphemes, lexemes, and multi-word expressions functioning as request markers in Turkish. Besides the retrieval of requestive forms based on a standard morphological search, the paper reveals the contribution of mood derivables (e.g. *bi* 'just for once', *bari* 'at least'), explicit performatives (e.g. *özellike* 'especially'), hedged performatives, locution derivables (e.g. *bence* 'in my opinion'), want statements, suggestory formulae, and preparatory conditions (e.g. *mümkünse* 'if it is possible'), all of which crucially impact the performance of politeness. Their findings on mood derivables have the potential of enabling cue-based, situation-bound analyses of (im)politeness with a conversational analytic perspective in corpus-based and corpus-driven research on (im)politeness in Turkish.

In the last chapter, "Identifying Impoliteness in Spoken Corpora: A Methodological Perspective," Hatice Çelebi and Şükriye Ruhi discuss the development of a cyclic methodology on a data set of conversations to investigate impoliteness in the British National Corpus (2007) and the

Spoken Turkish Corpus (Ruhi et al., 2010). They start with a cue-based approach to extracting impoliteness relevant data and first examine conventionalized impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2010), but move on to examine turn management, non-conventionalized impoliteness (Culpeper, 2010), and discourse/semantic prosody (Sinclair, 2004; Stubbs, 2001) as explanatory notions to identify impoliteness. Çelebi and Ruhi underscore that applying the discursive and cue-based approaches cyclically requires the analyst to revise tentative research questions, based on regularities in the corpora. They remark on the need for in-depth analyses of conversational rights in impoliteness phenomena, and the need to explore the function of non-formulaic expressions of metapragmatic comments on impoliteness.

Overall, whether through the investigation of specialized or general corpora, the chapters show that studying (im)politeness relies on fine-grained analyses of micro and macro-level (socio)linguistic patterns and norms of interaction. This is evidenced in the analyses of various linguistic cues, conversational moves, and setting features in the various chapters.

As has been mentioned earlier, one of the major strengths of the volume is that it relies on authentic language data, some of which are open to the scrutiny of other researchers, so that the same or different analytic procedures may be replicated to test the validity of research findings (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono, 2006). This point is worth emphasizing as the majority of (im)politeness research to date has yet to offer this capability.

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CHAPTER TWO

‘THANKS FOR NOTHING’: IMPOLITENESS IN SERVICE CALLS

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“He who sees a need and waits to be asked for help is as unkind as if he had refused it.”

—Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines quotidian mediated service encounters where customers telephone a call centre to receive information on train services. In this context the general expectation is that the interlocutors will pay attention to each other’s face and avoid causing offence. This, in theory, should be one of the telephone agents’ prerogatives in that, as frontline workers, they act as ambassadors.

In this chapter we will look at five interactional instances where, contrary to the expectations of good business relations, face becomes salient as a result of the jeopardizing of the participants’ goal achievement. In these episodes, a female agent attempts to get rid of the customers by withdrawing (Goodwin, 1981) at interactional junctures when the provision of information is typically offered. She does this display of disengagement within the ongoing state of talk through repetition, passivity, delayed responses, increased number of pauses, and slowed down speech. The agent’s generally disaffiliative behavior is also illustrated by assigning responsibility to third parties and by offering unreliable information, which is later brought to light by the customer. The agent’s uncooperativeness is further shown by her rather slowed down speech delivered with somewhat flat intonation, displayed non-reciprocity, and general disaffiliation. We argue that these moves indicate impolite

behavior as evidenced by the caller's reactions, and that this behavior corresponds to both internal and external contextual factors such as the type of company examined, the essential service it offers, the way in which its services are operationalized, the job characteristics of telephone agents, and the agent's interactional style.

Following a brief discussion of (im)politeness and facework in customer service contexts, we present the background and methodology of the study. We then focus on how face is manifested in the service calls selected for this study, focusing on the sequences in which impoliteness becomes observable. Finally, we turn our attention to the role that the broader communicative setting has for the interpretation of impoliteness before presenting our conclusions.

2.2. On politeness and face

While research on politeness phenomena has spanned over three decades (Brown & Levinson, 1978), several studies of impoliteness have relatively recently emerged (e.g. Lachenicht, 1980; Austin, 1990, Culpeper, 1996; Kienpointner, 1997; Tracy & Tracy, 1998; Culpeper et al., 2003; Mills, 2003; Bousfield, 2008). This is because traditional models of politeness (e.g. Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech, 1983) have largely ignored impoliteness or referred to it as an absence of politeness, or a by-product of or deviation from politeness (e.g. Mills, 2005; Locher & Watts, 2005 for criticisms on this dichotomous conceptualization). It is thus no surprise that early studies of impoliteness (e.g. Culpeper, 1996) have conceived of impoliteness as the opposite of politeness and failed to account for the hearer's interpretation of impoliteness, relying instead on the researcher's evaluations of the phenomena under consideration.

Following numerous criticisms voiced against traditional politeness theories, deemed to be applicable to early impoliteness models (e.g. Austin, 1990; Culpeper, 1996; Locher & Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield, 2008), some post-modern studies contend that a first order politeness or politeness1 approach (the layperson's perspective) should be embraced (e.g. Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Locher & Watts, 2005; Locher, 2004) whereas others are in favor of the second-order politeness approach (theoretical constructs of (im)politeness) or politeness2 approach (e.g. Bousfield, 2008; Terkourafi, 2008). Yet, more recently, a combination of politeness1 and politeness2 has received some attention (Hambling-Jones & Merrison, 2012; Haugh, 2012). These studies have focused on the way interactants

made publicly available an orientation to actions of others as impolite. In offering an analysis of the participants' orientation to each other's contributions, more empirically grounded observations can be provided, making the ascription of communicative intentions by the analyst unnecessary (Hutchby, 2008). The present analysis adopts a similar analytical approach in that it not only focuses on the ways in which interactants orient to each other's utterances, but also takes into account the participants' roles and the context in which these interactions take place. With this in mind, the chapter aims to explore how impoliteness is interactionally achieved by closely examining how participants orient to and display evaluations of each other's contributions and how they respond to such evaluations and contribute to the line of research on impoliteness in institutional settings.

To date, impoliteness in institutional settings has mainly been examined in emergency situations in which, even according to Brown and Levinson (1987), face can be ignored in cases of urgent cooperation (Tracy & Tracy, 1998, on emergency calls to 911) or in settings in which, due to the asymmetries in status and power, face-attacking behavior was considered intentional (e.g. Culpeper, 1996, on army training camp discourse). The role of intentionality has generated considerable debate among politeness scholars. Culpeper (2008), for instance, considers impoliteness to be an "intentional face-attack" and rude "unintentional face-attack" (p. 32). Beyond differences in terminology, interpretations of intentionality need to be supported by an analysis of the interactions and the way in which the participants (rather than the analyst) orient or do not orient to them. Although this may not resolve terminological differences or indeed allow us to disentangle intentionality, an interactionally grounded analysis should offer us closer insights into manifestations of impoliteness in action as perceived by the conversational participants.

Our analysis draws on Goffman's (1967) notion of face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). According to Goffman (1967), social actors need to account for the codes of behavior in particular situations in order to support each other's faces and thus avoid inconsistencies or threats to face. To achieve this, participants have to cooperate in supporting and protecting the face of the addressee as well as their own faces. Thus, facework for Goffman (1967,) is "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (p. 12). These actions may consist of (a) avoidance processes, i.e. attempts to prevent threats to face or (b) corrective processes, where an attempt is

made to save face and/or to regain the social equilibrium in case the first process fails. Thus, in the case of this study the agent's institutional or professional face and the customer's face must be maintained at any cost and the participants will choose appropriate means to maintain the social equilibrium. What means will be used depends on the particular communication process, and politeness is just one of the possible means participants may use to maintain face or to achieve their interactional goals (Shimanoff, 1994). It would then follow that not all cases of face attacks would necessarily constitute cases of impoliteness.

Goffman (1967) further suggests that there are three levels of responsibility a person may have for a threat to face that his or her actions have created. First, an agent may have acted innocently by causing an unintended or unwitting offence such as when agents wrongly infer the gender of the customer and as a result of this incorrectly address him or her. Second, the agent's offence may be incidental, i.e. a result of "an unplanned but sometimes anticipated by-product of action-action the offender performs in spite of its offensive consequences, although not out of spite" (Goffman, 1967, p. 14), for instance, when agents, in line with their job responsibilities, need to perform actions that run contrary to the customers' transactional needs and/or what they feel customers should be entitled to, such as when a senior citizen is not given a reduced train fare. Third, "the offending person may appear to have acted maliciously and spitefully, with the intention of causing open insult" (Goffman, 1967, p. 14) by, for instance, ignoring and/or warding off a customer's request, as will be demonstrated in the analysis below. It is within this category that Culpeper et al. (2003, p. 1550) place their understanding of impoliteness and Tracy and Tracy (1998) define the notion of face attacks "as communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive" (p. 227). These can range from "displays of complete contempt to acts of mild disrespect." It has, nevertheless, been found that in some contexts (e.g. legal cases) that face-threatening acts frequently occur where the fullest cooperation is typically expected such as, for example, in examination episodes (e.g. Penman, 1990), where speakers may occasionally manipulate the potential multifunctionality of their utterances for a particular strategic gain. This, then, suggests that there is a level of verbal aggression that does not show an explicit intent to harm, yet it is more planned and systematic than, for instance, Goffman's incidental level (e.g. Archer, 2011). As useful as Goffman's articulation of the potential motives that lead on to an offence is, it is difficult without access to the speaker's mind to see, which one it actually was because all we have to demonstrate offensive behavior are the

participants' reactions, and in our case, those by the customer in particular. However, general service expectations coupled with some of the characteristics of the service context examined are helpful to better understand the participants' reactions.

To date, most studies of interactions in service encounter settings have focused on facework and politeness in face-to-face interactions (e.g. Hochschild [1983] on the emotional labor flight attendants have to invest into their work; Leidner [1999] on emotional labor and routinized tasks in customer-oriented contexts ranging from salespersons to McDonald's employees; Kong [1998] on politeness in service encounters in Hong Kong; Pan [2000] on facework in Chinese service encounters; Kerbrat-Orecchioni [2005] on French service encounters; Traverso [2006, 2007] on Syrian service encounters; Márquez-Reiter and Placencia [2004] on Montevidean and Quintero service encounters; Márquez-Reiter and Stewart [2008] on Montevidean and Edinburgh service encounters).

More recently, studies of politeness and/or facework have examined mediated service encounters (e.g. Márquez-Reiter [2005, 2006] on [complaint] calls to a Montevidean caregiver service company; Economidou-Kogetsidis [2005] on politeness strategies of Greek and British English callers to an airline's call service; Márquez-Reiter [2008] on service calls to different Montevidean service providers; Márquez-Reiter [2009] on facework in an intercultural service call; Lacha [2009] on complaint calls to a Dutch newspaper company; Orthaber and Márquez-Reiter [2011] on complaint calls to a Slovenian transport company; Márquez-Reiter [2013] on complaint calls to a Latin American holiday exchange company). Overall, these studies have provided potentially valuable insights into politeness manifestations, but their objective, unlike ours, was not an examination of impoliteness manifestations. Nevertheless, some of the patterns and phenomena identified may be relevant to our examination. For instance, Kong (1998) reports that bank servers will use more politeness strategies than the clients who either gave short replies or none at all because of the institutionalized power difference, and Márquez-Reiter (2008) reports how the agents' shifting of responsibility to a third party can serve as a way of distancing themselves from the cause of problem, thus not fully assuming their roles as institutional representatives.

In Slovenian, very few studies of spoken interactions in a customer-service setting have been conducted (e.g. Verdonik, 2006; Verdonik et al. [2008] on the use of discourse markers in telephone conversations with tourist agencies and hotel receptionists; Orthaber and Márquez-Reiter

[2011] on facework in Slovenian complaint calls). In particular, the present chapter aims to contribute to the existing postmodern body of knowledge on impoliteness in institutional settings by providing, to the best of our knowledge, the first analysis of interactional manifestations of impoliteness in a language that has received scant attention: Slovenian.

Theoretically speaking, in these highly routine service encounters one would not expect face to become salient, given that the telephone agent is a paid employee who is likely to share the same interactional project as the prospective customer. In other words, we can assume that the agent will not act out of spite (Goffman, 1967) given the duties of her roles, but that other contextual factors such as a large volume of calls, the time when the call was taken during the agent's shift, and the complexity of the customer's request may impinge on the agent's overall performance.

2.3. Background and methods

The data for this study represent a particular type of discourse setting, i.e. linguistic service encounters, a genre where interaction is mainly oriented towards requesting and providing information (Ventola, 1987, p. 115). Service encounters are interactions between a service provider who is 'officially posted' in some area and a customer. They are "oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service" [Merritt, 1976, p. 321]. This means that in this context and in line with their discursual roles, both interlocutors have situation-specific entitlements, rights, and obligations. The agents' responsibility would be to provide accurate and timely information to the customers' queries. In this context, therefore, customers are likely to display their entitlement to receive information and any refusals without justifications, excuses, or apologies by the agent could potentially be considered face-threatening. In a similar vein, the provision of high-quality customer service is essential when customers drive business performance. In other words, companies' prospering and profit, at least in most privately-owned companies, by and large, depend on their customers (Drucker, 1954). This is why customer service representatives as front-line staff need to understand that gearing their communicative efforts towards establishing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with customers contributes to service quality and leads to customer satisfaction. The data were taken from a state-owned rail company that enjoys a monopoly and is infamous for its poor performance and chronic financial losses. Due to the recent economic crisis in Europe, all investments into

the outdated infrastructure, including the rail fleet, online ticketing, or self-service ticket machines are postponed for an indefinite time.

One of the characteristics of working for a state-owned company is that job security and salary depend neither on the company's profitability (or lack of thereof) nor on the quality of service they provide. This means that once the workers are permanently employed they remain in the service until they retire or choose to leave. Moreover, they are rarely held accountable for not performing their duties properly. In severe cases, they may face suspension for a short period of time. However, they rarely face any serious consequences for their misbehavior (i.e. dismissal), mainly due to financial and legal impediments to dismissal (Virant, 2011). Despite the high job security, inadequate remuneration and outdated promotion systems lead to lower levels of commitment and employee motivation (Zadel, 2006). In addition, given the customer service representatives' job characteristics, such as high-volume repetitive tasks, low autonomy in work tasks and decision-making, automatism, emotional dissonance and exhaustion (e.g. Lewig & Dollard, 2003; Zapf et al., 2003; Matos, 2010), maintenance of a friendly and professional interactive environment throughout the working day (i.e. typically a 12-hour shift) is not always achieved. The large volume of highly routinized calls makes an agent's task repetitive (Zapf et al., 2003) and may result in employee withdrawal behaviors as a means of coping with the work environment.

The main data for this study were taken from a corpus of over 29 hours of calls to the official customer care department of the company that deals exclusively with inbound service calls. In these calls, prospective passengers inquire about train times, fares, special offers, and the like. Providing such information is also the agents' main job, as tickets can neither be booked nor purchased via the telephone or online. The calls used in this study were recorded in October, 2009 by Slovenian Railways and permission was granted by the company to use the data. Although the calls are claimed to be monitored by the company, in practice, this is rarely the case.

According to the Department for Research and Customer Service Development of the Slovenian Railways, company agents working at the call centre respond to about 200 calls for information per day. In the summer time, given the tourist season, their workload is said to increase by approximately 50 percent (Uršič, 2009). During this period, a female agent, whose calls are analyzed in this study, worked 12-hour shifts, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., every other day. During this time she managed over 350 calls for information (approximately 177 calls per 12-hour shift) with a 30-

minute break every 8 hours.

Given the nature and the high volume of incoming calls, the agents tend to treat inquiries as transactional exchanges, reducing communication to the basic informational exchange. At the same time, in this institutional setting, the agents, for the sake of efficiency, typically orient to a particular order by taking over a directorship role, in that they guide the customer through specific steps to specify the request (e.g. Lee, 2009). This typically takes the form of itinerary, date, time, number of passengers, and fare classification, which is largely shaped by a computer program. It is important to note that the interlocutors have not met prior to their encounters and that it is highly unlikely that they ever will, which is why the building or sustaining of any relationships is beyond their remit of interest (see Arundale, 2006, 2009, 2010).

Drawing on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, his articulation of how offence can be brought about, the notion of inference (Gumperz, 2000), withdrawal (Goodwin, 1981), emotion and pitch range (Wichmann, 2000), irony levels (Eisterhold et al., 2006), as well as some analytic tools from Conversation Analysis, we examine offensive episodes in five conversational excerpts from two telephone conversations managed by the same telephone agent. The analysis focuses on how the agent withdraws from her role as service provider at interactional junctures when the provision of information is typically offered, assigns responsibility to third parties and offers incoherent information, and the way in which the customers orient to such behavior as surprising, unacceptable or even unheard of.

2.4. Analysis

The call center from which the calls selected for this study were taken has a call distribution system, where an automatic answer to the summons first informs the callers about the number they have reached by revealing the name of the company, thus recruiting them for participation in the interaction, and informing them of the fact that the calls are being recorded. The subject of inquiry in both conversations is requesting information for international itineraries.

In the first call selected for this study (Excerpts 1 and 2), a man telephones to inquire about a timetable for a motorail train from the neighboring country (i.e. Austria) assuming that there aren't any trains from Slovenia to Germany. (N.B. The names of the customers, if provided, have been altered).