Prof. Eija Ventola
Aalto University, Dept. of Communication

Service Encounters: Dialoguing
– Linguistic and Cultural Issues
– Past, Present and Future

“Developing Competencies for Next Generation Service Sectors”, April 13–14, 2011, Porvoo, Finland
Structure of the talk

1. Genre – service encounter
2. Service encounter genres in our culture and other cultures
3. Teaching service encounters - past
4. Teaching service encounters - present
5. Teaching service encounters – future
6. Questions for the Learning Café
1. Service Encounter = A type of communicative event = a *Genre*

Here the focus:

- Not a phenomenon of the business and marketing worlds
- Rather an interpersonal, cultural and linguistic phenomenon
- How the server and a customer are engaged in service interaction, how they pursue their respective goals by using language – by dialoguing, typical to the *genre* of *service encounters*
- How the dialogue unfolds *linguistically* and *multisemiotically* …
2. Service encounter genres in our culture

• Why my interest in service encounters? Why should everyone be interested in them?
• Me: my first experiences in the service field
• You: we all spend a lot of time going through service encounters – sometimes with great successes, sometimes with less success …
• The more you know about this type of communication, the more likely are you going to succeed in carrying it through …
• we get socialized into patterns of behaviours
2. Service encounter genres in other cultures

• **Problem**: Once outside of our familiar spheres of service encounters in our own language, ‘trouble’ may occur.
• **Solution**: *Foreign language teaching*
  • helping non-natives to adjust linguistically to communicative situations in foreign cultures …
    – How has it succeeded in the past?
    – How is it succeeding presently?
    – How will it succeed in the future

• **DOES LANGUAGE MATTER IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS?**
3. PAST: DID LANGUAGE MATTER? Perhaps the nature of dialogueing was not yet understood …

We were not able to study service dialogues properly …
materials & methods issues
1) observations & notes => language pedagogy, textbooks
2) tape recordings => language pedagogy, books, casettes

Some example dialogues and developments …
observations & notes, recordings, video-recordings => language pedagogy, textbooks

-model dialogues based on observation/notes > up to 1980’s

**Criticism** (Ventola 1987: 59)

“Textbooks represented social interaction very stereotypically and relatively rigidly … following pragmatic and … communicative theories … dialogues were introduced in which … interaction is practiced speech act by speech act … less attention has been paid to … global structures and a unique instance … will be realized … the use of authentic recordings should be encouraged even at elementary stages”
From Question – Answer Pairs

Webster et al. 1982 (from Ventola 1987: 61)

At a travel agency:
Travel Agent: Good Morning. Can I help you?
Mr. Linton: Yes I’d like to book a trip to Copenhagen, please.
Travel Agent: How would you want to go?
Mr. Linton: By ferry.
Travel Agent: How many are you?
Mr. Linton: Four. My wife, myself and out two children and the car.
To Complex Dynamics of Exchanges

(Ventola 1987:108) S= Server / C= Customer

Post Office

S: any any any parcel sent to London by airmail, register
   uh insure them (= command to act)
C: register them (=confirmation)
S: no (= challenge) insure them (=repetition)
C: and insure them (=the right confirmation)
S: yeah (=confirmation of the right confirmation)
C: okay (=response to command to act)
How to learn to predict the ‘appropriate’ language for each communicative occasion?

- Genre – the stages of communication
- Register – the situation
  - Field: what are we talking about?
  - Tenor: to whom are we talking?
  - Mode & Media: language, gaze, gestures … & face-to-face, phone, email …
- Language choices at
  - Discourse level
  - Lexicogrammar
  - Phonology and Orthography
Differences in Field, Tenor and Mode => language realisations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE - SERVICE</th>
<th>TEXT A</th>
<th>TEXT B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request for service</td>
<td>C: uh Melbourne priority paid thanks</td>
<td>C: uh could I have priority paid (thanks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for the sticker</td>
<td>S: would you like to put a priority sticker on it for me</td>
<td>S: put a priority sticker on’t for me thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minor clause + polar interrogative mood</td>
<td>Polar interrogative + imperative mood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

April 11, 2011
Eija Ventola
Differences in Field, Tenor and Mode => language realisations?

Australian:
I was wondering er … I’s thinking about … January, February … I have some holidays and I’s thinking about … some friends of mine are going on a trip to Alice Springs … and I was just wondering about the cost and so on …

Finn:
I want to go … uh … Queensland … uh … one week holiday
Differences in Field, Tenor and Mode => language realisations?

**Australian:**
I was just wondering how much it would cost to England, just the general price

**Finn:**
We want to go to Finland
Differences in Field, Tenor and Mode => language realisations?

**Australian:**
I’d like some information please on the Barrier Reef

**Finn:**
I I going to Perth
Text on Finnair’s sugar satchet

• Do you want sugar?

Cf.

• Would you like to have some sugar?
Sometimes it is difficult even in your own language …

C: mä otan postimerkkejä … mua aina- yks kysy- sano että siin’ on kanssa ostaja ku ei sano minkähin- hintaisia … …mä niitä kirjemerkkejä sem- onko teillä semmosia … er en minä tommosia huoli … mutta semmonen .. Onko teillä semmonen … niinku sarja niinku

S: ei oo niitä … mikä se oli se

C: niitä semmosia erilaisia mökkejä

S: se on loppunut jo

C: ai se on loppu

S: joo
Ventola (1987) *The Structure of Social Interaction ... Semiotics of Service Encounters*

- Flow chart – surely we can today capture these linguistic choices and generate discourse?

Fig. 2. Ventola’s Genre Flowchart Representation
More useful than > Essential elements of every customer service interaction -

- Acknowledge the customer
- Make eye contact
- Greet the customer
- Smile
- Have a helpful attitude
- Give full attention
- Listen carefully
- Have patience
- Take all the time needed
- If you can’t help, send them to the right person who can
- Be open-minded/don’t pre-judge
- Use open-ended questions to determine customer’s real need or problem
- Use feedback and paraphrase to clarify need
- Use a pleasant tone of voice
- Use positive phrasing
- Stay calm
- Solve the problem or meet the need completely
- Use follow-up problem solving when need cannot initially be met
- Thank them
- Apologize when appropriate
- Invite the customer to follow up if unsatisfied
4. PRESENT - 2011: DOES LANGUAGE/Languages MATTER NOW?

• What has changed? We can also focus on other semiotics more systematically - *multisemiotics* of service encounters (gaze, gestures, sounds, space, etc.)

• video recordings, mobile phones, internet => language pedagogy, books, casettes, videocassettes, CDs, DVDs, videoconferencing, internet service practice platforms, e-commerce practices

• Local => Global

• English as a lingua franca

• Technology replaces human services – self-service
As to my flow chart ... further developments ...  
Robert J. Anstee and Rodney J. Clarke  
Computational Modelling of Workpractice Genres using the Protocol Analysis Method (PA)

- Ventola’s [7] flowcharting approach has some interesting features that are worth further exploration. The notation actually looks at the problem from both sides of the interaction and doing so facilitates the modelling of the enactment of the social occasion. Modelling genres from dual perspectives is suggestive of the double-sided nature of interfaces. The definition of an interface between a computer system and the environment is actually the specification of what a particular computer system has to achieve and is thus its design criteria. Similarly, the development and representation of the definition required in the specification of complex computer-to-computer interactions can also be modelled by means of interfaces. The problem of exact specification and characterisation of interactions between systems has been a problem in the computer world for a long time and has resulted in many overruns in time and cost. Although not immediately obvious, genre structures can also be modelled from the perspective of interfaces.
“The authors believe that this is the first occasion in which any model of genre has been demonstrated as being machine executable”
Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons: Technology in Services
Role of Technology in the Service Encounter (next 5 slides)

A. Technology-Free Service Encounter
B. Technology-Assisted Service Encounter
C. Technology-Facilitated Service Encounter
D. Technology-Mediated Service Encounter
E. Technology-Generated Service Encounter
# Evolution of Self-service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Industry</th>
<th>Human Contact</th>
<th>Machine Assisted Service</th>
<th>Electronic Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>Teller</td>
<td>ATM</td>
<td>Online banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>Checkout clerk</td>
<td>Self-checkout station</td>
<td>Online order/pickup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airlines</td>
<td>Ticket agent</td>
<td>Check-in kiosk</td>
<td>Print boarding pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>Wait person</td>
<td>Vending machine</td>
<td>Online order/delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie theater</td>
<td>Ticket seller</td>
<td>Kiosk ticketing</td>
<td>Pay-for-view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book store</td>
<td>Information clerk</td>
<td>Stock-availability terminal</td>
<td>Online shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Computer tutorial</td>
<td>Distance learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>Poker dealer</td>
<td>Computer poker</td>
<td>Online poker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-service Technologies (SST)

- Does customer adoption of self-service follow a predictable pattern?
- How do we measure self-service quality (e.g., ease of use, enjoyment, and/or control)?
- What is the optimal mix of SST and personal service for a service delivery system?
- How do we achieve continuous improvement when using SST?
- What are the limits of self-service given the loss of human interaction?
## Electronic and Traditional Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Electronic</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Screen-to-face</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>Anytime</td>
<td>Working hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>From anywhere</td>
<td>Travel to location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Area</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiance</td>
<td>Electronic interface</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment</td>
<td>Credit card</td>
<td>Cash or check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Personalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Grocery Shopping Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>On-line Shopping</th>
<th>Traditional Shopping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>See new items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saves time</td>
<td>Memory trigger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less impulse buying</td>
<td>Product sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
<td>Forget items</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less control</td>
<td>Waiting lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need computer</td>
<td>Carry groceries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivery fee</td>
<td>Impulse buying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. FUTURE:
WILL LANGUAGE/Languages MATTER?...
How will the future change our service interactions?

6. Our Questions ...

- Globalization: Will English be the only global ‘service encounter’ language?
- Will other languages die, at least in this genre?
- Will place-bound service interactions be disappear?
- Will we be skyping our service interactions globally and rely on global deliveries? Or something else?
Continues …

- Will the processes of self-servicing continue?
- Will we then stop using spoken interactions in services? If not…
- Will I be served by a robot instead of a human server?

--------------

- Will I have my personal Rosie when I am old and do my own shopping?

Rosie the Robot Maid is a humanoid robot, model XB-500 in *The Jetsons* animated television series of the 1960s.
Buying Rosie

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOYp47oXYSQ&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOYp47oXYSQ&feature=related)
- 0:16 – 1:21
- 3:40-
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqdwbSaHiDU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqdwbSaHiDU&feature=related)
- -beginning
We have various kinds of robots...

**Shopping results for cleaning robots**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roomba 440 Cordless Robot Vacuum</td>
<td>$155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iRobot Damaged Box Sale Roomba 530</td>
<td>$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iRobot Roomba 610 Professional Series Vacuum</td>
<td>$549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iRobot Pet Series 532 Vacuum</td>
<td>$290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Serving robot at the "Ubiquitous Dream" exhibition in Seoul, Korea on June 24, 2005

The walking type playing the trumpet.
The wire type

The i-Foot.
Social robots – main function – social interaction – will they run future services?

- **Wakamaru** is a Japanese *domestic robot* made by [Mitsubishi Heavy Industries](http://www.mhi.co.jp), primarily intended to provide companionship to *elderly* and *disabled* people.

Wakamaru runs a [Linux operating system](http://www.linux.org) on multiple [microprocessors](http://www.microprocessors.com). It can connect to the [Internet](http://www.internet.com), and has limited speech (in both male and female voices) and [speech recognition](http://www.speechrecognition.com) abilities. Functions include reminding the user to take medicine on time, and calling for help if it suspects something is wrong.
PaPeRo has been researched and developed to be a partner to human beings – it’s able to live together with them - has various basic functions for the purpose of interacting with people - has a cheerful character that enjoys speaking with people, but will change depending on the way it interacts with people.

- Personalities
- Leader PaPeRo
- Knowledgeable PaPeRo
- Dancing PaPeRo
- Lazy PaPeRo
- Computer PaPeRo
Does it matter how robots talk to us?


Don't Be Surprised if You Encounter Robots in Hospital
by Terry Ross | The Sun, Yuma, Ariz.

“There is no need to have the server pushing the carts of trays, but the server does do what robots can’t do — interact with the patients to meet their individual needs and concerns.”

“The USA Today article noted the robotic carts do have some minimal interaction with humans. For example, if a person gets on the same elevator as a robot, the robot will announce they should push the button for the floor they want since the robot may have selected a different one. Robot carts can also announce their need for a door to be opened so they can enter a closed off area.”

“And in one of the stranger interactions reported by the newspaper, some robots will ask “What did I ever do to you?” if they are sitting still and someone bumps into them. Even stranger, some people respond to the robot.”
LANGUAGE DOES MATTER …

“What did I ever do to you?”

We need to know how to make the right linguistic choices … if we want to run our social interactions smoothly and not want offend etc. others… in service encounters and other encounters.

Thank you!