

Reseña/Review

J. César Félix-Brasdefer (2015). *The Language of Service Encounters: A Pragmatic-Discursive Approach*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, United Kingdom. ISBN 9781107035829 (hardback) 276 pages. € 65, US\$ 99.00

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1 Overview

Using a pragmatic-discursive approach, the author provides a thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of 2482 face-to-face service encounters in Spanish and English. The Spanish data was collected in an open air market, a supermarket delicatessen and a small grocery shop in three Mexican cities (Mérida, Mexico City and Guanajuato). The English data, on the other hand, was gathered in two supermarket delicatessens and a visitor information center in two cities in the United States (Bloomington, Indiana and Solon, Ohio). The data were audio recorded and supplemented with field notes documenting nonverbal and prosodic information. The richness and variety of the data allowed for cross-cultural, intra-lingual and intracultural variation.

2 Synopsis

The Introduction describes the field of study, background notions, data collection procedures and the structure of the book.

Chapters 1 and 2 are theoretical in content. Chapter 1 presents some of the different approaches used in the analysis of service encounters and ends with the author's proposal for an integrative model. Chapter 2 concentrates on presenting the scope of service encounters and offers an extensive, albeit not complete review (see García, 2011), of existing research on service encounters in commercial and non-commercial settings. The chapter closes with the author outlining four characteristics that he will take into account in the analysis of his data: setting, goal- or task-oriented, participants' roles, constrained topic.

Chapters 3–8 are empirical in nature. In each chapter the author provides short sociolinguistic descriptions of the regions under analysis, data collection

procedures and a literature review of the topic to be discussed. Chapters 3–6 analyze different aspects of transactional talk while Chapter 7 examines relational talk. Chapter 8 examines forms of address and politeness. Chapter 9 presents the conclusions arrived at by the researcher.

Chapter 3 offers a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of negotiating service in two delicatessens, one in Mérida and the other one in Indiana. The author examines variation in the discursive patterns used by Mexican and US customers to open and close the transaction, request variants, joint actions and turn-taking. Results also showed gender variation in the requests. Chapter 4 examines intra-lingual pragmatic variation from a sociolinguistic regional perspective in the realization of service encounters in Mexican small shops (in Mexico City and Guanajuato) and in US delicatessens (in Indiana and Ohio). Analysis results showed variations in the request influenced by both the salesperson's and the customer's gender. Chapter 5 examines service encounters in an open-air market in Mérida featuring intercultural interactions between bilingual (Maya and Spanish) vendors and monolingual (Spanish) patrons. The author looks at the request variants, openings and closings, the request-response sequence, the bargaining sequence and gender differences. Analysis results lead the author to conclude that the vendors' and patrons' speech, the topic of the interaction and the setting are some of the factors influencing request variants. Supporting Antonopoulous (2001), the author concludes that gender differences can be attributed to the addressee's gender rather than that of the speaker's. This assertion was not made in the analyses of previous chapters, though.

Chapter 6 examines the negotiation of service in a non-commercial setting: a US visitor information center on a university campus. After presenting an overview of research on intracultural service encounters, the author looks at intra-linguistic variation among native English speakers focusing on the interactional resources used to negotiate a request for information (transactional talk), but also on relational talk. Moreover, a pragmatic-discursive analysis of prosodic resources used when producing the request is offered. Differently from previous chapters, Chapter 7 examines the pragmatic and discursive functions of non-transactional talk in US service encounters giving special attention to phatic exchanges, small talk, and creative talk embedded in transactional talk. Chapter 8 looks at the pragmatic and discourse functions of address forms (vocatives and pronominal forms) used by both servers and customers in Mexican small shops and open-air market and in the US supermarket delicatessens. Chapter 9 presents the major findings and offers directions for future research.

3 Evaluation

There are two aspects to the evaluation of this book that need to be highlighted: its form (publishing house work) and its contents (author's work).

Despite the fact that this book concentrates on the analysis of Mexican and US service encounters, the title of the book does not reflect its contents in the least. It is generic in nature, maybe to attract a wide variety of readers, but doing a considerable disservice to Spanish and English pragmatics scholars. Instead, the title should have been *The Language of Service Encounters in Spanish and English. A Pragmatic-Discursive Approach*.

Similarly, the book cover does not reflect in any way any of the contexts of interaction analyzed in the book. There are also a number of spelling mistakes, both in English and Spanish, format errors, etc., but these could be overlooked and forgiven if the title and cover of the book reflected its true and valuable contents.

Despite these form missteps, every chapter is very well organized and written, providing valuable summary tables, constant reference to the contents of previous and following chapters thus guiding the reader and providing overall cohesion to the book. As pointed above, every chapter is very well researched, presenting rich and extensive literature reviews, explanation of the data collection procedures, an innovative research model, and offering interesting and groundbreaking contributions to the Spanish and English pragmatics literature. Definitely a must read.

References

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