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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND COMPLAINTS IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation adopts a qualitative approach to conflict management and complaints in service encounters in English, using analytical tools from Cognitive Pragmatics and Interactional Sociolinguistics. Data are gathered using a mixed-method approach, combining sets from three different sources, including face-to-face communication from the TV documentary soaps 'Airline' and 'Airport', telephone conversations from the company 'Eurostar', and role plays based on two situations frequently occurring in the data sets of naturally-occurring discourse. This novel combination of data elicitations allows for a comparison of role plays and naturally-occurring discourse, testing role plays as to their value for drawing conclusions about actual speech behaviour, and as a source for speaker evaluations and expectations regarding norms and appropriateness in specific situational contexts. The analysis focusses on customer complaint behaviour, stressing the importance of viewing this speech event as one element of a multi-faceted problem-solving process, taking its discursive nature into account. The results of the close sequential analysis of the data highlight the importance that negative emotions such as anger and frustration have in a conflictual service encounter frame and reveal the interplay of key elements such as goal orientation and planning, power relationships, participant roles and expectations, and (im)politeness considerations. The thesis contributes to the field of politeness research by highlighting a paradoxical relationship between speaker expectations of normative behaviour, corresponding to traditional theories of politeness, and actual speaker behaviour, which runs counter to such expectations, using (im)politeness as a tool, and showing heightened awareness of impoliteness considerations predominantly for self and not for other.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Conflict Management and Complaints in Service Encounters

Conflict is an important part of our interactions with other people, be it in the private or in the public domain. Whenever we interact with others, in our families, with friends, in our jobs, or in any other context, problems are likely to occur. People do not always meet each other's expectations, they commit errors or fail to be helpful, in short, they tend to violate social rules. This invariably results in discomfort and annoyance on the part of those whose expectations have not been met. They will feel the urge to express their feelings and to prompt the other to rectify their behaviour. This kind of conflict occurs anywhere and between anyone: we complain to our partners, to our children, to our friends, to our colleagues, to strangers, to people that we do business with. In this dissertation I will focus not on private interactions, but investigate people's linguistic behaviour within conflict episodes in an institutional context.

Institutional discourse is defined by Drew and Heritage (1992) as follows:

> 1 Institutional interaction involves an orientation by at least one of the participants to some core goal, task or identity (or set of them) conventionally associated with the institution in question. In short institutional talk is normally informed by *goal orientations* of a relatively restricted conventional form.
>
> 2 Institutional interaction may often involve special and particular constraints on what one or both of the participants will treat as allowable contributions to the business at hand.
>
> 3 Institutional talk may be associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts. (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 22)

As Drew and Heritage point out, institutional discourse is determined by the goals the participants in the interaction pursue. The institution in question determines the goals of its representative (as may be documented in a company's policy). Drew and Heritage also refer to the roles interactants adopt in institutional discourse, which are in turn shaped and often constrained by the institutional framework.

Within the broader context of institutional discourse, I will concentrate on conflict talk and complaints in service encounters (Iacobucci, 1990). Smooth

interactions, especially in institutional settings, are expected as the norm. Whenever things go wrong, when a company does not provide the service it promised, or when a customer is in any way dissatisfied or feels treated badly, conflict between the parties arises, and in many instances there will be a reason for the customer to utter a complaint[1]. Complaints are one common substrategy of conflict discourse (Grimshaw, 1990; Hayashi, 1996; Leung, 2002), in many instances initiating conflict talk. Reasons for customer complaints can originate from problems with the personnel (incompetence, sloppiness, neglect), from problems with the logistics of the company (delivery problems, bad planning, faulty equipment, delays), and from a range of other company-internal problems. Customers tend to complain even if the fault is not the company's but their own. The question who is responsible for the offensive action is a central problem in the analysis of complaint behaviour (see chapter 2).

Complaining is a sensitive issue both for the company and the customer. From the company's point of view, complaints are indicative of problems within the company and intrinsically negative in the sense that they evoke a negative impression of the company. The customer might get the impression that it cannot provide satisfactory service. This might develop into a conviction or negative opinion of the company in the customer's mind and might in turn lead to the customer choosing a different company next time he/she requires a similar service. One concern companies have when dealing with customer complaints, is to alleviate the impression that their service might be faulty. Companies strive to create a bond with their customers, in order to achieve repeat custom. Moreover, having to deal with complaints is usually costly and time-consuming. On the other hand, customer complaints can be positive for companies, in the sense that they can attribute to the company's quality management. Problems and flaws, which might have otherwise gone undetected, will be brought to the company's attention (see for instance Scheitlin, 1988).

[1] On rare occasions situations may occur, where it is a representative of the company who utters a complaint addressing the customer and his/her behaviour. These occurrences are relatively uncommon though, and not the focus of this study.

From the customer's point of view, having to complain is even more problematic. The customer's expectations have not been met, and he/she usually experienced a negative emotion. In order to solve the problem, the customer has to make an effort to complain and thereby has to give up the relative comfort of anonymity (see Fiehler, Kindt, & Schnieders, 2002: 120). Fiehler et al. (2002) point out that for the customer, the reason for the complaint causes disruption and annoyance in their day-to-day affairs. In order to make a complaint, the customer has to invest time and effort, without having a guarantee of being successful. When making a complaint in an institutional context, customers have to defend their rights dealing with a big and powerful institution, where in turn the complaint is received as disruptive and quite possibly as something negative. Negative emotions are an important factor in complaint sequences. On the one hand they trigger the urge to voice a complaint, on the other hand they can be caused or increased by the complaint interaction. Negative emotions can be caused in the person who voices the complaint, but also in the person the complaint was addressed to.

1.2. Research Questions

Adopting a mixed-method approach, analysing data from three different sources, I will attempt to shed light on the inner mechanisms of complaint behaviour within conflictual service encounters. My corpus consists of three data sets: the largest part consists of naturally-occurring discourse, with on the one hand data taken from two documentary soaps (docusoaps, for short), 'Airline' and 'Airport', recorded from British TV, from which I have distilled situations which involve some kind of conflict and, consequently, complaining behaviour. On the other hand I conducted some ethnographic research at the train company Eurostar, and was able to record some of their telephone calls with customers, a number of which involved problem-solving episodes and complaints. The third data set consists of elicited data in the form of role plays, based on two recurring scenarios typical for the TV data as well as for the telephone data.

Introducing this rather novel combination of data sources, a large part of my research questions revolves round methodological issues. First of all there

is the question whether a combination of these particular data sets can help us get insights into people's speech behaviour. Is it fruitful to triangulate data in the manner reflected by my corpus design or would it be more appropriate to focus on one particular data set? Is it indeed possible to compare two kinds of naturally occurring discourse? And how 'natural' is the talk observed in a documentary soap, or in other words, what constitutes authentic discourse? What are the advantages and shortcomings of data from fly-on- the-wall documentaries? Some of these questions will be answered in the course of the analysis, where I will investigate the mechanisms at work when people have a conflict of interest and try to solve a problem in a service encounter. The analysis will show that in these kinds of interactions, conflict is usually aggravated by people's conflicting assessments of their interlocutors' role within the interaction. It becomes very clear that in service encounters company representatives and customers have opposing goals and expectations, but more importantly, are not aware of these discrepancies.

Apparently, company representatives and customers also have different judgments concerning their interpersonal role relationship and the power balance of such an interaction. The analysis will investigate how the interaction is shaped and influenced by the institution it takes place at and how the interactants relate to each other according to their predefined roles. Even more importantly, it will highlight how power is expressed and negotiated, and how this influences the problem-solving process.

Part of conflictual discourse is the need to express negative emotions, and therefore to complain about something negative. My research aims at investigating complaints in more depth than has been done before. One goal will be to highlight how complaints are organised and which typical strategies tend to be used when people utter a complaint, but more importantly, how complaints are managed locally, and what (im)politeness considerations are at work when people complain within a service encounter context. It would be interesting to see whether there is indeed a typical sequential organization for complaints, as stipulated in many previous studies on complaints, and whether it is possible to isolate typical expressions and structures used for uttering a complaint. Furthermore it would be interesting to see whether some complaint

strategies are more successful than others, and which strategies are used to attain a particular goal.

When investigating complaints, the issue of (im)politeness is all-important. Expressing displeasure about the other person's actions necessarily involves a certain degree of face-threat and might aggravate matters in conflictual discourse. In this context it is important to bear in mind that the corpus focuses on service encounters, where face-considerations might be of less importance than in private interactions. Therefore I will investigate how and to what aim politeness and impoliteness strategies are used in complaints and which (im)politeness markers are used most frequently and in which contexts.

Bearing in mind that complaining is usually fraught with negative emotions on the part of the person uttering the complaint, and might in turn cause negative emotions in the person reacting to the complaint, it is imperative to investigate the role of emotion in these speech events. I will discuss how emotion becomes manifest in these interactions, and will try to find out whether emotions, rational goal-orientation, and politeness considerations affect each other. Investigating this set of questions will result in a clearer picture of the discursive nature of complaints.

In order to investigate conflict discourse and complaints, a rather eclectic methodological approach is needed. Internal processes, related to cognitive-emotive considerations of the individual are at interplay with social considerations and the interlocutor's embeddedness in their cultural background. When investigating conflict discourse, traditional politeness theories do not appear to be applicable, and a focus on the discursive nature of complaints is called for, with a holistic approach, going beyond the utterance level and taking prosodics and kinesics into account whenever possible.

Summing up, the research questions for this dissertations fall under five main thematic categories: methodology, conflict management and complaining, (im)politeness considerations, power, and the role of emotions in conflict discourse.

a] Methodology:

The research questions dealing with methodological issues are motivated predominantly by an apparent research gap in the investigation of naturally occurring complaints:

1. What are the differences and similarities between the complaint behaviour observed in data from the three different corpora (TV data, telephone conversations, role plays)?
2. How similar are the elicited data to naturally occurring discourse? What are the advantages and shortcomings of data from fly-on-the-wall documentaries?

Although many previous studies have investigated complaint behaviour (compare chapter 2.4.), they usually focus on constructed data, a fact which raises questions as to whether these data enable researchers to make claims about natural discourse. Additionally, most previous comparisons of data collection methods fail to take naturally occurring discourse as a template for the construction of scenarios for constructed data. This study starts out by observing real-life situations and then sets out to compare those with similar (and therefore comparable) role play scenarios.

b] Conflict Management and Complaining:

Conflict management and complaining in a service encounter context are bound to have certain elements that are different from conflict management and complaining in the private domain. Therefore the following questions need to be raised:

1. What are the mechanisms of conflict management in service encounters?
2. What do typical complaint sequences in service encounters look like?
3. On which conceptual level and for what reason does a conflictual speech event take a particular direction (towards solution or aggravation of conflict)?

c] (Im)Politeness:

Conflict discourse automatically involves a certain degree of face threat and interpersonal tension. Consequently, considerations about (im)politeness are central issues in problem-solving episodes in service encounters. I want to examine the data in terms of (im)politeness strategies used, perceptions of (im)politeness, and, through a comparison of naturally occurring discourse with role plays, I will attempt to gain insights into the norms and appropriateness judgments in this specific service encounter frame:

1. What factors have an influence on the evaluation of utterances as polite or impolite?
2. Is there a difference between norms and expectations for speech behaviour in conflictual service encounters on the one hand, and people's actual behaviour on the other hand?
3. In what ways are (im)politeness strategies used strategically in conflict management and complaining in service encounters?

d] Power:

The institutional context in which problem-solving sequences in service encounters are embedded have an influence on the distribution of power, which in turn is closely linked to the roles of the discourse participants (customers and company representatives, respectively). My research questions with regard to power in conflictual service encounters focus on how power is expressed and how power balances can be swayed:

1. How does power become apparent in confrontation episodes in service encounters?
2. What influence does the institutional context have on the perception and interplay of power relationships in service encounters?

e] Emotion:

Conflict discourse and complaints usually presuppose the presence of negative evaluation of other-behaviour, thus entailing negative emotions. Additionally,

working through a conflict can evoke further negative emotions, thereby possibly aggravating the conflict and (further) disrupting social harmony between the interlocutors. This lead to the following questions:

1. What is the role of (negative) emotions in conflictual service encounters?
2. How are (negative) emotions expressed, and what effect does this have on the interlocutors and the course of the interaction?

1.3. Chapter Outline

In the following, I will give a short overview of the chapters of my dissertation which is divided into two main parts, with chapters 1 to 4 dealing with the theoretical background and chapters 5 to 9 with the analysis and the study's implications and applications.

Following the current brief introduction, Chapter Two posits the speech event complaint as a sub-category of conflict discourse and describes the main aspects of conflict discourse in a service encounter context. In a next step it deals with conceptualisations and terminological issues of complaints. Complaints have generated a keen interest in researchers from various disciplines (within linguistics, but also in social psychology, sociology, marketing and consumer research, etc.), despite the fact that complaints are problematic in nature and difficult to study (in the sense that it is almost impossible to gather naturally occurring complaints) and this heterogeneity in approaches is reflected in the studies. The chapter provides a review of the relevant literature on complaints, focussing mainly on insights from linguistics and marketing.

Chapter Three introduces the theoretical background this dissertation is based on. It discusses issues such as (im)politeness theories, the notions of power, cognition, and emotion and shows how these relate to the analysis of my corpus.

Chapter Four introduces the corpus. It discusses the various data collection methods, and discusses the comparability of the data chosen for this corpus.

Chapter Five combines the theoretical approaches discussed in chapter three and introduces a model for analyzing conflict discourse in service encounters. The chapter shows how the model can be applied successfully to find out what motivates people in conflict exchanges, and for what reasons these exchanges deteriorate in view of the problem-solving goal.

Chapter Six deals with issues regarding politeness and rudeness. The negotiation of face seems to follow different rules in service encounters than in private conversations. Quite clearly there is a clash between what are the norms and expectations for conflictual interactions and the reality we can observe.

Chapter Seven analyses power relationships in conflict discourse. It focuses on the role relationship between company representatives and customers, and investigates how different assessments of power influence the problem-solving process, how power is expressed in these exchanges, and how (subtle) shifts in the power relationships are achieved

Chapter eight, which deals with the influence of emotions on the conflict-solving process, can account in part for the scarcity of face work in this corpus. Emotions are necessarily involved when people are at conflict, and are not easily suppressed when a lot is at stake. Even when people do not express them verbally, anger and agitation are transmitted via subtle signals in facial expressions or body language.

Chapter nine, finally, sums up the findings and puts them into a wider perspective. It discusses the dissertations' implications with regard to data elicitation methods, politeness issues, and the important role of emotion in conflict discourse.

Chapter 2: Conflict and Complaints

In this chapter I will define the speech event complaint within the wider context of conflict discourse and subsequently discuss the terminological and ideational difficulties connected with the concept of complaining. The final section of this chapter (2.4) will be devoted to a discussion of the relevant literature on complaining behaviour, from various fields, as well as various methodological and theoretical points of view.

2.1. Complaining as a Substrategy of Conflict Talk

In order to understand the nature of complaints and complaining behaviour, it is imperative to view this particular speech event within the context in which it is embedded. For research into the nature of complaints it has proven impossible to make judgments about them without at least some information on the context and the interlocutors. Generally speaking, complaints are one of many substrategies which are used in the wider context of conflict management.

Conflict discourse (and argumentative discourse) have been extensively studied from a variety of research angles (compare for instance 1990; Gruber, 2001; Hayashi, 1996; Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998). Conflict talk is mentioned in the literature in the same breath as *disagreement*, *argumentation*, and *disputing*, amongst others (for an overview and discussion of the term 'argument' see (Leung, 2002)). Conflict talk is defined as a speech activity in Gumperz' (1982a) sense where

> [...] participants oppose the utterances, actions, or selves of one another in successive turns at talk. Linguistic, paralinguistic, or kinesic devices can be used to express opposition directly or indirectly. Verbal conflict ends when the oppositional turns cease and other activities are taken up. (Vuchinich, 1990: 118)

Participants in conflict talk in this sense are opponents who use a conversation in order to work through a conflict; therefore, some kind of problem or trouble is negotiated verbally, but also with paralinguistic and kinetic devices. In the literature conflict talk is defined as conversations in which the interlocutors have different positions or opinions on a particular topic; it thus

> (...) captures the idea that participants take alternative positions on the same issue (whether reconcilable or mutually exclusive) but it does not imply a restriction to a single speech act nor a single turn sequence nor a single topic of conversation. (Leung, 2002: 3)

Clearly, conflict normally is not easily resolved, and usually verbal conflict interactions stretch over a number of turns until conflict resolution has been achieved. Conflict discourse has no clear sequential structure, and can revolve around any number of topics, employing a large variety of linguistic strategies. Conflict discourse is a tool for managing and dissolving interactional troubles or problems, thereby putting the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors into jeopardy (Vuchinich, 1990: 119). However, how people manage conflict discourse sequentially, and how they reach a dissolution of the conflict, paradoxically, requires a high degree of conversational cooperation:

> [...] despite the way in which argument is frequently treated as disruptive behavior, it is in fact accomplished through a process of very intricate coordination between the parties who are opposing each other. (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990: 85)

In general, two kinds of conflict talk can be distinguished: relationally oriented conflict talk (Conly & O'Barr, 1990: 179) involves the participants' interpersonal relationship and their claims as to identity and interpersonal behaviour, that is people's conduct (Newell & Stutman, 1989: 142) whereas goal-oriented conflict talk revolves not around the participants or their interpersonal relationship, but is focussed on the transactional dimension of the dispute, with every participant having the clear goal to resolve the dispute according to their own interest and goal orientation (Grimshaw, 1990: 283f); in short, this kind of conflict talk is focussed on rules of conduct (Newell & Stutman, 1989: 142). Clearly, conflict discourse in service encounters belongs to the latter category, as the disputes in service encounters are usually (although by no means exclusively) focussed on the dissolution of a practical problem and not on the interpersonal relationship of the interlocutors.

As mentioned above, conflict discourse does not seem to have any predictable structure, but many conflict episodes are initiated by one of the participants uttering a complaint, thereby bringing the problem and the speaker's negative evaluation of the problem to the hearer's attention. Endings to conflict talk can take different shapes within the context of service encounters, mainly depending on whether the dispute was settled with a compromise, or only satisfactorily for one of the parties involved, or not at all. The ending of the conflict episode can be signalled by verbal tokens of agreement (such as *ok* or *alright*), by a simple

topic switch, or even, in the cases of unsatisfactory resolution or non-resolution, by one of the parties leaving (Grimshaw, 1990: 304).

2.2. Complaints in Service Encounters

We cannot tacitly assume that complaints are a homogenous category (Mattson, Lemmink, & McColl, 2004, 942), but always have to be aware of the context and framework a particular complaint is embedded in. The present study focuses on complaints in conflictual service encounters, which are markedly different in nature from complaints made in a private context, especially with regard to the interlocutors' role relationship. In private complaints, the interactants (usually) know each other and have a shared history of some kind. In service encounters, the interactants tend to be strangers (and remain so even after having interacted with each other repeatedly). There is no personal relationship between them, no shared history, and no emotional involvement other than the negative feeling evoked by the event that triggered the conflict or was evoked in the course of the conflict discourse. In this sense complaints in service encounters are easier to approach than ones in the private domain, as the interpersonal role relationship between complainer and complainee is clearly defined by the roles they have in the interaction. Within the broader context of institutional discourse, service encounters form a subcategory which has very specific inner mechanisms, as service encounters are interactions that are strictly transactional and goal-oriented in nature. Service encounters usually take place in institutional settings which directly and unmistakably shape the interaction. The institution directly determines the participants' roles, as pointed out by Thornborrow:

> [...] institutional discourse can perhaps be best described as a form of interaction in which the relationship between a participant's current institutional role (that is, interviewer, caller to a phone-in programme or school teacher) and their current discursive role (for example, questioner, answerer or opinion giver) emerges as a local phenomenon which shapes the organisation and trajectory of the talk. (Thornborrow, 2002: 5)

This presupposes that the institution puts constraints on the participants' behaviour from the onset (they have a specific role within or vis à vis the institution) and in their current discursive role within any given conversation. In my corpus this translates into the participants being the company representative and a customer, with usually clearly defined discursive roles, where the customer usually has a problem and/or reason to complain, and

the company representative is expected to solve the problem and allay the customer's discontent. The institutional frame on the one hand positions and aligns the interactants (Thornborrow, 2002: 4), but it also serves to put constraints on their possible contributions within the interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992: 22). The institution does not only determine the roles and role relationships of the interlocutors, however; it also entails that communication will be mainly oriented to a specific task, as pointed out by Thornborrow:

> [...] in these various contexts for talk there is an orientation towards a specific task – the business of the talk as it unfolds is to ask questions, to provide answers (or to resist providing them), to have a discussion, to make a complaint, amongst others. (Thornborrow, 2002: 3)

Institutional discourse is thus mostly *goal-oriented* or *transactional*, with the interpersonal relationship between the interactants of secondary importance. In my corpus, the interactions happen for the purpose of solving a problem, with the interactants usually meeting for the first and probably last time, and therefore their interpersonal relationship figuring low on their agenda. Again, it needs to be stressed that the institutional context of a conflictual service encounter clearly influences participants' contributions.

> Service encounters are clearly drawn instances where participants' goals, be they more or less complementary, have to be achieved by means of verbal interaction. (Iacobucci, 1990: 85)

The verbal interactions in service encounters as observed in this corpus have the sole purpose of attaining the interactional goal, which in the first instance means to solve the problem at hand. Most of the negotiation in conflict talk, and most of the complaints uttered therein, revolve around the problem that the participants' goals are at odds. The challenge therefore consists in finding a suitable compromise which makes both parties attain their goal at least approximately.

A slightly more comprehensive definition of service encounters is given by Merritt (1976: 321), according to whom service encounters are

> an instance of face-to-face interaction between a server who is "officially posted" in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service.

Although at first glance Merritt's definition of service encounters seems to encompass all their facets, I find that the assumption that they are face-to-face interactions does not always

hold true. Especially in recent years[1], more and more service encounters happen via media such as the telephone or even the internet. This of course also affects the second aspect of Merritt's definition, according to which service encounters have to be conducted in a clearly defined space, namely in some service area, with both the server and the customer physically present. In service encounters which are conducted over the telephone, usually only the service provider is present on the company premises[2], whereas the customer probably calls from his home or place of work. I therefore suggest to broaden the definition of service encounters to include telephone conversations and communication via the internet and to put less emphasis on spatial orientations, even if that might make it difficult to justify the use of the word 'encounter'. In the present study, I am analysing face-to-face interactions as well as, to a lesser degree, telephone conversations.

2.3. Concepts of Complaints

2.3.1. Word meaning and Related Concepts

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides two different meanings for the verb *to complain*, which can either mean *to express dissatisfaction or annoyance*, or in conjunction with the preposition *of*, refers to *a state that one is suffering from (a symptom of illness)*. When we look at the noun *complaint* in the OED, we get the following meanings: a complaint is *an act of complaining*; *a reason for dissatisfaction*; *the expression of dissatisfaction* (example: a letter of complaint); *an illness or medical condition, especially a relatively minor one*. For the purpose of the present study, we need to discard the reference to illness. Etymologically, the verb 'to complain' derives from Old French *complaindre*, which in turn originates from Latin *complangere* 'bewail'. Over time the word changed its meaning in the English language from *an expression of grief* to *an expression of anger*. Summing up, in the dictionaries we find complaining defined simply as a form of expressing a negative feeling or emotion.

[1] Merritt's defined service encounters in 1976, and in those days they probably were conducted mostly as face-to-face interactions.

[2] Many of these service encounters might not even have this prerequisite, as often companies employ subcontractors to deal with customers on the phone. These might work from their own homes or even from other countries than where the company is stationed.

In line with the etymology of the word, in linguistics research (at least) two different kinds of complaints are discussed: Complaining in the modern sense of the word, relating to a direct expression of anger, and indirect complaining or troubles-telling, which would correspond to the Latin origin of 'bewailing' and refers to complaints that are not directed at the person who is responsible for the negative action triggering the complaint. Whereas (direct) complaining addresses the culprit (or some representative) directly and aims at remedying affairs, indirect complaining serves almost exclusively as phatic talk. Its function is to vent negative feelings and to create a bond between the interlocutors (none of whom is the person to blame):

> A general distinction is made between direct complaints (in the sense of *expressing dissatisfaction* or *annoyance*), which are usually addressed to the person who is the trouble source and to be held responsible, and indirect complaints, which refer to the expression of negative feelings towards a third party. IC can be considered a component of the troubles-telling (talk) speech event in that it is often the initiating speech act of such and event. Indirect complaint (IC) will be defined here as the expression of dissatisfaction to an interlocutor about a speaker himself/herself or someone/something that is not present (Boxer, 1993, 106).

Indirect complaints are interesting objects of study in themselves, as they usually serve as phatic talk and help solidify the relationship of the interlocutors. The opposite is usually true for direct complaints, which are much more problematic, since they are inherently damaging for the social role relationship of speaker and hearer. The present study will focus on direct complaints exclusively.

Semantically, we need to distinguish *complaining* from related terms such as *criticising* and *reproaching*. Both concepts are very closely related to complaining and also express negative evaluations:

> While Brown and Levinson seem to regard acts of disapproval, complaint, criticism, accusation, etc. as distinct from one another, such acts actually overlap, and it is not easy (and may be not necessarily that useful), to distinguish very clearly between them. (Laforest, 2002: 1597)

As pointed out by Laforest, a clear-cut distinction between these terms often proves difficult, as there is a certain degree of semantic overlap. In some ways there is always a notion of criticism inherent in a complaint, which is not true the other way round. A criticism does not necessarily relate to a negative action and the point of criticism does not necessarily have any negative repercussions for the speaker. When a speaker chooses to utter a criticism, s/he claims he to have the 'ability to judge' ('Urteils- und Bewertungskompetenz') (Zillig 1982, 94; quoted in Wagner 2001, 245). Whereas *criticising* expresses disapproval, *reproaching*

can express disapproval or *disappointment*. It seems that all three terms express nuances of a very similar negative feeling. Complaints are uttered when our expectations have not been met, when someone has done something wrong, or omitted to do something we expected from them. Complaints thus refer to actions (in the broadest sense of the term) which have negative repercussions. A criticism can refer not only to actions, but also to personal attributes, products, states of affairs and the like and there is no necessary relationship between the speakers and the object of their criticism. Criticism can involve anger on the part of the speakers, but does not presuppose it. Both criticising and reproaching can be part of the complaint sequence, and can be regarded here as possible sub-categories of complaining. Consequently, *complaints* do share many semantic features with *criticising* and *reproaching*, but usually go a bit further, mainly with regard to their purpose from the point of view of the speaker. Speakers who complain usually do not only want to express their negative feelings, but also tend to expect some (remedial) action or at least an apology from the hearer.

2.3.2. Defining Complaints

Complaints have been widely studied over the past two decades; however, they have proven difficult to describe and to capture, mainly because a complaint has no clearly definable, prototypical form, nor is there a default reaction to complaints. Although universally the notion of complaining is well known and we all have some idea about what 'complaining' means and what kind of behaviour it entails, the term has not yet been adequately defined (and probably never will be). Although many researchers have tried to show what the exact lexical and syntactic representations of a complaint are as well as (just as importantly) what the reactions are that it triggers, this seems to be an impossible task.

A fairly neutral definition is provided by Schaefer, who characterises a complaint as:

> [...] an utterance or set of utterances, which identifies a problem or trouble source and seeks remediation, either from the person responsible for the trouble source, or a third party who has the power to affect the situation. (Schaefer, 1982: 8)

People encounter problems (or trouble) when they interact, be it in the private or the public domain, and they therefore need to negotiate and balance their interactions. Whenever someone perceives the actions (or non-actions) of another as offensive, or, more generally speaking, negative for themselves, they might feel the need to utter a complaint.

Another fairly broad definition is suggested by Edmondson and House:

> A Complain [sic] is analysed for our purposes as a verbal communication whereby a speaker expresses his negative view of a past action by the hearer (i.e. for which he holds the hearer responsible), in view of the negative effects or consequences vis à vis himself. Clearly, the analysis might be extended to include Complains made of third parties, but we shall here consider the clearest case, that in which the alleged offence was committed by the addressee of the Complain. (Edmondson & House, 1981 p. 144)

According to Edmondson and House, the main characteristic of a complaint is the expression of a 'negative view of a past action'. This definition remains a bit too vague and only alludes slightly ('negative view') to the important issue of negative emotions that is inherent in complaints.

The idea of the complainer's dissatisfaction or annoyance is incorporated more prominently in a useful definition by Olshtain and Weinbach, who further expand on what complaining is by including additional information about the language user, his/her motivations, the interlocutor's actions, and cause and effect thereof:

> In the speech act of complaining, the speaker (S) expresses displeasure or annoyance – censure – as a reaction to a past or ongoing action, the consequences of which are perceived by S as affecting her unfavourably. This complaint is usually addressed to the hearer (H) whom the S holds, at least partially, responsible for the offensive action. (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993, 108)

Olshtain & Weinbach's definition approaches the topic from a pragmatic point of view, in which the language user and the context are taken into account. Following this it is important to establish what the speaker's motivation is for the utterance of the complaint. They also introduce a slightly different view of the temporality of the complaint. For Edmondson and House the complaint refers to a past action by the hearer, whereas Olshtain and Weinbach mention a 'past or ongoing action'.

A fairly similar definition is given by Trosborg, who goes a step further and introduces ideas from politeness theory. Usefully, she also applies names to the roles of the participants of a complaint exchange, which is necessary as a complaint speech event usually covers a number of turns, which makes it rather difficult to keep using the labels 'speaker' and 'hearer', as these roles are constantly reversed:

> A complaint is defined here as an illocutionary act in which the speaker (the complainer) expresses his/her disapproval, negative feelings, etc. towards the state of affairs described in the proposition (the complainable) and for which he/she holds the hearer (the complainee) responsible, either directly or indirectly. In Leech's terminology, the complaint is a representative of the conflictive function, which includes acts of threatening, accusing, cursing, and reprimanding. These acts are by their very nature

> designed to cause offence and they are therefore highly threatening to the social relationship between the speaker and hearer. (Trosborg, 1995, 311f)

In her definition, Trosborg alludes to the close semantic relationship with terms such as *threatening*, *accusing*, *cursing*, and *reprimanding*. Not only are these closely related to complaining, they can also be part of any given complaint exchange or sometimes even serve as the complaint proper (again, as mentioned before, there is no clear-cut complaint utterance, other than the rarely used illocutionary force indicating device *I (would like to) complain*). Trosborg also mentions the conflictive function of complaints and points out the important fact that they are usually highly threatening for the interlocutors' social relationship. This is certainly of greater importance in private complaints than in service encounters, where the interlocutors' role relationship is of secondary importance. Consequently, complaints require a certain degree of delicacy from both parties involved. The initiation of the complaint by the complainer sets the tone, but the reaction to the complaint is just as important, as it determines any further interaction. In the act of communicating, speaker and hearer continuously influence each other's reactions.

Complaints involve a set of intricate interactions between speaker and hearer, and the course and the outcome of the interaction depend to a large degree on mutual cooperation or negotiation. We can say that complaints are negotiated, a notion that is well developed in the following definition by Newell and Stutman, where the authors refer to the wider context of 'social confrontation episodes' rather than complaints.

> Social confrontation episodes involve conflict over conduct and rules of conduct. The confrontation episode is initiated when one participant signals the other participant that his or her behavior has violated (or is violating) a rule or expectation for appropriate conduct within the relationship or situation. The function of social confrontation may be generally described as working through disagreement over behaviors and thus negotiating expectations for future conduct. The episode is recognizable as a sequence of behaviors moving from initiation to resolution." (Newell & Stutman, 1989, 142)

Newell & Stutmann regard complaints (and any related social confrontation episode) as a negotiation process, with clearly defined goals, which describes complaints in service encounters very well. This is the first definition that refers to the interactional or sequential character of complaints, and it seems surprising that this notion is virtually absent from other, later definitions. Accordingly, my approach is to move away from the idea of complaints as isolated speech acts and to focus on the notion of complaints as an ongoing negotiation

between speaker and hearer. Similar to Morales-López, Prego-Vázquez and Domíngez-Seco (2005) I will

> [...] consider interactive discourse to be a negotiated construction of meaning, in which the participants make use of the resources available to them in their communicative repertoire to construct various discursive strategies designed to achieve their communicative goals in the sociocultural context in which this discourse is generated. (Morales-López et al., 2005: 229)

In general, researchers seem to struggle not only with the notion of what a complaint is, but also with the term 'complaint' itself. Deeply rooted in speech act theory as early research on complaints was, researchers have lately tried to take the discursive nature of complaining into account. Several alternatives to the term 'complaint' have already been suggested: Olshtain & Weinbach (1993) prefer the term 'complaining speech act'; Hatch (1992) introduces the term 'complaint speech events'; D'Amico-Reisner (1983) uses the term 'disapproval exchange' instead of complaint; Newell & Stutman (1989) use 'complaint' and 'social confrontation episode' while talking about one and the same thing; Hayashi (1996), finally, favours the term 'conflict management'.

After having discussed several different definitions of complaints which complement each other, and after having distinguished complaining from semantically related terms, I would like to sum up here what the prerequisites of a (direct) complaint in a service encounter are. Firstly: something has happened that had negative consequences for the complainer (usually the customer), which s/he found annoying or which s/he disapproves of; in summary, some kind of problem or conflict exists. Secondly: the complainer (here in most instances the customer) decides to utter a complaint directed at the person responsible for the negative action or at some representative thereof (the company representative), who will be able to remedy affairs or offer an apology. Summarising, I suggest the following brief definition for complaints in service encounters: *Complaints in service encounters are initiations or sub-strategies of problem-solving interactions in which customers and company representatives negotiate a conflict.*

2.3.3. Complaints: Functions, Objectives, and Structure

The definitions of complaints discussed above are not very clear about the actual physical shape of the complaint and the sequence in which such an event would unfold. Hatch tries to describe the sequencing and the order in which complaints usually develops, while

purposefully moving away from the notion of speech act towards the idea of a 'speech event' that consists of a number of turns:

> Complaint speech events typically contain an opening that includes an identification of the complainer and an explanation of why he or she is entitled to complain (i.e., a self-justification for the complaint), the complaint act, a possible justification of the addressee's action, an apology, a negotiated remedy, and a closing (or bridge to another topic). While other parts may be optional or not verbally expressed, the complaint act is obligatory. (Hatch 1992, 144)

This is an adequate and concise description of complaint interaction, as it is mainly concerned with the turn-taking mechanisms involved, but also includes the complaint as well as possible reactions to a complaint. Still, it cannot be said to be an exhaustive definition of what a complaint is, because the negative dimension (of the reason for the complaint and for the ongoing action) is not included. Furthermore, it remains unclear what the complaint proper might look like and how that can be distinguished from the other constituents.

Direct complaints have two main functions: to address a problem in the hope of receiving some remedial action, and to express a negative emotion and therefore vent one's feelings, both of which are deemed to be highly face threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987) for the hearer. Hence, complaint episodes are charged with negative energy, they always to a certain degree involve dissent, sometimes even moral censure or blame. In psychology research, complaints are classified amongst acts of aggression, a phenomenon which is seen as harbouring potential for destruction, but also for constructive action and assertive behaviour (Tatsuki, 2000, 1005). All this combined can lead to interpersonal friction and the disruption of harmony between the interlocutors. However, especially in service encounters, that is not a (huge) problem for the interlocutors, as their interpersonal relationship is of minor importance compared to the transactional goals they are pursuing. Conflict in this context is not something the interlocutors are trying to avoid, but something they are actively seeking.

Starting from this novel assumption, we should not make the mistake of approaching complaints exclusively as something negative. Interactions involving complaints should probably be viewed in principle as opportunities for problem-solving, where negative emotions can be vented and interlocutors can work their way back to common understanding and social harmony (Scheitlin, 1988).

> Depending upon the successful accomplishment of the speaker's intent, complaining serves at least four different functions: Catharsis, self-validation, retribution, and social influence. Complaining provides an

> opportunity to vent frustrations leading to catharsis. Complaining leads to self-validation either by providing a forum for restoring self-esteem or for having one's negative world view validated. Complaining can be a device for retribution by either harrassing the target or by complaining to others and undermining the target. Finally, complaining can be a mechanism of social influence leading to either alleviating the source of the problem or obtaining compensation for suffering. (Newell & Stutman, 1989, 142f)

Newell & Stutman manage to summarize the complexity of complaining behaviour well by pointing out that complaining can serve several functions such as catharsis, self-validation, retribution, and social influence. All the functions are observable motivations for the speakers in my corpus. They clearly feel the need to voice a complaint in order to vent their frustration and anger, reposition themselves as someone who has the right to a certain kind of service (and treatment), to rectify the problem or get compensation, and overall in order to convince the service provider to act in the customer's interest. Naturally, not all complaints are justified: sometimes people do complain in order to make a profit or gain something (Scheitlin, 1988: 19), a fact which in part explains the often weary and suspicious reactions of the service providers.

More problematic than any inherent face threat involved when a complaint is made could be the danger that lies in omitting to complain when the need or urge is clearly there. Opting out of making the complaint (on opting out see Bonikowska, 1988) can have various reasons but in many instances people opt out of making the complaint because they are too shy to express their feelings or because they believe that a complaint will be futile. In these instances there will be no cathartic effect, no possibility to let off steam, and the overall effect might be frustration and a building of more aggression on the part of the person opting out. This phenomenon is by its very nature difficult to investigate, and therefore not an integral part of this study.

Many linguistic studies on complaints have as their main goal to attempt a minute description of the sequential organisation complaints typically have. Most of these studies rely on constructed data such as questionnaires and role plays, which do not reveal much about naturally occurring discourse but can provide insights into norms and perceptions about speech behaviour. A valid and exhaustive overview of the facets complaining can have is given by Newell & Stutman (1989). Their research is based on the assumption that all conversation is a negotiation of roles and goals between the interactants. Although their focus

lies on complaints, the authors prefer to talk about confrontation sequences rather than complaints. Their interest focuses mainly on how a complaint is being initiated by a speaker and on the ensuing reaction by the hearer. The initiation, according to Newell and Stutman, sets the tone of the whole interaction, whereas the hearer's reaction determines the impact of the complaint. The authors' data consists of role plays (60 role-played interactions involving four scenarios) and self reports (68 participants) about recent events where the participants felt the need to utter a complaint. Newell & Stutman take a functional approach to communication, claiming that social confrontation episodes usually evolve round conflict over people's behaviour (conduct) and rules of behaviour (rules of conduct) (Newell & Stutman, 1989: 142). Whenever two (or more) people disagree about what acceptable behaviour is or what rules of behaviour have to be observed, they have to work through this conflict. Newell and Stutman introduce their own model of prototypical issues for social confrontations:

(1) the legitimacy of the invoked rule;
(2) the legitimacy of any superseding rules;
(3) whether or not the person actually performed the behavior in question;
(4) whether or not the behavior constitutes a violation of the rule – a question of interpretation
(5) whether or not the confrontee is to be held responsible for his or her actions; and
how the situation is to be resolved. (Newell & Stutman, 1989 p. 142f)

This model can be regarded as a rough script for complaining behaviour and is rooted in the concept of social norms and their violations, with blame as a central theme. Whenever people complain, they have a quarrel about mis-behaviour, or in other words about the fact that someone violated a social rule that had been agreed on previously by the interlocutors. The complaint sequence serves the function of stating the problem (and the rule, if need be) and in what follows to work towards a solution. Newell & Stutman focus especially on the strategies that initiate a complaint sequence. They locate five strategies or tactics of initiation, which include *hinting*, *seeking confirmation*, *blaming/accusing*, emotional display, and *emotional statement*. (Newell & Stutman, 1989 p. 143f). Any number of other strategies can follow in the course of a conflict episode, including persuasion, any forms of criticisms, suggestions for a solution, and the like. A large number of other studies on complaints has focussed on the whole range of strategies employed in complaining, as well as on the sequence in which these strategies unfold. Usually these studies, like the one by Newell &

Stutman, rely on constructed data and focus exclusively on the strategies employed by the complainer, without taking a complainee's reactions and their repercussions on the subsequent complaint moves into account.

2.4. Research on Complaints

The majority of the studies undertaken on complaints investigate the politeness strategies used in them, especially the ways speakers try to minimize face-threat. On the basis of these insights, researchers have come up with a range of categories in order to describe polite and impolite complaint strategies. The interpretations made by these researchers are greatly influenced by their research design. The use of production questionnaires and closed role play inherently precludes interaction, therefore studies which rely on these data elicitation methods exclusively are unable to make claims about actual speech behaviour. Nonetheless these studies can give useful insights into people's perceptions of complaining; accordingly I will give an overview of some of them.

It is important to note here, though, that these studies are almost exclusively investigating complaints in the private domain. Complaints in service encounters are in many (not all) ways different from those in the private domain, especially with regard to the role relationship of the interlocutors. Nonetheless, these studies give good (first) insights into prototypical complaint behaviour. Having said that, there are a few studies which use naturally-occurring discourse for the analysis of complaints. Amongst these are various studies of complaints in the realm of organizational discourse, which investigate telephone recordings of complaint calls to companies (Antos, 1989; Brünner, 2000; Fiehler, Kindt, & Schnieders, 2002; Morales-López et al., 2005) and at least one study that analyses spoken workplace discourse (Clyne, Ball, & Neil, 1991). In the private domain, the study by Laforest (2002) analyses recordings of naturally occurring conversations in a family environment. To my knowledge, the present study is the first one on complaints to combine the analysis of naturally-occurring discourse with role plays.

2.4.1 Studies on Complaints by Native Speakers

Strangely enough, there are only very few studies on complaints focussing on British English (see Geluykens & Kraft, 2003; House & Kasper, 1981), while there are quite a few studies that use evidence from American English (see Arent, 1996; Boxer, 1993; Cupach & Carson, 2002; DeCapua, 1998; Frescura, 1995; see Hanford, 1988; Morrow, 1995; Newell & Stutman, 1989; Tanck, 2002) and in a few instances from Australian English (Clyne et al., 1991; Mattson et al., 2004). Other languages investigated are native German (DeCapua, 1998; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003; House & Kasper, 1981; Kraft & Geluykens, 2004), native French (Kraft & Geluykens, 2002, , 2004) and native Canadian French (Laforest, 2002), native Danish (Trosborg, 1987), native Hebrew (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993), native Italian (Frescura, 1995) (in Italy and as a community language in Canada), native Portugese (Korsko, 2004) native Chinese (Du, 1995; Ping, 2006), native Korean (Yoon, 2007), native Farsi (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2007), and native Japanese (Tatsuki, 2000). Most of these studies do not focus on native speaker complaints but try to establish cross-cultural differences between native speaker and learner complaint behaviour.

2.4.2 Studies on Complaints by Non-Native Speakers

Most studies on interlanguage complaints focus on English as the target language, which illustrates the ever-increasing importance of English as a lingua franca or world language. Some studies look into the speech behaviour of learners with a variety of language backgrounds (Clyne et al., 1991; Morrow, 1995; Tanck, 2002), others target the learner behaviour of speakers from one specific language background. Complaints in German-English Interlanguage have been most frequently studied (Bendel, 2001; DeCapua, 1998; Geluykens & Kraft, 2003), but there are also studies investigating complaints in Danish-English interlanguage (Trosborg, 1995), Catalan-English interlanguage (Trenchs, 1995), Chinese-English interlanguage (Arent, 1996; Piotrowska, 1988), Japanese-English interlanguage (Molloy & Shimura, 2004), and in Korean-English interlanguage (Murphy & Neu, 1996). Very few studies on learner complaints focus on other target languages than English. One study investigated interlanguage Hebrew, with speakers from various language backgrounds (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993); other studies focus on French as the target language, with speakers from a German language background (Kraft & Geluykens, 2002;

2004; 2006), on non-native English with various language backgrounds (Kraft & Geluykens, in press-a), on French-English interlanguage (Kraft & Geluykens, in press-b), English-Spanish interlanguage (Kuriscak, 2006), English-Chinese interlanguage (Ping, 2006) and one study attempts to shed light on Japanese-German interlanguage complaint behaviour (Ohama, 1987).

Most studies on native speaker and interlanguage complaints rely on constructed data such as discourse completion questionnaires, role plays, participant comments, retrospective interviews and the like. Sometimes several of these data elicitation methods are combined to gain more informed results. Very few studies use recordings of spontaneous conversations (Bendel, 2001; Clyne et al., 1991; Kraft & Geluykens, in press-a, , in press-b; Laforest, 2002; Lee, 2006; Ohama, 1987; Yoon, 2007) mainly for the reason that they are so difficult to come by (compare chapter 4 – Corpus and Data Elicitation Methods).

2.4.3 Research on Complaints in Service Encounters

The discussion of complaints in service encounters necessarily involves considering the relationships between service providers and their customers. These issues have been looked into either from a predominantly linguistically oriented perspective or from a marketing or business perspective, with very little cross-fertilization between the two research strands. It would go too far here to discuss in detail the literature from marketing, which focuses on customer complaints and how to deal with them. It should be mentioned, however, that there seems to be very little awareness in marketing research of what the insights of linguistic research could contribute to marketing with respect to customer complaint handling. In the following I will discuss the most salient papers from linguistics research which are important for my discussion.

In marketing research there is a whole strand which deals with possible reactions to customer complaints and with customer expectations. From a linguistic perspective it needs to be pointed out that, whereas many of theses studies focus on the complaint, reactions to complaints, and certainly to those in service encounters, seem neglected. Trosborg and Shaw introduce the notion of 'business pragmatics', recognizing that a business environment entails a business culture, and therefore also discourse conventions shaped by the business environment. In several publications (Shaw, 2001; Trosborg & Shaw, in press; Trosborg,

2003; Trosborg & Shaw, 1998) they focus on reactions to complaints in service encounters. First they explain what reactions to customer complaints should ideally be like, and then they communicate ways of teaching these strategies to learners of English. This is an altogether prescriptive approach aimed at improving customer service. In their studies, Shaw and Trosborg point out the cross-cultural differences related to different language backgrounds *and* to differences in business culture, which might vary from country to country and ultimately aim at developing methods not only to teach cross-cultural pragmatic awareness, but also an awareness about business pragmatics, as communication in a business context is shaped by the institutional context and varies systematically from ordinary discourse conventions.

Scheitlin (1988) describes complaining in an organizational context as a psycho-dynamic process in which the customer is in a state of heightened emotional sensitivity (Scheitlin, 1988: 17), possibly angry about the company's service failure. This can lead to a state of tension, in which any wrong reaction on the part of the service provider might aggravate the customer's emotional state (Scheitlin, 1988: 18). Similar to Shaw & Trosborg's approach, Scheitlin adopts a prescriptive stance, stating how complaints should be dealt with ideally by delivering a catalogue of adequate reactions to (often emotionally charged) complaint behaviour.

A study which is similar to my own in approach and outcome is the one by Morales-López, Prego-Vázquez & Domíngeuz-Seco (2005), which analyses complaints from the public during the restructuring process of a Spanish water supplier. It analyses 16 recorded telephone interviews between company employees and citizens. The interactants in this study discuss conflict situations, with the customers complaining about problems caused by a company internal restructuring programme.

In German there is a semantic difference between complaints (Beschwerden) and complaints in (some) service encounters (Reklamationen, Beanstandungen). Especially the term 'Reklamation' is semantically closely linked to service failures (delivery of damaged goods, malfunctions etc). A number of papers deal with this kind of complaint and try to establish the sequences in which a complaint in a service encounter unfolds. Ohama (1987) analyses one intercultural dialogue, in which a female Japanese customer interacts with a German sales woman in German. Ohama aims to show what impact intercultural differences

might have on the realisation of the speech sequence, and which linguistic forms are being used in this particular interaction of naturally occurring discourse. Ohama attempts to show clearly what the necessary steps or moves are that people have to follow in order to do a service encounter complaint in Germany. She shows these steps in a diagram and constructs similar diagrams for the reclamation sequence under scrutiny. In her analysis she compares these diagrams and tries to explain the differences and similarities. Her approach presupposes certain 'Handlungsmuster' or scripts that people follow in certain situations. The Japanese woman was not aware of the whole script of a German reclamation sequence, which was attributed to the fact that the interaction was full of misunderstandings. The interaction would have been smoother if the woman had at least had more than rudimentary knowledge of German (she had been in Germany for only four months by then). Ohama's study puts its emphasis on the script that people follow in certain situational contexts. She shows that in an intercultural context language proficiency is not enough and that certain scripts and subsequent discourse steps have to be learned as well.

Another study dealing with service encounter complaints in German tries to point out the different expectations customers and service providers bring to the complaint exchange. This is an insight that has been motivating studies in management and marketing, where attempts are being made to measure customer expectations (Burgers, de Ruyter, Keen, & Streukens, 2000; Kelley & Davis, 1994) and customer satisfaction (Maxham III & Netemeyer, 2002). Fiehler, Kindt & Schnieders (2002) use telephone data from the complaint department of a small sales company in Germany. They point out that complaints are usually disruptive for the company as well as for the client, and that for clients, additionally, having to complain entails negative emotions such as anger or disappointment (Fiehler et al., 2002: 120).

Another study, also describing German telephone service encounter complaints (amongst other kinds of organizational discourse), is the one by Brünner (2000), who attempts an exhaustive overview of different kinds of workplace or organizational discourse. Brünner analyses a few examples of telephone complaints and shows the main weaknesses in dealing with customer complaints, which she attributes mainly to a lack of empathy and emotional involvement on the part of the service providers. Complaints to companies often seem to be met with suspicion, disbelief, putting the complainer in a position where he/she feels treated like a fraud. Brünner also points out the very common problem of companies making their

service lines difficult to reach (hidden phone numbers, lines constantly occupied, staff not adequately trained, etc), and the problem of customers having to justify themselves and to prove that their complaint needs to be taken seriously.

Bendel (2001) studies problems that occur between employees and guests at a hotel reception desk in Austria. She does not explicitly mention the word 'complaint' but calls these occurrences 'Servicefehler' ('service mistakes'). Her main aim is to find out how customer-staff relationships function and how staff is being trained to deal with problems. She wants to study the nature of service mistakes and find reasons for successful or unsuccessful staff behaviour (success being measured by the positive outcome of the exchange, balancing between the hotel's economic agenda and the customer's satisfaction). She sees her study as a means of providing better staff training. Bendel uses interviews with the employees about their perception of how well they think they are able to deal with problems in their workplace, as well as recordings of authentic interactions at the reception desk. The interactions recorded are in English, with none of the participants having English as their native language. From the retrospective interviews it transpires that the staff's reactions, and their ability to deal with problems successfully, depend to a great deal on the manner in which the guests voice their complaints. If they speak calmly and try to be polite, this behaviour is reflected in the reaction. If the guest comes across as angry, rude, or too direct, it is more difficult for the members of staff to react calmly and in a friendly manner. This is an interesting study, but sometimes slightly besides the point. It could have gained from a more linguistic approach, since many of the problems that were analyzed seemed to stem from the fact that none of the interactants had English as their mother tongue. The problems people had understanding each other seemed to be due to their poor command of English rather than to pragmalinguistic features.

Studies on naturally-occurring complaints in service-encounters are still fairly rare, and to my knowledge, there are no studies investigating face-to-face interactions in service encounters. This apparent research gap is mainly due to the problems researchers encounter with data gathering and participant cooperation. Whereas many companies have a policy of systematically recording incoming calls (and amongst them they receive many complaint calls), naturally-occurring complaints are difficult to observe.

2.5. Summary

For an understanding of what complaints are, they need to be examined within a wider context of utterances, as a speech event consisting of several turns, with reactions to complaints just as important as the complaints themselves. It seems to be untenable however, to investigate complaint events independently of other strategies, as complaints are only one subcategory of the more global event of conflict management. Complaints may serve to initiate a conflict episode, but may just as well appear at any other given stage of conflict discourse. Semantic closeness to related strategies such as criticisms and reproaches, as well as the fact that complaints have no clearly defined lexical shape, demands to analyse them within the greater context of conflict discourse, taking the situational context, the participants and other circumstances into account.

As shown above, traditional views of complaints focus on private complaints, distinguishing between direct complaints (which are more common, and also the focus of this study), and indirect complaints, which usually are addressed at a third party and function as phatic communion. The present study focuses on direct complaints in an institutional context, in very specific service encounters. Although, in their surface form, direct complaints in a service encounter context share similarities with private complaints, service encounter complaints differ from private ones especially with regard to the role relationship between the participants, which is usually marked by the absence of a mutual history, as well as with regard to the participants' goal orientation. A service encounter context determines the participants' orientations towards each other, with transactional goals clearly outweighing any interactional considerations.

In the kinds of service encounters discussed here, complaints are one sub-strategy in a wider context of problem-solving episodes. Complaints may serve to initiate these or occur in the course of an ongoing problem-solving episode. Complaints in these contexts can be observed to have different functions: they might be designed to draw attention to the problem at hand; they might serve to vent a complainer's negative emotions; they could be a prompt for remedial action or an apology; or they might be a combination of the above.

Usually, in a service encounter context, complaints are prompted by an occurrence which had negative consequences for the complainer (usually the customer), which he/she found annoying or which he/she disapproves of: in short, some kind of problem or conflict. This problem or conflict is consequently negotiated through discourse between the customer and a company representative (or several customers/several company representatives) in a number of turns, leading from some form of initiation to a solution of the problem. In this negotiation process, complaints form one possible sub-strategy among many others, and can be found at any point of the interaction: at the beginning (i.e. as a statement of the problem, as an expression of negative feelings, etc.) or at any subsequent point.

Summarising, and building on the definitions discussed earlier (compare chapter 2.3.2.) I have suggested the following brief definition for complaints in service encounters:
Complaints in service encounters are initiations or sub-strategies of problem-solving interactions in which customers and company representatives negotiate a conflict.
This definition, although perhaps less exhaustive than many others, describes the main elements of and prerequisites for service encounter complaints.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework for the analysis of my corpus of conflictual service encounters. It spans a wide range of topics, introducing and discussing the concepts of (im-)politeness, power, frame and emotion, and explaining their relevance for the analysis of conflict behaviour in service encounters.

3.1. Politeness

Conflict exchanges, and complaints in particular, naturally involve interpersonal friction. Therefore the question arises whether there is a 'polite' way of negotiating conflict at all. But then, what IS politeness? I will now give a brief overview of the main topics in linguistic politeness research and show how they relate to the analysis of conflict and complaints in service encounters, thereby reviewing the literature on politeness and discussing the relevant terminology (for more comprehensive reviews of the research on linguistic politeness see Eelen, 2001; Fraser, 1990; Kasper, 1990; Meier, 1995b)).

Studies on linguistic politeness struggle to find an adequate definition and delineation of the subject. This is not facilitated by the fact that the term is widely used in various academic fields, linguistics only one amongst many, as well as in the public domain. The concept of politeness itself seems to be ubiquitous, although not very clearly delineated, as pointed out by Kerbrat-Orecchioni:

> First, even if one reduces the definition of politeness to its verbal usage, the forms it can take in a given society still vary enormously. If one understands it as *all procedures that help maintain a minimum level of harmony within any exchange (despite the rise of conflict inherent in all exchanges)*, politeness reveals itself to be multiform and all-pervasive in discourse, rather than a marginal phenomenon restricted to the well-known 'formulas' favoured by manuals on good manners and fine breeding. (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005: 29)

A general consensus in many definitions of politeness seems to be that its function is to create or re-establish harmony between interlocutors. In linguistics research politeness has been viewed as geared mainly towards the other person, as a tool to express consideration towards the interlocutor, as expressed in just one of many similar definitions:

> Politeness is reflected in interactants' demonstrated consideration of one another. The word 'demonstrated' is meant to imply that this 'consideration' need not be genuine or sincere, rather 'it is the fact that an effort was made to go through the motions at all that makes the act an act of politeness' (Green, 1996:147). (House, 2005: 14)

In House's view, polite behaviour is shown in the interactants' consideration for each other, independent of whether that consideration is sincere or just faked. Polite behaviour in this view is behaviour demonstrating mutual respect.

A similar definition of politeness is given by Holmes, describing politeness as:

> (...) behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour. In other words, politeness my take the form of an expression of good-will or camaraderie, as well as the more familiar non-intrusive behaviour which is labelled "polite" in everyday usage. (Holmes, 1995: 4f)

Holmes in her definition adds the notion of distance, and the avoidance of imposition. These two ideas, incorporating that people should be considerate of the other's needs, as well as distant enough to respect their personal freedom, have been predominant in linguistics research (see section 3.1.2 below). However, these days, and especially in research on conflict, it seems that we need a slightly more elaborate conceptualisation of politeness phenomena.

Many researchers to date distinguish between a layman's common-sense understanding of the notion of politeness and one that approaches the topic from a theoretical point of view. Following Ehlich (1992), researchers nowadays tend to distinguish between primary politeness, which is to be understood as the layman's term and his/her understanding of politeness (politeness 1), and secondary politeness (politeness 2), which relates to the theories and ideas developed by researchers. Although a wide array of publications on the phenomenon of linguistic politeness has furthered our understanding of the topic immeasurably, I want to argue with House (2003) and Locher (2004) that it is advisable to concentrate on first order politeness (politeness 1), i.e. on the language user's understanding of politeness as it transpires in actual language use and in meta-comments about language behaviour.

A central concern of research on linguistic politeness has been to delineate and define the subject, with a number of researchers indicating that the term 'politeness' itself may be too vague, as well as too dogmatic to be used any longer. Holmes and Schnurr (2005: 124) therefore introduce the term 'relational practice', derived from management research, which puts emphasis on a claim made by other

researchers, namely that "(...) politeness is only a relatively small part of relational work and must be seen in relation to other types of interpersonal meaning" (Locher & Watts, 2005: 10). Still, Holmes and Schnurr's view of relational practice shows some of the same shortcomings that can be found in other research on politeness phenomena, namely an emphasis on face concerns, and, more specifically, on face concerns about the other, not the self. Holmes and Schnurr's approach is worth mentioning here, however, as the focus of their studies lies on relational practices in the workplace, an environment which shares many features of service encounters. In their view relational practice (RP) encompasses three main components or functions:

(i) RP is oriented to the (positive and negative) face needs of others
(ii) RP serves to advance the primary objectives of the workplace
(iii) RP practices at work are regarded as dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral
(Holmes & Schnurr, 2005: 124f)

Although I will not adopt their terminology, I think Holmes and Schnurr's approach offers some useful ideas for the analysis of conflict in service encounters. In addition to the well-known concept of face work (see below), they introduce the notion of politeness, or rather relational practice, as a tool which is goal-oriented. This is an important consideration in my study as well, as many instances can be found in the data where relational work serves to make the participants reach their interactive goals. Slightly contradictorily, Holmes and Schnurr's third claim, namely that participants in workplace interactions seem to regard relational practice as only marginally important in a workplace environment, holds true also for service encounters. In both instances we are therefore confronted with a paradox, which presents itself as existent in the interlocutor's perception of an interaction, be it in the workplace amongst colleagues, or as in the data under investigation here, in service encounters between company representatives and customers. The particular context of the utterances seems to reduce politeness or relational practice to a 'necessary evil' which may facilitate the achievement of certain goals, whereas on the other hand interpersonal relationships are deemed of minor importance. As I will show in the present and subsequent chapters, people's own perceptions of the functions of relational work and their actual expectations of others are at best fuzzy in their own minds, and still require a lot of research.

Recent studies on politeness put increasing emphasis on the fact that research on politeness phenomena cannot be limited to speaker attitudes and motivations, but needs to take speaker *and* hearer into account. This is necessary when investigating longer stretches of talk instead of one-sentence utterances, because the roles of speaker and hearer change constantly; speakers become hearers, hearers become speakers. Even more importantly, politeness phenomena do not occur in a vacuum, the hearer *interprets* or *ratifies* an utterance as polite or impolite, therefore it is impossible to leave the hearer out of the equation, as was the tendency in the earlier research on politeness. Locher (2004) arrives at a useful definition of politeness taking this approach into account, distinguishing between politeness from the speaker's perspective and politeness from the hearer's perspective:

> Politeness for the speaker:
> A polite utterance is a speaker's intended, marked and appropriate behavior which displays face concern; the motivation for it lies in the possibly, but not necessarily, egocentric desire of the speaker to show positive concern for the addressees and /or to respect the addressees' and the speaker's own need for independence.
> Politeness for the addressee:
> Addressees will interpret an utterance as polite when it is perceived as appropriate and marked; the reason for this is understood as the speaker's intention to show positive concern for the addressee's face and/or the speaker's intention to protect his or her own face needs. (Locher, 2004: 91)

This very concise and, in my view, adequate definition of politeness already includes some of the topics which will be the focus of my discussion, such as speaker and hearer perceptions, face concerns, and markedness and appropriateness. These and other ideas are important if we want to grasp the underlying mechanisms of (im)politeness in conflict and complaints.

Whereas Locher tried a definition of politeness, House (2005) offers a useful theoretical approach to politeness research with her multilevel model of politeness, distinguishing four thematic levels for the conceptualization of politeness phenomena:

> Level 1
> Biological and societal necessities. Individual *versus* social "drives". Tension: Distancing *versus* Cooperation.
> Level 2
> Resolving the tension. Behavioural maxims and principles. Cooperative principles, principles of politeness.
> Level 3
> Putting principles into practice. Culture-specific behavioural rules/norms of politeness and behaviour.

Level 4
Putting practices into language. Politeness and behavioural norms embodied in linguistic systems. (House, 2005: 17)

House in this approach combines universal ideas as expressed in maxim- and face-oriented approaches to politeness with culture- and language-specific aspects (House, 2005: 17). The following sections will give an overview of the approaches subsumed under House's multilevel model of politeness and will explain how the various approaches are relevant in the analysis of conflict and complaints in service encounters. I will discuss approaches to politeness based on the ideas of principles and maxims (level 2 in House's model), approaches which focus on the notion of face (level 1 in House's model), and the idea of norms and appropriateness (level 3 and 4 in House's model).

3.1.1. Conversational Principles and Maxims

Linguistic research first developed theories about politeness in the 1970s, based to a large extent on the thoughts expressed by ordinary language philosopher H. P. Grice. Many researchers to date still base their theories of politeness on his concepts. Grice (1968) claims that conversational interaction is based on certain guidelines, which he labels conversational maxims, and that every participant in a conversation is faithful to a global cooperative principle, while adhering to the maxims of quality (be truthful), quantity (be informative), relation (be relevant), and manner (be brief and clear). Speakers in this view therefore try to be as cooperative as they possibly can, as well as saying only what is necessary at a certain point in a conversation. Grice starts from the assumption that a violation of the conversational maxims does not mean that speakers are also violating the cooperative principle, but that they invite their interlocutor to infer some other meaning. This phenomenon is called conversational implicature. Any deviations from the cooperative principle might be motivated by the desire to be polite[1].

Robin Lakoff, on the basis of Grice's conversational maxims, proposes a more expansive theory of politeness. She starts from the assumption that language does not only have grammatical but also pragmatic rules, which in turn account for polite behaviour. For Lakoff there are two global rules for conversational interaction, according to which a speaker needs to be clear and polite. Subordinate rules indicate that speakers should not impose, should give their interlocutor space

[1] For a recent discussion of Grice's cooperative principle see Davies (2007).

and options, and should allow them to feel good. In Lakoff's terms an utterance can be labelled 'polite' when it adheres to one or more of these rules (Lakoff, 1973) .

Another important approach to politeness is the one by Geoffrey Leech, who also bases his considerations on the theories developed by Grice. Leech (1983), elaborating the ideas put forward by Grice, draws a distinction between textual rhetoric and interpersonal rhetoric. Within the latter, alongside a co-operative principle, there are also a politeness principle, an interest principle and a Pollyanna principle. For the politeness principle he establishes seven maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, phatic). For Leech, the politeness principle is a super-ordinate principle which serves "to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place" (Leech, 1983: 82). Recently, Leech has complemented his ideas by extending his theoretical construct with the Grand Strategy of Politeness (GSP), which he describes as incorporating two main constraints on communication, the one expressing higher value attributed to the addressee, the other attributing lower value to the speaker (Leech, 2007). These ideas are clearly very similar to the notions of face (see below) as described in Brown and Levinson's framework, with the difference that in Leech's approach concern for other is more pronounced than concern for self.

Putting Grice's cooperative principle at the centre of their politeness theories, Lakoff and Leech both view social interaction as mainly geared towards maintaining social harmony. Fraser (1990) takes this approach one step further when he introduces the idea of a *social contract* between the interlocutors, which refers to their respective awareness of certain interpersonal rights and obligations which may shift or be renegotiated depending on the situational context (Fraser, 1990: 232).

> Politeness, on this view, is not a sometime thing. Rational participants are aware that they are to act within the negotiated constraints and generally do so. When they do not, however, they are then perceived as being impolite or rude. Politeness is a state that one expects to exist in every conversation; participants note not that someone is being polite – that is the norm – but rather that the speaker is violating the CC. Being polite does not involve making the hearer 'feel good' à la Lakoff or Leech, nor with making the hearer not 'feel bad', à la B & L. It simply involves getting on with the task at hand in light of the terms and conditions of the CC. (Fraser, 1990: 233)

Thus, according to Fraser, politeness considerations are vital in any kind of verbal interaction and something that speakers mutually agree on implicitly. Fraser views politeness as the norm and something that people do not notice, whereas a deviation from the social contract is violating its norms and is noticed as rude.[2] Fraser simply assumes, just like Lakoff and Leech do, that speakers generally adhere to the Cooperative Principle.

What these three approaches cannot account for, however, are those kinds of social interaction that are conflictual and aimed (at least as a side effect) at disrupting social harmony. In conflict episodes in service encounters people are not particularly concerned with adhering to a cooperative principle nor to a politeness principle, unless either will help them achieve their communicative goals. For this reason, many studies dealing with linguistic politeness to date struggle with the notion of whether to conceptualize politeness in terms of Grice's cooperative principle or not. In order to tackle this apparent paradox, but also in order to apply existing theories to the analysis of their data, a number of researchers have proposed additional maxims, hence building on Lakoff's and Leech's theories and expanding them (see for instance Blum-Kulka, 1987; Gu, 1990; Ide, Hill, Carnes, Ogino, & Kawasaki, 1992). Terkourafi (2005b) labels these approaches to politeness 'traditional' and distinguishes them from more recent studies which reject the idea of predefined maxims and politeness norms and focus on participants' notions of politeness and impoliteness – these studies she describes as the 'post-modern' view of politeness (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003), while suggesting a third approach herself, which she calls the 'frame-based' approach to politeness and claims to fit in with both research traditions (Terkourafi, 2005b).

What in Terkourafi's terminology is 'post-modern', would be more aptly described as a 'discursive approach to politeness' (Haugh, 2007; Locher, 2006), as recently linguists put more and more emphasis on the interpretative process between speaker and hearer. Common to research on politeness that takes a discursive approach is the rejection of speech act theory and the classical Gricean framework. Discursive theories of politeness put the notion of rapport-management at the centre of their analysis and take speaker and hearer evaluations into account

[2] For a discussion of this notion please refer to chapter 'impoliteness' below.

in equal measures (Terkourafi, 2005b: 241). In her frame-based view of politeness Terkourafi suggests a move away from theory-driven research, which she observes both with traditional politeness theories, based on speech-act theory and Grice's Cooperative Principle, as well as with post-modern approaches with their ideological struggle over first-order and second-order politeness. Furthermore she deplores "their analysis of politeness on the pragmatic level as a particularized implicature" (Terkourafi, 2005b: 246). As an alternative, she suggests a data-driven approach which observes and takes the particular discourse frame into account, focussing entirely on first-order politeness, making assessments about politeness and norms on the basis of the interactants' observable behaviour and evaluations. This is an approach I will follow in my assessment of conflict and complaints in service encounters.

Recent discussions of politeness theories have come to a general consensus that linguists should no longer try to develop theories based on conceived norms, but should rather investigate how politeness phenomena are negotiated and evaluated by the interlocutors and the norms they adhere to. A very useful and comprehensive critique of the most well-know linguistic politeness theories has been put forward by Eelen (2001). I argue with him that "[...] politeness 1 comprises at least three different phenomena, depending on whether it involves an actor's evaluations, an actor's expressive behaviour or an actor's metapragmatic discourse" (Eelen, 2001: 241). All these levels have to be taken into account when analysing discourse in terms of (im)politeness evaluations. Instead of proceeding in the traditional way by developing theories of politeness along with interactional norms, it is important to evaluate conversations in context and from those evaluations attempt to build theories of politeness (if that should be at all possible):

> For example, if ordinary speakers invoke norms in their explications of politeness, then we should not simply do the same, but rather zoom in on that activity of norm-invoking and examine it more closely, as it is likely to give us an insight into what politeness actually involves. (Eelen, 2001: 252)

Instead of imposing norms on what we observe, the observations should be interpreted in a way that gives us insights into participants' own evaluations of politeness and norms. Research on politeness consequently is moving away from a focus on the production of (im)politeness behaviour towards a focus on the production of (im)politeness evaluations (Eelen, 2001: 248ff), and consequently is

also moving away from the formulation of principles and maxims designed to predict polite behaviour.

3.1.2. Face

In their seminal work, Brown and Levinson (1987 [1978]) propose a highly influential theory of politeness. Their model is based on the concept of 'face', which they borrowed from Goffman and which is defined as

> (...) the positive social value a person effectively claims for [her/himself] by the lines others assume [s/he] has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes – albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. (Goffman, 1967: 5)

Goffman in turn adopted these ideas from Chinese, where certain kinds of behaviour or perceptions can make people 'lose face'.

On the basis of this concept Brown and Levinson claim that in any linguistic interaction a constant need exists to balance the face wants of the interlocutors. In analogy with Durkheim's (1915) negative and positive rites[3] they distinguish between *negative face*, defined as

> the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to nondistraction – i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition; the want of every ‚competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others

and *positive face*, defined as

> the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants; the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987: 61f).

Negative face thus relates to personal freedom, or *independence* (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), whereas positive face, i.e. *solidarity politeness* (Scollon & Scollon, 1981) or *involvement* (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), involves the appreciation of the other's needs, 'the expression of restraint' (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 2). Further distinctions within the notion of positive face have been made by Lim and Bowers (1991), who subsume two different face wants for positive face: *fellowship face* as the desire to be included, and *competence face*, as the desire to be respected.

Despite being the most influential and most widely adopted (and adapted) theory of politeness, the framework by Brown and Levinson has been criticised

[3] An in-depth discussion of Durkheim's and Goffman's conceptualizations of rites can be found in Bargiela Chiappini (2003).

extensively. One of the main points of criticism involve their 'Anglo-centrism', mostly aimed at the claim that the politeness strategies in their framework are universally applicable, while mostly referring to the English language (but also to Tzeltal and Tamil) and a Western context. In the same vein, Mao (1994) investigates the various meanings of the term 'face' as put forward in Goffman and in Brown and Levinson and compares their readings with the notion's origins in Chinese and Japanese.

> In my view, Goffman's face is a public, interpersonal image, while Brown and Levinson's face is an individualistic, 'self'-oriented image. Such a 'self'-orientated characterization of face, which may very well underlie Western interactional dynamics, can be problematic in a non-Western context. (Mao, 1994: 455)

Mao observes that in traditional as well as in modern Chinese society, notions such as individualism and freedom are much less important than in Western societies (Mao, 1994: 459) and that Chinese face emphasizes 'the harmony of individual conduct with the views and judgement of the community' (Mao, 1994: 460). His findings for the Japanese interpretation of face are very similar to his findings for Chinese.

> What is characteristic of Japanese culture is not a claim to individual freedom of action but a distinctive and perennial emphasis on interpersonal relationships; such an emphasis revolves around acknowledging and maintaining one's position in relation to other members o f the same community, and in accordance with their perceptions about such a position. (Mao, 1994: 467)

In a recent article Leech attempts to show that there is no such East-West divide in politeness, using his GSP approach on a number of languages in order to lend credibility to his claim (Leech, 2007). For the purposes of this study, and predominantly because this study is rooted in a Western context, Brown and Levinson's conception of face does correspond well with the approaches taken by the speakers in my data. The speakers observed here are indeed rather self-centred and seem mostly concerned with their individual needs and aims, very much unmoved by societal considerations. We get a slightly differentiated view, however, when we take the role plays of my corpus into consideration. Here we find a discrepancy between actual speech behaviour as observed in the naturally occurring discourse and attitudes shown in enactments of similar situations, which are focussed on self to a much lesser degree. This seems to be due to certain expectations about normative behaviour in specific situational contexts. People appear to have certain ideas about what prototypical behaviour in a conflict

situation should be, even if these ideas do not always correspond with people's actual behaviour.

In Brown and Levinson's view, all linguistic interaction involves face work, and the utterance of so-called face threatening acts (FTAs). According to their theory, interlocutors in a conversation are constantly busy negotiating face, trying to maintain a balance where their own rights and self-perceptions remain intact and where they try, at the same time, not to violate anybody else's needs and perceptions. This notion becomes increasingly difficult to maintain when investigating so-called *face-threatening acts,* such as complaints. According to this view, certain speech-acts are intrinsically face threatening and uttering them without endangering the social relationship between the interlocutors necessitates the use of hedges and mitigating devices. Recent opinions contradict the view that any utterance is inherently face-threatening, or that FTAs are to be equated with speech acts (O'Driscoll, 2007).

Brown and Levinson (1987) base their ideas on speech act theory, which originates from the theories of the ordinary language philosophers Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), who claim that "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts" (Searle, 1969: 16). In Searle's view, any complete speech act is an illocutionary act, and its characteristic form is a complete sentence. An illocution consists of two parts, the illocutionary force and the propositional content. That explains why one sentence can have different meanings in different situational contexts. Illocutionary force indicating devices, such as intonation, adverbials, or modality, to name but a few examples, enable the hearer to interpret an utterance. In those cases in which speakers use indirect speech acts, interlocutors cannot rely on force indicating devices alone, but have to take the context and possible speaker intentions into account. In Brown and Levinson's view, indirect speech acts are used to convey politeness, and the higher the level of indirectness the more polite an utterance is. On the basis of Austin's original classification,[4] Searle distinguishes five classes of speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives[5].

[4] Austin distinguishes between verdictives, exercitives, comissives, behabitives, and expositives (Austin, 1962: 150).

[5] Representatives are acts which allow the speaker to express his views of the world, directives are acts which allow speakers to show others what s/he wants them to do, commissives reflect a

The present study investigates conflict episodes in service encounters, where the speech act Complaint is a frequently used substrategy. Searle (1976) grouped that particular speech act within the category of expressives, which are defined to serve as a means for the speaker to express his/her state of mind and feelings. As shown in chapter 2, complaints are usually triggered after someone committed a socially unacceptable act, or in the context of service encounters, when a problem arises or is not solved satisfactorily. Hence, the speaker who utters a complaint will have to express negative emotions, which is highly face threatening for the addressee. In Leech's (1983) theory we find the idea that there might be a distinction between 'relative politeness' and 'absolute politeness', the latter referring to acts which are inherently polite no matter what context they occur in (for example 'offers'). In analogy to this idea we might assume that there is also a concept of 'absolute impoliteness' and that complaints therefore are inherently and by definition impolite, whenever they are uttered. Recent insights into politeness and face-work have shown that (im)politeness is rarely inherent in a particular utterance[6] but is constantly negotiated between interlocutors. In this context it should be pointed out that the same appears to be true for the notions of face and self which need to be regarded both as relational and interactional phenomena (Arundale, 2006).

Much of the research on politeness conceptualises politeness as the goal of the interactions, in the sense that people consciously employ it in order to maintain social harmony. That might be true in many contexts, but does not apply to conflict discourse. Equally, the notion of face needs to be re-evaluated in the context of conflictual discourse (especially in service encounters), which is markedly different from discourse in the private domain.

> Face is a cluster of identity- and relational-based issues that simmers and surfaces before, during and after the conflict process. Face is associated with respect, honor, status, reputation, credibility, competence, family/network connection, loyalty, trust, relational indebtedness and obligation issues. It is a field concept (Ho, 1994) that has simultaneous affective (e.g. feelings of shame and pride), cognitive (e.g. calculating how much to give and receive face) and behavioural layers. (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 190)

As rightly pointed out by Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, the notion of face is not only linked to the conception others have of us, but rooted in considerations of affect,

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speaker's own intentions, expressives reveal speakers' emotions and state of mind, and declaratives refer to states of affairs (Hindelang, 1994: 49f).

[6] Even an apparently unambiguously polite utterance as for instance 'please' can be rude, depending on intonation and context.

cognition, which have an impact on how we present ourselves to others, and are perceived by them. Most notably in conflict discourse, rationally or emotionally motivated considerations might overshadow the importance of face considerations. Therefore, to use the terms 'polite' or 'impolite' in this context is misleading. The negotiation of conflict and the uttering of a complaint are perceived as inherently face threatening, but their execution is possible in many different ways. Interlocutors can choose from an inventory of strategies, and may deliver these strategies in certain ways, which might be *perceived* as polite or impolite by the hearer.

> Politeness is a dynamic concept, always open to adaptation and change in any group, in any age and indeed at any time. It is not a social anthropological given which can simply be applied to the analysis of social interaction, but actually arises out of that interaction. (Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 1992: 11)

The perception of politeness (and of impoliteness) depends to a large extent on the context and the internal workings of every particular interaction. It is indeed a dynamic concept, which is the main problem with those theories of politeness which try to formulate principles and maxims and to allocate politeness values for utterances which are detached of context. In order to understand (im)politeness phenomena better, it is imperative to look at actual speech in context and not just at isolated sentences. This is an approach adopted by Locher and Watts, who " [...] define politeness itself as a discursive concept arising out of interactants' perceptions and judgments of their own and others' verbal behavior." (Locher & Watts, 2005: 10). In the same way that (im)politeness is a discursive phenomenon, which is negotiated between interlocutors, conflict and complaints are not limited to single utterances but usually stretch over a number of turns. Speech act theory therefore is too limited in its approach to account for the mechanisms of conflict management or for politeness phenomena, since it

> [...] forces a sentence-based, speaker-oriented mode of analysis, requiring attribution of speech act categories where our own thesis requires that utterances are often equivocal in force (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 10),

as Brown and Levinson concede themselves. From recent research on politeness we must conclude that, in order to grasp (im)politeness phenomena, it is indeed necessary to investigate longer stretches of naturally occurring talk in various contexts. That does not mean, however, that the insights gained from speech act theory have lost all their meaning now:

> In any case, we recognized [...] that 'face-threatening acts' or FTAs need not be realized in sentence-like units, and the upshot of all this is that we must now acknowledge that the speech act categories that we employed were an underanalysed shorthand, but one which, were we to try again today, would still be hard to avoid. (P. Brown & Levinson, 1987: 10f)

Indeed, many researchers build on the insights and terminology introduced by Brown and Levinson, expanding and adapting them, but nonetheless leaving the core ideas unchanged. Kerbrat-Oreccioni, for instance, in analogy to face threatening acts (FTAs), introduces the notion of face flattering acts (FFAs), which serve as polite counter-measures for face threatening acts.

In light of the politeness theories discussed so far, we would have to assume that people, whenever they want to communicate, strive to minimize the face threat inherent in their utterances and that the maintenance of a good interpersonal relationship is one of their main concerns or goals in any interaction. This might be true in many types of conversation, but it certainly does not seem to apply to problem-solving episodes in service encounters. As Eelen (2001: 174-177) points out, the framework suggested by Grice seems to be largely inappropriate for the analysis of conflict exchanges. Locher and Watts have a similar view, and when they claim "we are not therefore arguing that relational work is always oriented to the maintenance of harmony, cooperation, and social equilibrium" (Locher & Watts, 2005: 11), they are probably also referring to conflict exchanges like the ones under investigation here. In conflict exchanges, *transactional* goals (such as solving the problem at hand) are much more dominant than *interactional* goals (Brown & Yule, 1983). Face-work in conflict is used as a tool or facilitator to achieve a transactional goal, not primarily to establish or maintain interpersonal harmony. The reason for this can be found in the specific nature of service encounters, where the participants usually are strangers, meeting for the first, and most likely, last time in their life, and only for the specific purposes of this particular service encounter - as such, the interpersonal relationship between them is of minor importance.

This does not mean, however, that face-work is or should be absent from conflict discourse. As seen on level 1 in House's multilevel model of politeness (House, 2005: 17), there are certain biological and societal necessities which are reflected in Brown and Levinson's concept of negative and positive politeness. People bring certain expectations to interactions with others, and these

expectations include being treated respectfully and with civility, something which also holds true for their expectations in conflict exchanges. Conflict episodes involve a high amount of face-threat, and therefore in this kind of interaction, people are especially concerned with protecting their own face.

> More specifically, face influences conflict behaviour, because, in any conflict situation, conflict parties have to consider protecting self-interest conflict goals and honouring or attacking another person's conflict goals. On top of incompatible goals, intercultural conflict parties typically use their habitual conflict scripts to approach the conflict situation. (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 188)

In conflict exchanges, people are primarily concerned with their own goals, and use face strategies as tools to attain them. Participants in conflict exchanges are far more self-centred than the ideal speaker in Brown and Levinson's framework. Conflict exchanges involve goal-oriented behaviour and consideration primarily for *self*, not for *other* (see the model of self-politeness by Chen, 2001). Self-politeness in these instances is used is a kind of self-defence mechanism (Chen, 2001: 88) and "refers to cases in communication where the need to protect and enhance one's own face influences what one says and the way she says it" (Chen, 2001: 88). In this view, which seems much more applicable to conflict discourse than the theoretical approaches discussed so far, face-work is conceptualized as *self*-oriented rather than *other*-oriented, in the sense that speakers are much more interested in preserving their own face than that of their interlocutor. Face-work in this view is self-defence, but it is also mainly goal-oriented, as interlocutors not only want to preserve their own face-wants, but also, and possibly more importantly, want to achieve the transactional goal which prompted them to enter the conflict exchange in the first place:

> We predict that individualists, when their face is threatened, will tend to use situational accounts (i.e. external causes such as blaming generalized others or the situation) to save face. Situational accounts refer to stories (e.g. car problem) that attribute the reasons of the conflict problem to external sources (i.e. external to one's ability, disposition, or competence). (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 192)

This prediction by Ting-Toomey and Kurogi is confirmed in the data of my study (see analysis). Customers in service encounters do indeed try to defer the blame for the problem away from themselves to other, external sources, and the use of narratives is a very common device used to embellish claims and to persuade company representatives to act in accordance with the customers' expectations. In

this context Ting Toomey and Kurogi's categorisation of face-saving strategies can be helpful for the analysis of conflict episodes. Based on ideas from social psychology (Brown, 1977), they distinguish between *preventive* facework and *restorative* facework strategies.

> Preventive facework strategies (e.g. the use of disclaimers and hedges) refer to actions designed to "hide, soften, ward off, prevent, or block...and to control the occurrence of future events that one expects will foster an appearance of weakness or vulnerability, particularly when it is presumed that such events will impair one's image or the image of those whom one represents" (Brown, 1977, pp. 278-279). Restorative facework strategies refer to actions designed to "repair damaged or lost face [and are] occurring in response to events that have already transpired. Thus, it is past-oriented and defensive. It reflects actions designed to re-establish or reassert one's capability and/or strength after one feels they have been damaged" (Brown, 1977: p. 281). (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 191)

This approach introduces the idea of face-saving measures *before* or *after* face-threat has occurred, which means that it introduces the factor of temporality, which was missing from Brown and Levinson's framework. Many strategies used in conflictual service encounter exchanges can be classified as preventative facework measures (for example the use of apologies, justifications, and the like).

As shown above, researchers struggle with the notion of politeness. The search for inherently polite utterances, as well as for a systematics of polite behaviour, have been fairly inconclusive. I shall argue here that no utterance is inherently polite or impolite. Whether an utterance is perceived as (im)polite depends on the way the hearer decodes it. It seems adequate in this context to compare politeness to a commodity like money[7] which does not have any value as such, but is assigned a symbolic value by the people who use it. The hearer ratifies the speaker's utterance as polite or impolite. The question arises what this ratification is based on. What are people's perceptions and expectations in relation to politeness and impoliteness based on? Lay people's conceptions of politeness are certainly less clearly defined than the value of money. Whereas in a country we are very well aware of the value of our denomination, our assumptions about politeness seem fuzzy at best. Nonetheless, societies do have norms for polite behaviour, and again every single member of a speech community has certain expectations and opinions about polite behaviour as well. Therefore I agree with

[7] This analogy was already suggested by Werkhofer (1992).

Locher, who claims that we have to investigate the context, the situation, and the evoked norms when we investigate politeness phenomena.

> Politeness cannot be investigated without looking in detail at the context, the speakers, the situation and the evoked norms. In the end, however, politeness will always be identified and evaluated by both the speaker and the hearer as norm-based and, in this sense, ultimately also moralistic. (Locher, 2004: 91)

Locher in this quote also refers back to the Chinese concept of face and face work, which is fraught with moralistic connotations (Hu, 1944: 46). This leads directly to the expectations participants bring to any kind of discourse they engage in. Apparently speakers do have certain expectations as to norm-guided behaviour and the appropriateness of utterances in certain contexts.

3.1.3 Norms and Appropriateness

In terms of problem-solving strategies in service-encounters, face-work is a central aspect of these interactions. Whether an utterance is perceived as (im)polite, however, depends to a large extent on the interlocutors' personal and culturally shaped expectations of normative and appropriate behaviour. Clearly, participants in conflictual service encounter discourse have certain expectations as to how such discourse has to evolve and what they expect their interlocutor's behaviour to be like:

> "Such assumptions and expectations are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned" (Fairclough, 2001: 64) .

It is only when such expectations are not met that people begin to assess the situation in terms of politeness or impoliteness. Speech behaviour which conforms to the norms of a speech community and/or to the norms of an individual speaker will be judged as appropriate.

> Appropriateness remains a useful term to use with caution when discussing the way that individuals come to an assessment of their own and others' utterances in relation to a set of perceived group norms. (Mills, 2003: 70)

The term appropriateness is also useful because politeness judgments may vary according to the situational context and the participants of an interaction; it thus relies on a process of assessment and judgment (Mills, 2003: 71). An utterance might be judged appropriate in one context, but not in another, or by one person, but not by another. Naturally, judgements of norms and appropriateness may also

change over time. The notion of the historicity of politeness (Ehlich, 1992; Sell, 1992) is often overlooked in research on politeness phenomena. Judgments about appropriate behaviour certainly do change over time[8] and are not only negotiated locally, but also related to cultural conventions and societal norms.

In the discursive approach to politeness Locher states that "what is appropriate cannot be predicted universally and must be addressed at the local level" (Locher, 2006: 253). Locher, along with and on the basis of ideas put forward by Watts (Watts, 2005), argues that politeness phenomena should not be regarded as a dichotomy of politeness and impoliteness, but distinguishes three kinds of relational work: politic/appropriate, polite, or impolite (Locher, 2006: 255). In this view, politic behaviour would be the kind of behaviour that would be regarded as appropriate and adhering to the norm, and would therefore be unmarked and unremarked on by the interlocutors. Polite behaviour would be positively marked (although sometimes 'over-polite' behaviour can also be negatively marked) as going beyond what is expected in such a context, whereas impolite behaviour would be noticed as violating the expected norms.

Although this is an interesting approach to the problem of norms and appropriateness, in my opinion it does not correspond to the evaluations actual language users have of politeness and appropriate behaviour. I therefore prefer not to take over Watts' and Locher's approach and concur with Spencer-Oatey who takes "[...](im)politeness to be the subjective judgments that people make about the social appropriateness of verbal and non-verbal behavior" (Spencer-Oatey, 2005: 97), which are not inherent in any utterances, and cannot be classified neatly. However, in the context of service encounters, there seems to be some theoretical construct out there of what the behavioural norm in such contexts should be, which is evidenced by the abundant literature on customer service. Many companies try to provide their personnel with guidelines as to what customers expect and how customer complaints can be dealt with successfully (Forsyth, 1999; Trosborg, 2003). This awareness of certain customer expectations, however, is not always reflected in every day dealings with customers.

[8] One example is the usage of greetings in Germany. A few decades ago a formal handshake and the use of 'Guten Tag' were the universal norm, whereas nowadays that custom is reserved for formal meetings and strangers, and in other contexts have been replaced by less formal greetings ('hallo').

3.2. Impoliteness

Whereas politeness phenomena have been the focal point of extensive research and theory building, the phenomenon of impoliteness remains under-investigated. One general assumption in politeness research is that within social interactions, people will try to be cooperative, and approach discourse with the aim of minimizing face-loss and conflict. By their very nature, conflict episodes and complaints entail a certain degree of interpersonal friction, and therefore we need to question whether face-saving issues are as relevant in these contexts as when we investigate other, less conflict-wrought, speech events, such as for example requests or apologies. In these circumstances, focussing on politeness seems to be too limited to describe the mechanisms at work in conflictual service encounters. Also, generally speaking, politeness and impoliteness seem to be the extreme ends of a broad spectrum of what goes on in discourse. In the context of problem-solving episodes in service encounters, face considerations and conflict avoidance seem to be of minor importance compared to the main transactional goal of solving the problem at hand. In order to reach that goal, interlocutors employ strategies which can include politeness or impoliteness considerations. This initially raises the question of speaker intentions and hearer interpretations. Apparently, within the notion of impoliteness, there is a difference in whether a speaker is inadvertently impolite, or purposefully rude. Lakoff (1989) distinguishes three kinds of polite behaviour: when interlocutors adhere to certain rules of politeness, whether expected or not, she observes *polite* behaviour; when people do not adhere to such rules their behaviour is *non-polite*; and when they do not follow any expected rules their behaviour is *rude*. This distinction to me seems more logical than the notion of politic (Locher, 2006) behaviour mentioned above. In Lakoff's view, which is based on Grice's Cooperative Principle and Lakoff's own theory of politeness (see 3.1.1 above), there are certain rules interlocutors need to adhere to if they want to appear polite. Sometimes, as for instance in misunderstandings, in cases where people judge situations differently, or with interactants from different cultural backgrounds, they might inadvertently not adhere to these rules, which according to Lakoff would be impolite. Rudeness would be a deliberate neglect of expected (and known) politeness rules.

Based on very similar considerations, Kienpointner (1997) makes a useful distinction on the basis of the notions of cooperative, non-cooperative and competitive interactions (Kienpointner, 1997: 255). His approach is also heavily based on Grice's cooperative principle, and starts from the idea that cooperative behaviour is inherently polite, whereas non-cooperative behaviour has to be regarded as rude. Kienpointner points out, however, that matters are slightly more complicated, as there are lots of instances where rudeness can be cooperative (as for example amongst close friends, or in irony), or where politeness is exaggerated to 'overpoliteness' (Kienpointner, 1997: 257).

> (...) utterances which at first sight seem to be rude according to standard rules of polite behaviour in a speech community can actually be cooperative behaviour in specific contexts. I call such behaviour 'cooperative rudeness'.(Kienpointner, 1997: 257)

Kienpointner suggests a distinction between politeness and rudeness "as the extreme points in a continuum of more or less cooperative or competitive communicative behaviour" (Kienpointner, 1997: 282). He marks politeness as prototypically cooperative (with possible exceptions, though), designed to stabilize "the personal relationships of the interacting individuals, thus making it easier to achieve the mutually accepted goal of the interaction" (Kienpointner, 1997: 259). Applying this view to problem-solving episodes in service encounters, we would have to assume that politeness can be used as a tool to achieve the goal of solving the problem at hand. However, in this particular context matters are more complicated, and customers (and to some extent also service providers) can at times be observed to deliberately employ competitive behaviour and rudeness in order to achieve their transactional goals. Kienpointner's distinction of cooperative, non-cooperative, and competitive behaviour is quite useful as it manages to avoid the term (im)politeness, but it is not fully applicable to complaint behaviour in service encounters, where keeping the interpersonal relationship intact is only of strategic importance, while goal-orientation is the strongest motivator for the interactants. Sometimes, in order to attain their interactional goals, interlocutors in service encounters resort to blunt and very direct behaviour. This might be classified as rudeness, and either way will aggravate the interpersonal relationship of the interlocutors, even if it helps them to reach their goal. Rudeness in Kienpointner's framework is further defined as non-cooperative

or competitive communication behaviour (Kienpointner, 1997: 259) and is characterized as the factor

> (...) which destabilizes the personal relationships of the interacting individuals and thus makes it more difficult to achieve the mutually accepted goal of the interaction or makes it difficult to agree on a mutually accepted goal in the first place. (Kienpointner, 1997: 259)

He also points out that rudeness "creates or maintains an emotional atmosphere of mutual irreverence and antipathy, which primarily serves egocentric interests" (Kienpointner, 1997: 259). This is one of the few studies on (im)politeness that takes (negative) emotions into account, if only in passing. Kienpointner further distinguishes between cooperative rudeness and non-cooperative rudeness, a distinction which appears plausible.

Lakoff's idea that rudeness comes about when politeness rules are neglected intentionally is taken up in Culpeper's definition of Impoliteness:

> Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2). The key aspect of this definition is that it makes clear that impoliteness, as indeed politeness, is constructed in the interaction between speaker and hearer. (Culpeper, 2005: 38)

Culpeper does not make the same distinction as Lakoff, as for him impoliteness seems to be intrinsically linked to the notion of intentionality, whereas that was classified as rudeness, not impoliteness, by Lakoff. In the end, however, it is not the notion of intentionality, but the hearer's perceptions that will decide whether an utterance was processed as polite or impolite. Culpeper's definition includes the important, and nowadays widely accepted, observation that impoliteness is constructed in the interaction, and that it depends on the interpretation of the interlocutors whether an utterance is ratified as polite or impolite, in which context he notes that "the phenomenon of impoliteness is to do with how offence is communicated and taken" (Culpeper, 2005: 36). Following this and the argument that "[...] impoliteness is not inherent in particular linguistic and non-linguistic signals" (Culpeper, 2005: 41), the interpretation of an interlocutor's behaviour encompasses the speaker's intentions to a certain extent, but focuses more heavily on the hearer's interpretations. Only if the hearer attributes the notion of offensiveness to an utterance can it really be classified as rude. This idea is especially important in the context of conflictual service encounters, as in my corpus I will show that very often utterances are perceived as impolite (but not

meant that way), and to a much lesser extent interlocutors are impolite on purpose.

My own interpretation of the terminology favours a usage which applies the notion of intentionality to rudeness, and classifies impoliteness in more general terms.

> Kasper (1990:208), drawing on Lakoff (1989) writes, "Rudeness ... is constituted by deviation from whatever counts as politic in a given social context, is inherently confrontational and disruptive to social equilibrium. (Beebe, 1995: 159)

When investigating intentional impolite behaviour – rudeness – different possible motivations and kinds of rudeness can be observed. Beebe (1995: 156) gives a useful overview of possible kinds of rudeness: As mentioned above, rudeness can be non-competitive as for instance in the use of irony. Rudeness can also be strategic – as it often is in the context of conflictual service encounters where people use it consciously as one strategy to achieve a goal. Most importantly though, rudeness can be linked to the emotional state a speaker is in, and would therefore be motivated by a person's inability to reign in their emotions. This 'lack of affect control' (Beebe, 1995: 156) can often be observed in conflictual service encounters. Participants are emotionally upset, and therefore tend not to show consideration for their interlocutor's face. Rudeness in this context can have two main functions, namely to vent negative feelings, and/or to get power (Beebe, 1995: 159).

3.3. The Concept of Power in Conflictual Service Encounters

Service encounters are by their very nature asymmetrical exchanges, in the sense that the participants come from different social systems, with company representatives as in-group members of an institution and with customers who are outsiders (Fairclough, 2001: 53). Depending on the course of the interaction, on the particular circumstances, and, most importantly, the institutional context, there is an unequal power relationship between the interlocutors. The notion of power in conflict discourse "refers to the extent of influence and the degree of compliance between two or more interactants in negotiating their differences" (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998: 194); therefore power is inherent in the potential to control the behaviour of the other (Brown & Gilman, 1972: 255). Power is consequently expressed in the participants' ability to achieve their own transactional goals.

> An individual A possesses power if s/he has the freedom of action to achieve the goals s/he has set her/himself, regardless of whether or not this involves the potential to impose A's will on other to carry out action that are in A's interest. (Watts, 1991: 18)

In conflictual service encounters, consequently, power is reflected in the way the participants are able to convince their interlocutors of complying with their line of argument and to help them achieve their transactional goals. In that sense, especially for the customers, power is closely linked with conversational strategies of argumentation and persuasion. This kind of power balance is negotiated online between the interlocutors with (usually) the customers (trying) to impose their plans and self-evaluations on the other (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 77). However, the power constellation is predetermined by the institutional context of the service encounter.

Power in the literature is often used synonymously with the terms *social power* or *status*, and sometimes with *dominance* and *authority* (compare Spencer-Oatey, 1996: 7). These terms aim to describe a relationship of inequality between interlocutors, which can refer to the power of control, to social status or rank, to authority, or to the legitimate right to exert influence (Spencer-Oatey, 1996: 11). Locher, however, points out that there is a marked difference in the semantics of the terms *power* and *status* (Locher, 2004: 30-34). In the example of the service encounters investigated here, it is important to distinguish the two terms. Status refers to a hierarchical relationship within a system, rather than the ability to influence the actions of others, which is what power can be described as (Leichty & Applegate, 1991). As pointed out above, company representatives and customers do not belong to the same system. Within an institution, of which a customer is an outsider, there can be a difference in status between the employees, for example concerning the rank they have in the company, such as manager or manager's assistant. The company-internal ranking means that company representatives amongst themselves are higher or lower in the hierarchy, which affects the way they interact as well as the power balance between them. Linked to status is a higher degree of power, usually expressed in the right to make decisions. This kind of status can also affect dealings with customers, especially in the sense that customers are aware of such company-internal mechanisms and expect (even) more forthcoming behaviour from company representatives of higher status. Customers assume that company representatives with higher status will be

empowered to bend the company policy in the customers' favour. Concerning the interpersonal relationship between company representative and customer, only the power factor, but not the status factor is important, as ultimately it is inconsequential for the customer what rank the company representative has, as long as they fulfil their obligations towards the customer.

Within the situational context of the service encounter, the relationship between customer and company representative is marked by certain rights and obligations they have towards each other, comparable to an example about the driver/passenger and waiter/customer relationship reported by Spencer-Oatey:

> In cases such as these, it seems that various interpretations are possible, depending on the rights and obligations associated with the role. For example, with respect to payment, drivers and waiters have the right to receive payment from passengers and customers, and in this sense have power over them if the passenger/customer tries to avoid paying. On the other, drivers and waiters are obliged to provide good service, and if they fail to do so, passengers and customers have the right to complain, and so in these situations it is the passengers and customers who have greater power. So perhaps if these relative rights and obligations balance out, the relationship can be regarded as equal, as Wood and Kroger (1991) maintain. (Spencer-Oatey, 1996: 10)

In theory, the relationship between the interactants in the service encounters described here is very similar. Relative to the rights and obligations they have towards each other, their relative power varies, and all things considered, their relationship is one of equals. In practice, however, this is an asymmetrical relationship with in actual fact the company representative being the one who has more power than the customer, for the simple reason that his/her actions are embedded in and supported by the institution they work for. Within the framework of the company policy, he or she can make decisions that affect the customer negatively or positively. In reaction to the company representatives' behaviour the customers have only very few options. They can for instance threaten to report the incident to someone higher in the company's hierarchy or they can "make the ultimate complaint and fly with some other airline in the future" (Stein, 2005: 73). Both the behaviour of the company representative and customer are constrained by their respective roles. For the company representative this means that he/she is not there as the person they are in private, but occupying a specific 'subject position'[9]: that of professional representative of the company they work for. This means that

[9] Fairclough distinguishes between contents (what is said or done), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse) and subjects (the 'subject positions' people can occupy (Fairclough, 2001: 39).

they have to adhere to company policy, having to act in accordance with it, even in those instances when they might personally disagree with it. The customer, on the other hand, comes to the encounter in his/her private role, but as someone who has purchased a service and therefore assumes having certain rights.

The interlocutors in conflictual service encounters have clearly defined roles which shape their expectations and obligations vis-à-vis the other. Customer and company representative have very different roles, and apparently also different perceptions about what the respective roles entail. Both parties seem to have certain preconceived notions about how they expect the other person to behave, and these rarely correspond to the behaviour actually shown in the complaint exchanges of my corpus. Such differences in expectation might lead to disappointment and negative attitudes.

Customers tend to bring to complaint interactions a preconceived notion that they have certain rights because they are customers of a company. Their claim is that they have paid money to receive a service, and that they are therefore entitled to compensation if things go wrong or the service has not been delivered (satisfactorily). For most customers it is irrelevant in these instances whether the reason for things going wrong lies with themselves or with the company. When they themselves are to blame, customers still tend to expect the company to make allowances for them and try to accommodate them, for the simple reason that they are customers. In general people think that companies have an interest in coveting customers and should (want to) accommodate customers wherever possible. Within this line of reasoning, most customers approach a complaint episode with the full expectation that the use of certain conversational strategies will invariably be successful and solve the problem in their favour. These strategies involve mentioning that they are paying and/or loyal customers, the request to speak to a manager (someone with more power), threats to take their custom elsewhere, and threats to address a written complaint to the company.

The role of the company representatives is usually determined by company policy. The company representatives in my corpus therefore usually have different assumptions about a complaint exchange than the customers. Especially when the problem is not demonstrably the company's fault, the company representative will usually not be inclined to accommodate the customer. This is reflected in their behaviour, verbally and non-verbally. The company representatives usually adopt

the stance that the problem is the customer's fault to begin with, and no amount of argumentation or reasoning will change that. That notwithstanding, they will still treat the customer with respect and a certain degree of politeness, which is reflected in the use of address terms ('sir'), the use of apologetic utterances, and the fact that the company agents try to remain calm and neutral. Whether the problem was caused by the company or the customer, it is always the company representative who is in a more powerful position in this kind of exchange. They can decide to stop communicating with the customer, they can decide whether to accommodate them or not. It is therefore the company representative who ultimately shapes and steers the interaction. Initially, the power relationship is shaped by the institutional context and the interlocutors' roles. The interaction takes place on the company's premises and according to guidelines set by the company - it is therefore institutionally shaped and predetermined. Fairclough refers to this as the power *behind* discourse:

> 'But the power behind the conventions of a discourse type belongs not to the institutions itself (whatever that would mean) but to the power-holders in the institution. One indication of this is the *policing* of conventions, the way they are enforced, both in the negative sense of what sanctions are taken against those who infringe them and in the positive sense of what affirmations there are for those who abide by them. The policing of conventions is in the hands of institutional power-holders, at various levels.' (Fairclough, 2001: 51)

What Fairclough describes here are mechanisms that shape a conversation, but which are not necessarily apparent *in* the discourse. In the service encounters discussed here that means that the people who put the company policies into practice and made sure that the employees reinforce them, are directly responsible for the company representatives' actions and for their relationship with the customers. A company's management is therefore directly responsible for the way in which its employees interact with the customers and, consequently, how the customers perceive the company and its attitude towards service and customer interaction (compare Edgar, 1990).

In service encounters such as the ones described here, relational inequalities determine the interactions between company representatives and their customers to a certain extent. In these encounters, the power relationship is complex and determined by various factors, such as the interactants' roles, but also the positions the interlocutors assume within the encounter.

> Exploring in more detail the linguistic basis of such frameworks, Goffman (1981a) introduced the term footing to describe how, at the same time that participants frame events, they negotiate the interpersonal relationships, or "alignments", that constitute those events. (Tannen & Wallat, 1987: 207)

Specifically entering the interaction for the purpose of problem solving, the participants have to plan initially how best to achieve their transactional goal. A customer can decide to be very confrontational and for instance opt for 'righteous indignation' (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990: 86) when complaining, or may decide to be more conciliatory, depending on which strategy he/she deems most successful in order to solve the problem at hand.

> [...] power relations in interaction are not necessarily fixed, predetermined states of affairs, but are constantly shifting and being redefined between participants on a very local level. These shifts can be observed by looking at the participatory framework and structural organization of the talk. (Thornborrow, 2002, 134)

Although the power relationships between the interlocutors in service encounters are predetermined by the institutional context and the participants' roles, the power balance can tip over either side in the course of the interaction, influenced by the alignment of the participants, and to a great extent aided by the use of more or less powerful language (Blankenship & Holtgraves, 2005).

3.4. Frames

In service encounters the context in which the interaction takes place is very clearly defined and very similar for every single interaction. Although Western societies are highly individualistic, people are still caught up in social conventions (Fairclough, 2001: 7) and rely on past experience and cultural norms. Evidence from pragmatics research shows that the context does indeed shape the way people interact and act through language.

> Earlier definitions of context as a set of variables statically surrounding stretches of talk are consequently abandoned in favour of a dynamic psycho-social view of a mutually reflexive relationship between talk and context, with talk and the interpretive and inferential processes it generates shaping context as much as context shapes talk (see, e.g., Duranti & Goodwin, 1992). (House, 2005: 15)

Context in this view shapes the way people interact as well as the way they interpret their interlocutors' actions. The term context, however, seems too broad and not specific enough for the kind of situation that I am investigating.

Introducing the notion of *frame* (for an exhaustive discussion of the term see Bednarek, 2005) will enable me to make specific claims about the nature of complaints in conflictual service encounters, and might eventually be useful for distinguishing complaints in the private domain from those in service encounters, or, more generally speaking, for the distinction between everyday pragmatics and business pragmatics (Trosborg, 2003: 250). The term frame was originally introduced by Charles Fillmore within semantics in the 1970s, and is still an important notion in cognitive linguistics. Frames are defined by Fillmore as "specific unified frameworks of knowledge, or coherent schematizations of experience" (Fillmore, 1985: 223) and as "cognitive structures [...] knowledge of which is presupposed for the concept encoded by the words" (Fillmore & Atkins, 1992: 75). The concept of frames was also introduced in research on artificial intelligence by Minsky (1975), who defines them as follows:

> Here is the essence of the theory: When one encounters a new situation (or makes a substantial change in one's view of the present problem) one selects from memory a substantial structure called a frame. This is a remembered framework to be adapted to fit reality by changing details as necessary. (Minsky, 1975: 212)

Minsky's definition assumes that any situation is represented in an individual's mind as a cognitive model, against which situational factors are mapped and evaluated.

Its use in different research disciplines, as well as the interchangeable use of synonyms for the same concept, have led to some confusion as to the meaning of the term 'frame'. Tannen and Wallat (1987: 206), after a review of the relevant literature, come to the conclusion that the terms *frame*, *script*, *schema*, *prototype*, *speech activity*, *template*, and *module* all refer to structures of expectation:

> The term frame, and related terms such as script, schema, prototype, speech activity, template and module, have been variously used in linguistics, artificial intelligence, anthropology and psychology. Tannen (1979) reviews this literature and suggests that all these concepts reflect the notion of structures of expectation. (Tannen & Wallat, 1987: 206)

Agreeing with them, I hold the view that the term *frame* is clearest when we are trying to describe a very specific situational context and the participants' expectations it triggers. After decades of research and suggesting more adequate terms, the general agreement to date seems to be to settle for the term frame and to go back to Fillmore's original delineation of it, as suggested for example by Bednarek:

> It seems to me as if the competing terms (*scenario, schema, script*) usually differ only in emphasis and cannot easily be distinguished, and that, considering the examples used in their elaboration, they may be seen as particular instances of frames. I will hence follow Fillmore in regarding *frame* as "a general cover term for the set of concepts variously known, in the literature on natural language understanding, as 'schema', 'script', 'scenario', 'ideational scaffolding', 'cognitive model', or 'folk theory'. (Fillmore 1982: 111). (Bednarek, 2005: 688)

Although Bednarek follows Fillmore's interpretation of the term's meaning, she introduces her own definition of frame, taking into account the cognitive aspect involved in processing situational context. Bednarek claims that

> [...] a *frame* consists of *cognitive features/components* and their relations. A feature/component can itself be a sub-frame. The features seem to exist on a *scale* ranging from *central* to *peripheral* and provide default assumptions by supplying *prototypes*. Associated *expectations* are higher with regards to central features than with regards to peripheral features: if a feature is central to a frame, a speaker will most certainly expect an actual instance of this feature when its respective frame is activated. (Bednarek, 2005: 691)

The notion of frame therefore presupposes certain pre-established cognitive structures, namely 'structures of expectations' (Locher, 2004: 57). In the context of conflict discourse in service encounters, the particular frame evokes certain expectations about norms and prototypical features in the participants' minds. The concept of frame therefore refers to a storage of shared knowledge and expectations to which speakers refer when they have to deal with a particular situation. They can map what they are experiencing at this particular moment against previous experiences of similar instances.

> Broadly speaking, frame theory deals with our knowledge of the world. In a first definition, a frame can be regarded as a mental knowledge structure which captures the 'typical' features of the world. (Bednarek, 2005: 685)

Consequently, the recognition of a particular frame triggers certain expectations in an individual. Having some previous experience or similarly general world knowledge, people will expect others to act accordingly.

> Frames establish the expectations people have regarding behaviour in a restaurant, at the doctor's, or in a lecture. Frames refer to past experience and incorporate norms of how behaviour *should* be. There can be multiple layers of frames which influence each other. (Locher, 2004: 47)

As pointed out by Locher, people have certain expectations when they enter into a certain situation or frame. Past experiences, but also general world knowledge, will be activated, and the participants will act in a manner that they think is appropriate in that particular frame, but will also process events accordingly as "linguistic data

are automatically interpreted in terms of a particular set of representations" (Escandell-Vidal, 1996: 635).

All societies have certain norms of behaviour which are conventionalized and therefore prototypical in a given culture (Bednarek, 2005: 690) and such norms of behaviour are apparently also stored in people's minds with regard to conflicts and complaints in service encounters. In my corpus I deal with situations which all have a clearly defined context or frame: the complaint event in a service encounter. As my data is focussed on one particular kind of service encounter, involving two companies which are people carriers (one specializing in low cost flights, the other in train journeys) the frame is highly specific, very comparable, and stable. In the case of the complaint event in a service encounter, there are certain elements that constitute the frame and are non-interchangeable. Involved in this frame are a representative of the company, a customer, and a problem. The place (in the case of the TV documentaries) is the airport, more specifically at the airline desk[10]. The space is usually clearly defined with the company representative seated at their workplace behind the desk, and the customer standing in front of the desk. Interactants in the 'complaint in a service encounter frame' will recognize the situation and compare it with the mental model they have established on the basis of similar occurrences.

3.5. Goals

In conflictual service encounters the discourse usually is highly goal-oriented, although we can observe goal multiplicity, as participants tend to have more goals than one in any given interaction. Goals in this context can be loosely defined as the "desired conversational outcomes" (Waldron, Cegala, Sharkey, & Teboul, 1990: 102).

As Craig (1986; 1990)[11] points out, it is important to distinguish between different kinds of goals within discourse. He roughly distinguishes between the

[10] In the case of the telephone conversations, the interaction takes place with the interactants in two different places: the customers are usually calling the company from their own home or work place, and the call is received by the company representative on the company's premises.

[11] Craig's distinction of goals is rather confusing: In discourse studies the term *goal* is used in various different ways and not always, it would seem, with full awareness of distinctions implied in other usages. An earlier essay (Craig 1986) highlighted several such distinctions. First, *intentional* goals are states of affairs that speakers consciously intend (with varying degrees of explicitness and specificity) to

prototypical goal in discourse, which is strategic and purely result- or outcome-oriented, and other goals. In the context of conflictual service encounters the prototypical goal is wanting to solve the problem at hand (for example: a customer wants to get on a plane).

> Prototypical goals are intentional, positive, and strategic. The prototypical person with a goal is one who strategically selects discursive means in order to achieve a consciously intended outcome. All other goal-concepts are at best 'quasi-goals' in relation to this prototypical sense of the term. Strip away intentionality from goals and you get *functions* of discourse that can be analysed empirically without reference to a speaker's mental states; [...)] (Craig, 1990: 163)

Craig's prototypical goals in the literature are usually referred to as *instrumental* or *transactional* goals, whereas the secondary or 'quasi-goals' would be relating to the interpersonal relationship of the interlocutors and are known most widely as *relational* or *interactional* goals (Tracy & Coupland, 1990: 5).

In conflict discourse, the interlocutors' transactional goals are usually at odds, and the conversation revolves around means of finding compromises or solutions. The transactional goals in these contexts are usually to solve the problem at hand, to get on the plane, to get money (compensation), etc. and the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors and the maintenance of each other's face wants are of much less importance and only subsidiary goals, if at all present in the interlocutors' mind. Goals are usually bound to a social situation (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990: 159), and much less to a person and their attitudes, especially since certain social situations entail certain goals and forms of interaction (Bavelas et al., 1990: 136). Participants in a conflictual service encounter exchange will bring certain culturally shaped preconceptions to such an exchange and plan their conversational strategies accordingly. How such discourse develops, and whether the initial goals can be pursued and eventually reached, depends entirely on the interactants and the direction their discourse takes.

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bring about through their discourse; but *functional* goals are cognitive structures (intentionality not presumed) inferred by an observer in order to account for input-output regularities in a speaker's behaviour. Second, positive goals are directly involved in the causal production of behaviour; but *dialectical* goals emerge at a conceptual or discursive level and may be only loosely or retrospectively connected to particular actions. Third, *strategic* goals are contingent outcomes of plans of action; but *formal* goals are intrinsic to conventional, rule-governed episodes to which they stand at 'official' purposes or end-states. These distinctions, which can be taken to represent alternative conceptualisations of goal, have implications for methodology as well as for the analysis of such theoretical problems as goal indeterminacy and multiple goals (Craig 1986). (Craig, 1990: 163)

Therefore, goals are subject to change and adjustments, according to the course of the conversation and its particular circumstances.

> [...] there are interactions between goals and actions. Goals affect the actions of the speaker and the subsequent actions of the interlocutor; the speaker's goals generate his/her own actions and elicit the actions of the interlocutor. Actions also affect goals; they may lead to the completion or modification of goals. (Hayashi, 1999: 99)

Goals and actions are clearly connected in discourse, so any initial goals the speakers might have brought to the conversation can at any time be influenced or changed on the basis of the participants' actions. It follows that any planning as to achieving the transactional goal must be adjusted constantly in order to suit the adaptation or replacement of goals; plans are thus sources for situated action, but do not in any strong sense determine its course. (Suchman, 1987: 52).

When speaking of planning, of course it would be unrealistic to assume that speakers have a very clear idea of every single thing they are going to say, especially as they cannot predict their interlocutors' reactions. However, they need to have a vague idea what stance they want to take in the interaction, what their opening phrase will be, and which conversational strategies might be beneficial in attaining their transactional goal. Planning, and adjusting the plan during the course of a conversation, are metacognitive processes involving reflective operations that take place contingently during intense reasoning. (Hayashi, 1999: 101). What happens in the planning process seems to be that

> (...) while the speaker may initially set up plans top-down, on the basis of goals and sub-goals, many plan construction processes are also "opportunistic" bottom-up operations, since planners can only specify global outlines and initial sequences of actions (Hobbs and Evans 1980). (Hayashi, 1999: 100)

Goal management clearly seems to involve on-line cognitive adjustment (Waldron et al., 1990: 116), very much depending on the strategies and arguments used by the other. In conflictual service encounters, goal achievement is the only reason for the conversation taking place, and the interlocutors, and the customers in particular, have a great need to achieve their transactional goal(s). In order to reach their goals, they have to resort to strategic devices such as argumentation and persuasion, with the goal of gaining the company representatives' compliance (Tracy & Coupland, 1990: 7). As pointed out by Poggi, persuasion in the Aristotelian sense consists of the strategies of rational argumentation, the speaker's credibility and reliability, and the appeal to emotion (Poggi, 2005), and clearly

these are all strategies and ideas the customers use in their attempt to sway the company representative in their favour. Not only are customers appealing to a company representative's emotions such as empathy, they often are themselves highly evolved emotionally, which might be one of the reasons that during the process of persuasion they might lose sight of the inter-relational aspect of the interaction. In this context, relational goals are much less important to the interlocutors and at least in conflictual service encounters it seems to be true that

> relational and identity management goals are less cognitively accessible and perhaps less 'rational' than are instrumental goals. (Waldron et al., 1990: 114)

The interlocutor's goal orientation, paired with a high emotional investment might make face considerations less salient.

3.6. Emotion

It has been established that conflict and complaints in service encounters entail a problem-solving process, with strong goal orientation. It is the speaker's goal to resolve the conflict at hand, and to do so in accordance with their pre-established roles. The company representative will try to balance the requirements of the company policy with the needs of the customer, whereas the customers will try to get the service they think they are entitled to because of having paid for it. We can assume that both parties will essentially want to adhere to the cooperative principle (Grice, 1968: 45) and have an interest in a smooth, socially acceptable interaction. We would expect them to use face-saving measures (this would be expected especially from the company representative, in his/her institutional role, and in the interest of the company who want to bind customers to their company).

This is where we have to take the influence of emotion into account, a factor that has been widely neglected in the research on complaints so far. In a conflictual service encounter, when people feel the need to voice their displeasure and complain, we need to be aware that this is a highly emotionally charged event. The overall atmosphere in conflict talk can be hostile, friendly, or neutral, and participants' evaluations of these moods might be shared or asymmetrical (Grimshaw, 1990: 290) These kinds of mood evaluations are constantly reassessed in any ongoing talk, and behaviour is adjusted accordingly. The concept of face is closely linked with the emotional state of the interlocutors, a notion which some

authors feel has been neglected in Brown & Levinson's (Brown & Levinson, 1987) politeness model, which seems to focus mostly on defensiveness and protectiveness (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003:1461). Going back to Goffman's work, Bargiela-Chappini points out that the emotions of anguish and anger are also inherent in the concept of (neglecting) face wants:

> Moreover, an individual's response to others' evaluation of his own face is not purely rational: *emotions* are involved, so that harm to another's face causes "anguish", and harm to one's own face is expressed in "anger" (Goffman 1967: 23). (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003: 1458)

Clearly, having to harm someone's face is difficult for the speaker and might cause anguish, but more importantly it is most likely to cause anger or related emotions for the hearer. Such considerations, however, although they are important in conflictual service encounters, seem to be of minor concern for the participants involved in such speech events. Apparently their goal orientation and their initial emotional state (see below) often override considerations of face. Of course when analysing emotions, it would be important to include prosodics and kinesics in the analysis, as emotions are usually not just expressed verbally:

> Although they focus almost entirely on linguistic manifestations of politeness, Brown and Levinson acknowledge that nonverbal behaviors – particularly prosodics and kinesics – may also play a role in face-work. These non-linguistic behaviours have not been incorporated into empirical investigations of politeness, however. (Trees & Manusov, 1998: 564f)

The two predominant emotions in conflictual service encounters are anger and disappointment. Especially the causes of anger are multifaceted in this context. Participants in conflictual service encounter discourse are usually angry because of the conflict or problem at hand. This emotion of anger or discontent will trigger the need to voice a complaint. The act of complaining in itself usually triggers the emotion of hope. Complainers hope to achieve a variety of goals by complaining: They usually need to alert the service provider that there is some problem to begin with, they want to vent their negative emotions, bust mostly they hope to achieve a solution to the problem at hand. Naturally, the whole process can turn into some kind of anger spiral, when these goals are not achieved and the complainer's interactional expectations are not met. This can lead to the building of renewed or more forceful emotions of anger and disappointment on the part of the complainer. On the other hand, negative emotions can also be experienced by the complainee.

Conflict discourse, and complaining in particular, is highly face-threatening both for the speaker and the hearer. Being at the receiving end of a complaint is something negative, and although we might assume that service providers are used to the handling of complaints and are getting some training for that, they cannot help having feelings themselves. Therefore the way a complainer negotiates a complaint has a direct impact on the complainee's emotional state as well, who in turn might react angry, thereby aggravating the customer's negative emotion.

The emotion of anger can be communicated in many ways – as verbal manifestations (i.e. swear words), in the manner of speaking (raised voice, faster speech) but also, mostly subconsciously, through body reactions (blushing; gestures; spatial orientations).

> The term "anger" has a multiplicity of meanings in psychology, as in everyday language, and can refer to an experience or feeling, internal bodily reactions, an attitude toward others, an instigation to aggression, an overt assault on some target, and to various combinations of these different reactions. (Berkowitz, 1999: 411)

Apparently many manifestations of anger not only happen subconsciously, without the person producing them actively choosing to do so, but interestingly, many such manifestations, especially non-verbal cues, are processed by the interlocutor in much the same way. There seems a general awareness of the other person's anger, but to read all the signs correctly seems to be near impossible for many interlocutors (Berkowitz, 1999: 423). This is a problem that becomes manifest in my corpus, where in many instances the conflict is aggravated by misunderstandings and misinterpretations of angry behaviour. Cleary, a higher awareness of these processes on the part of the service providers might lead to smoother interactions between them and their customers. Slightly contradictory to this notion, people seem to be able to recognize anger in others, and seem to have some kind of model or prototype in mind.

> Following the lead provided by cognitive psychologists, several emotion researchers have argued that these representations should be understood in prototypic terms. They note that when people think of an emotion or when they encounter an emotion-producing episode, they typically have an implicit model, or prototype, of the relevant emotional state in mind, and organize their interpretations and reports in terms of this guiding conception. Affect-related experiences are then categorized in terms of their "family-resemblance" to this best-case model, the prototype. (Berkowitz, 1999: 417)

Again, in conflictual service encounters, there might be a marked difference between the expectations customers and service providers have with regard to anger and related emotions[12]. Customers seem to have the conception that an expression of anger will trigger a range of reactions that will eventually lead to customer satisfaction. They often do not take into account that their expression of anger might affect their interlocutor negatively and might have adverse effects for the whole problem-solving process. From a researcher's point of view it is nearly impossible to judge people's motivations for the expression of anger. We can only analyse people's utterances and behaviour, but the cognitive processes that led to these manifestations are mostly unknown, more often than not even to the interactants themselves.

> Emotion theorists are by no means agreed as to what is the relation between the emotional experience and overt behavior. Many of them, especially those who are cognitively oriented, contend that emotions function generally to promote particular plans and goals, but their analyses of how this comes about do not always emphasize the same psychological processes. (Berkowitz, 1999: 424)

Equally difficult for the researcher is an evaluation whether the observed behaviour is rooted in a process of emotion and rational calculations on the part of the complainer, as manifestations of anger can have different motivations. Sometimes people's actions are driven by their emotional state, and all actions, verbal and nonverbal, are dominated by the emotion. Especially in service encounters, however, anger might also be used strategically, sometimes even in the absence of an actual emotion. Customers might deem an expression of anger as a useful strategy to achieve their interactional goal, without actually being in such an emotional state – in short, faking it. In the course of their socialisation and cultural learning, people might have found that an expression of anger is a useful strategy in a conflictual service encounter frame.

When doing research into people's emotional states, observing their prosodics and kinesics can give valuable clues as to their state of mind and attitude (Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003). Especially negative emotions are often expressed by changes in intonation or pitch, as well as expressed in gestures, bodily reactions (blushing, cowering, etc.) and since my corpus consists of video

[12] Related emotions are for example distress, fury, annoyance, irritation, exasperation, but the differences between them are very gradual and therefore negligible in this context (Berkowitz, 1999: 416).

data to a large extent, these cues will be taken into consideration whenever possible.

3.7. Summary

Conflictual service encounters pose a dilemma for traditional approaches to research on politeness. Embedded in the conceptual domains of cognitive pragmatics and interactional sociolinguistics, a combination of a discursive approach, which concentrates on the interlocutors' own evaluations of what they consider to be (im)polite and appropriate, together with a frame-based view (Terkourafi, 2005a; 2005b), which incorporates the situational context and the role relationships of the interlocutors, appears to be a fruitful approach for the analysis of conflictual service encounters. Going beyond the analysis of single lexically and grammatically defined utterances, the analysis needs to incorporate prosodics and kinesics, especially in relation to the expression of (negative) emotional states of the interlocutors.

Conflictual service encounters are set apart from other kinds of discourse mainly by the influence that the institutional context has on the interaction (with regard to the usually unequal distribution of power and knowledge) as well as by the fact that the interactants are usually strangers and therefore more focussed on transactional than on interactional goals. Consequently, one of this dissertation's emphases is on the importance that face considerations have in conflictual service encounters, questioning the assumption that speakers are intent on showing consideration for the other. Unlike in discourse in general, in conflictual service encounters the deliberate flouting of politeness maxims can be observed, usually either out of inconsideration, but often also as a tactical mechanism for obtaining transactional goals by using rudeness, thereby tilting the interpersonal power balance.

Face considerations in this context appear to be marked by a high degree of paranoia, with consideration for the other's well-being not being the speakers' main concern, but rather a high degree of sensitivity for their own face-wants in the interpretation of utterances. The traditional focus in politeness theories on 'the speaker', which tends to disregard reactions to utterances by focussing on the speaker, and mainly on their first turns, has led to a belief that discourse planning

is to a large extent influenced by consideration for the upkeep of social harmony. Although that is probably true in many discourse domains, it is certainly of much less importance in conflictual service encounters. However, from my analysis of speaker and hearer exchanges in the realm of conflictual service encounters, it transpires that the hearer's interpretations of utterances certainly lack the belief that the speaker had the maintenance of social harmony in mind. People might design their utterances with a certain degree of consideration for other-face, but they tend to *interpret* utterances as possible attacks on their own face wants.

In other words, people seem to be suspicious of speakers' intentions, and show a tendency, in conflictual service encounters at least, to interpret utterances as inconsiderate of their face wants, and therefore often as impolite. On the whole, comparisons between naturally occurring discourse and elicited discourse show a more aggressive stance of both speaker and hearer in the naturally occurring service encounters, a finding which seems to indicate a discrepancy between perception of norms in particular contexts on the one hand, and actual performance on the other, pointing towards the decisive influence that negative emotions have on behaviour in conflictual service encounters, especially with regard to the *interpretation* of utterances and extralinguistic factors.

This apparent paradox present in conflict discourse between politeness expectations and guidelines to normative behaviour on the one hand, and people's goal orientation and apparent neglect for face considerations on the other hand, have prompted me to approach the topic from various angles, using a mixed method approach which researches naturally-occurring discourse in combination with role play data.

Chapter 4: Corpus and Data Elicitation Methods

4.1. Outline

In pragmatics research, the use of authentic discourse is still not the norm, for the simple reason that authentic data prove very elusive. Many researchers therefore tend to rely on constructed data, either in the form of construction questionnaires or role plays, or on a combination of both. Less frequently used are methods that involve participant introspection, diaries, multiple choice questionnaires, field notes or interviews (Kasper, 1998, 2000). Conflict discourse in general, and complaints in particular, prove very elusive to researchers, for various reasons: From a researcher's perspective, complaints are perceived as difficult to analyse, and from the language user's perspective their circumstances are delicate and something speakers would rather avoid doing altogether (and which nobody likes to be at the receiving end of). In short, complaints have highly negative connotations. Consequently it is difficult for researchers to systematically record occurrences of complaints [1]. However, there is some consensus amongst linguists nowadays, that conclusions about actual speech behaviour can only be gained from the analysis of real-life spontaneous conversational data. Moreover, claims are being made now that the analysis of data from various sources, collected with various data collection methods, can yield more complete insights into speaker motivations and interpretations. Therefore, in order to investigate conflict and complaints in service encounters from various angles and perspectives, for this

[1] Preparing this project, I started from the assumption that it might be a good idea to contact companies in order to investigate customer complaints. For my interest in complaints this seemed the obvious choice, since lots of things tend to go wrong when interacting with customers. People carriers such as airlines or train companies seemed to be a good choice, therefore I approached quite a number of airlines and train companies both in the UK and in Germany. Most replies were polite rejections, on the grounds that the companies felt a need to protect their customers' privacy (mostly in the UK) or that calls were not recorded (in Germany). One airline allowed me to visit their premises and listen in to calls (Flybe, Exeter), but would not grant me permission to record the customers' side of the calls. When I was almost ready to give up, I was invited by the train company Eurostar, who allowed me access to their premises, let me listen in to calls, and allowed me to analyse calls recorded by them. Approximately at the same time I found a docusoap called 'Airline' on BBC 1. The episode I saw contained quite a few complaints and the interactions seemed authentic. Sadly, the episode was the last one for that season and recordings of the series were not available from the BBC. A little later I found out that there was a similar series on ITV1, called 'Airline'. This turned out to be a lucky turn of events, as there seemed to be more complaining going on in 'Airline' than in 'Airport'. While visiting Eurostar repeatedly, I recorded the weekly emissions of 'Airline' and started transcribing the data.

dissertation I adopt a mixed method approach (for a recent discussion of this approach see Geluykens, 2007; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007) in order to explain the mechanisms at work when people complain and negotiate conflict in service encounters. The core of the corpus consists of naturally occurring complaints, as found in TV fly-on-the-wall documentaries, and of telephone conversations, gained from ethnographic research in the company Eurostar. Complementing these data, I recorded role plays, using two of the situations most common in the naturally occurring complaints. In total, the analysis is based on a corpus of roughly three hours of recorded material of complaint episodes of various lengths. This chapter will serve to describe the corpus in detail and will explain why I opted for this particular combination of data elicitation methods.

4.2. Fly-on-the-wall-Documentaries or Docusoaps

In recent years television has seen the emergence of a new genre, the fly-on-the-wall documentary (Bruzzi, 2001; Kilborn, 2003), or documentary soap (Cathode, 1998; Kilborn, Hibberd, & Boyle, 2001), in which the camera captures any kind of every-day occurrence[2]. The term 'documentary soap' is more recent, and this genre is said to have developed from the earlier 'fly-on-the-wall' documentaries, which in turn have their roots in the movement of the cinéma vérité. A fly-on-the-wall documentary usually records events as they unfold, without script or any kind of manipulation.

> First of all, the tradition of 'fly-on-the-wall' film-making (with its roots in cinéma vérité) has set up a number of expectations about its 'direct truth to the events portrayed ' (...). There is sometimes a purist literalism about the claims made by this kind of project – everything you see really happened just as if the camera was not there at all. (Bruzzi, 2001: 128)

Naturally, this claim to purist realism and authenticity can only be sustained in part, as any kind of capturing events (as for instance in narrative, photography, filming) shows those particular events from a subjective point of view (the point of view adopted by the author of the narrative, the photographer, the filmmaker), and

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2 Fly on the wall
Meaning: Someone who observes a situation without being noticed.
Origin: Originated with and most often used in relation to 'fly on the wall documentaries' which are films of real life situations made without affecting the behaviour of the participants
Source: http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/139600.html

edits them in some way (attitude, perspective, camera angle, cuts, editing). However, in a fly-on-the-wall documentary, the original events are not initiated or influenced by the filmmaker, and therefore the events shown in these documentaries are as authentic as anything captured on film can be.

As early as in the 1980s a shift in (TV) journalism has been observed and deplored (Postman, 1989), where the boarders between information and entertainment became fuzzy – hence the term *infotainment* (Stockwell, 2004), which is a genre that is characterized by:

> extensive borrowing of the 'documentary look' by other kinds of programme, and extensive borrowing of non-documentary kinds of look (the dramatic look, the look of advertising, the look of the pop video) by documentary (...). (Corner, 2000: 4)

In this context, information tends to get fragmented and decontextualized in such a way that it becomes easier to digest for the audience, an evolution which is regarded by many as negative and having a 'dumbing-down' effect (Stockwell, 2004: 5). Within the context of this merging of genres, the term *docusoap* was coined, a term inherently containing a certain dismissiveness for the new genre.

> The term 'docusoap' itself was coined by journalists keen to dismiss this new brand of factual television that, in their estimation, contaminated the seriousness of documentary with the frivolity of soap operas (...). In certain respects, docusoaps resemble their more conventional 'fly-on-the-wall' antecedents. For example, (...) they feature the lives of ordinary people sharing a common experience. (...) What truly sets docusoaps apart from their predecessors is their prioritisation of entertainment over social commentary. (Bruzzi, 2001: 132)

Whereas classic documentaries, and to some extent also the 'fly-on-the-wall-documentary', put a lot of emphasis on serious information and attempts to choose topics that might have some kind of political or societal impact, the docusoap's main purpose is to entertain. The topics of docusoaps are usual trivial, and there is little to no interest in social commentary, apparently mainly satiating the viewers' curiosity about everyday, trivial occurrences.

> Performing this function, documentary is a vehicle variously for the high-intensity incident (gossipy first-person accounts) and snoopy sociability (as in amused bystander to the mixture of mess and routine in other people's working lives). Propagandist, expositional or analytic goals are exchanged for modes of intensive or relaxed diversion – the primary viewing activity is onlooking and overhearing, perhaps aligned to events by intermittent commentary. (Corner, 2000: 3)

What is probably so appealing in docusoaps is the fact that the inherent voyeurism we all might have is gratified and made socially acceptable through this kind of

programme. The innate urge of people to look into other people's houses, to spy on other people's conversations, and to find out about other people's lives is easily satisfied in docusoaps. The trivial and ordinary becomes interesting and accessible – people find their own lives and problems mirrored on TV and therefore reality TV remains very popular amongst TV audiences. Nowadays, the terms 'fly-on-the-wall documentary' and 'documentary soap' or 'docusoap' for short, are both used synonymously to describe the same tv-format. The original 'fly-on-the-wall documentary' puts much more emphasis on being a documentary, i.e. on the documentation of a state of affairs of some kind, whereas the term 'documentary soap' puts more emphasis on the entertainment element inherent in this format. It is a hybrid format, simply, but quite successfully, combining elements of two different and so far unrelated television genres, namely the documentary and the soap opera (Kilborn, 2003: 91).

Docusoaps share several features with traditional soap operas: the element of light entertainment, the re-occurrence of the same characters, and the interweaving of storylines. Viewers of soap-operas and docusoaps alike do not need to invest any great cerebral effort into processing what they are watching: everything is easy to understand and divided into short episodes, with the narrative switching between the topics.

> We use the technique of parallel action and intercutting to make something bigger than the sum of the individual parts. [...] It's a question of telling narratives in a different way from traditional single strand documentaries when you're essentially using linear narrative. [...] Docu-soaps operate on different lines, however. When you're just about to see something happen, you cut away to something else, then you cut back to the original story. One story starts, another one starts; then eventually one gets resolved. Another one gets picked up, overlaps, brings in a new character and so on. There's a strategy to the way they're constructed. You're essentially pulling people through the narrative. (Interview with the author, London 1998) (Kilborn, 2003: 116-117)

The cutting away from an interaction and the interweaving of narratives serve the purpose of making trivial, everyday occurrences seem more interesting. This technique suggests a faster pace (in a similar way to cutting and editing in music videos) and demands a much shorter attention span from its audience than traditional linear story-telling would. In terms of linguistic analysis, this approach proves to be a slight disadvantage, as the cutting and editing at times makes it difficult to determine in what order a conversation unfolded. Sometimes chunks

are missing or made inaudible by voice-overs, which in the programme serve to link and explain the different bits of narrative. However, these slight shortcomings are negligible, and most of the time it is still possible for the analyst to piece the conversations back together and end up with larger chunks of coherent conversations. On the plus side, the format offers an additional feature which proves invaluable for linguistic analysis. This feature consists of the protagonists addressing the camera after the main interaction (in these instances after the conflict or complaint episode) and give their assessment of the situation while addressing the camera (team). This provides the researcher with useful insights into the participants' mindframes and motivations.

Fly-on-the-wall documentaries tend to deal with a wide range of topics, and quite a few of them focus on public transport, with various programmes observing what is going on at airports. Logistics at airports are highly complicated, with any number of things going wrong, which means that there are plenty of reasons for people to utter a complaint. The main body of data for this dissertation stems from the fly-on-the-wall documentary 'Airline', shown on the British TV channel ITV1[3] and to a much lesser extent from the very similar programme 'Airport', shown on BBC1. Both programmes have enjoyed surprising success and longevity, and have been sold to a large number of other countries. This success is probably due to the universal appeal of the topics and events shown in these programmes, but more importantly is likely to be ascribed to the high potential for conflict that comes with the territory of busy airports, which appear to be the ideal settings for confrontations (Kilborn, 2003: 119). 'Airline' depicts events at various airports in the UK and occasionally in other European countries, and focuses exclusively on one airline: EasyJet. The company EasyJet uses this television show as a format to inform and educate its passengers, as well as a welcome tool for brand marketing and advertising[4]. The company is seemingly unaware of the negative image the

[3] I recorded the programme over a period of approximately six months, from October 2004 to March 2005.

[4] [4] On the company's website we find the following statement that explains the company's motivations for particpating in the program 'Airline':
„TV documentary
The LWT 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary series 'Airline' shown on ITV is based around the passengers and staff at easyJet. The airline was first approached about the possibility of filming during mid-1998 after a first series with Britannia Airways was discontinued. The first easyJet series was broadcast in January 1999, and the cameras have been with easyJet almost constantly ever since. In 2003 it was ITV's most popular factual programme with a total of 75 million viewers.

programme shows of EasyJet. From the way complaints are dealt with and from many customers' reactions, we remain with a rather negative impression of the company's approach to customer relations. The company still regards the programme as excellent publicity, though.

> Airline (ITV 1998 -), for instance, a docu-soap which is centred on the activities of low-cost UK-based airlines, provides a good illustration of how companies have been able to capitalize on television's hunger for character-centred entertainment with a nominal documentary flavour. In the case of EasyJet, the subject of the 1999 series, the company's decision to allow the LWT production team 'almost total access to EasyJet staff' may have seemed a rather risky exercise in view of all the many problems that an airline faces in its day-to-day operations. The risks involved in allowing incidents to be filmed where passengers complained about flight delays or about some malfunction in the airline's operation had to be set against the quite extensive free publicity to be achieved. For EasyJet Managing Director Ray Webster therefore the decision to 'allow the cameras in' was part of a hard-headed business calculation:
>
> The business rationale is simple: we don't sell through travel agents, so all our customers have to come to us – 70 per cent to our web site and the rest to our call centre. Therefore we have to find as many ways as possible of keeping the EasyJet brand name in front of the consumer. We spend millions of pounds on press and poster advertising each year but nothing on television, so the *Airline* series provides us with a useful way of getting ourselves onto the screens. (Webster, 2000: 5) (Kilborn, 2003: 105-106)

The subject matters shown in these programs seem to be in no way systematic, so that in the various weekly episodes, we find a great number of conflict sequences, but also funny anecdotes (people travelling with a snake, people in drag, etc.), as well as touching stories of people who meet at the airport after a long separation, of people proposing to each other, and other 'human interest' stories. We have to assume that the choices made by the producers have some influence on the contents of the programs; it is likely that complaint sequences that tend to escalate are given preference over complaint sequences that are more neutral. Nevertheless, both kinds can be found in the data and the spectrum of contents is fairly wide. For my dissertation, I have concentrated on occurrences of conflict and complaints,

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The programme has been sold to countries worldwide, amongst which New Zealand, Australia, and Japan.

The programme follows passengers and staff on journeys and during important moments in their lives. Wedding proposals, business trips, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences have all been filmed, both happy and sad. The programme also aims to educate the airline's passengers concerning its rules and regulations – some of the highlighted issues relate to missed check-in, incorrect travel documentation, and the carriage of prohibited items."
(EasyJet, 2004)

whereas occurrences of other speech events such as requests, jokes, etc. were deemed irrelevant for this project and discarded, unless they were parts of conflict episodes.

To the best of my knowledge, fly-on-the-wall documentaries or similar TV programmes have only very rarely been used for linguistic analysis before now, most likely for the simple reason that the genre is still relatively new (Bousfield, 2007; Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann, 2003; Dersley & Wootton, 2001; Lee & Peck, 1995). It is virtually impossible for a linguist to obtain data of naturally occurring complaints; therefore this new TV format is an ideal source for realistic data and has a number of advantages which clearly outweigh its shortcomings. For one, data from fly-on-the-wall documentaries are spontaneous, unscripted and have not been arranged or manipulated for research purposes. What is most important, though, is that the interactions are videotaped, which means that important features such as gaze, gestures and spatial alignment can be incorporated into the analysis. Naturally, whenever people are being observed, recorded or filmed, they will have a certain degree of awareness of the fact that someone observes their behaviour, which in turn might affect and alter their behaviour. Labov's observer's paradox[5] (Labov, 1972) cannot be disregarded, of course, but apparently the effects of people's awareness of recording devices wears off a little after getting used to having them around (Kasper, 2000: 319ff). In addition, I want to argue that in speech events involving a high degree of emotional involvement (such as conflict and complaints), speakers are likely to forget about the presence of recording devices.

The material in the programme 'Airline' was edited and commented on by the producers of the programme, which I see as the only slight constraint for the current project, as this pre-selection and editing is not ideal for research into natural speech behaviour. Having said that, the editing does not usually interfere with the flow of the conversations, and it is possible in most instances to gain a fairly accurate impression of the interaction as it actually occurred. More importantly, the format provides valuable additional information precisely because

[5] "We are then left with the *Observer's Paradox*: the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation." (Labov 1972: 209)

of the presence of a camera and camera crew. In many instances, during or after the conflict episode, the participants, sometimes unprompted, sometimes in reaction to questions asked by the camera crew, address the camera and express their views and feelings about what went on. These comments provide us with invaluable background information about people's assessment of the situation and their interlocutor's behaviour.

Participants in these TV documentaries seem to be chosen at random (and probably according to their willingness to be in a TV programme), and include people from all age groups and social backgrounds. Being on television, the identities of the participants are in the public domain and have not been altered or disguised for the purpose of my research.

4.3. Telephone Conversations

The second part of my corpus of naturally occurring data consists of telephone conversations recorded in the call centre of an international people carrier. The train company 'Eurostar' granted me access to their customer relations department and enabled me to do ethnographic research on their premises. This ethnographic approach (compare Davis & Henze, 1998; Erickson, 1992; Hanford, 1988; Saville-Troike, 1997) enabled me to observe the practices of the company, talk to the employees, and to gain insights into their company policy. More importantly, during several stays at the company I was able to listen in to customer calls, and was granted permission to use recordings of the calls for my research. Out of a larger corpus of calls focussing on ticket purchases, requests for information, and the like, I chose seven calls which contained a conflict exchange and complaining. The conversations were recorded by the company with the knowledge of the customers, but I made sure to treat the data confidentially by changing people's names and omitting other personal information (addresses, telephone numbers, credit card details, etc.) that came up in the conversations.

Telephone conversations (for a detailed description compare Hopper, 1992; Rath, 1995) have specific properties which are markedly different from face-to-

face interactions. The number of participants is usually limited to two people[6] who can hear but not see each other[7]. For the researcher this means that the analysis is limited to linguistic and prosodic choices. Extralinguistic features, such as gaze or gestures, are excluded from these data because of the constraints of the medium, the telephone. These constraint are also partly responsible for a high degree of routinization in telephone conversations (compare Werlen, 1984). These routines, which can be observed for beginnings and, to some extent, endings of telephone encounters, have been studied extensively (Clark & French, 1981; Hopper, 1989; Hopper, Doaney, Johnson, & Drummond, 1991; Schegloff, 1979, 1986; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2002); other studies have compared these routines across languages (Hopper & Doaney, 1988; Sifianou, 1989) and across genders (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). What is more, there is a marked difference between private telephone conversations and those made in the public domain. In service encounters, the company representatives tend to have scripts, or at least guidelines, which determine the course of the interaction and the company representatives' behaviour (compare Antos, 1989; Brünner, 2000; Fiehler, Kindt, & Schnieders, 2002; Morales-López, Prego-Vázquez, & Domínguez-Seco, 2005). Telephone conversations in service encounters therefore are highly predictable and (semi-)scripted interactions.

Conflict and complaints in an institutional context are often conveyed over the phone, and dealing with customer complaints in this way is an important, but also time-consuming every-day reality for companies. Studies investigating complaint strategies and how people can react to the complaints are therefore not only necessary from a linguistic point of view, but also from a marketing perspective. Telephone data has the additional advantage that it is relatively easy to obtain, and because of the constraints of the medium, simple in structure and easier to analyse than face-to-face interactions.

People carriers such as Eurostar use a variety of channels to reach their customers, advertising their product (travelling by train through the channel tunnel

[6] With recent developments in technology, it is now possible to have 'telephone conferences' with more than two participants, but this is not applicable here.

[7]There are exceptions: recent technological developments and digital communication have made videophones possible. This technology is used frequently by people who use the Internet for telephone conversations, but is not widely used with ordinary phones yet.

from the UK to Belgium or France and vice versa) in the print media, on the Internet and in specific poster campaigns. Tickets for the Eurostar can be obtained via the Internet, over the phone, from travel agencies and at train stations. Prices vary, depending on where and when the customers purchase their ticket, with the cheapest offers usually to be found on the Internet. These specifics in themselves tend to trigger conflict (due to problems with internet bookings, price differences between phone and internet bookings, no special last minute offers). Like most companies nowadays, Eurostar has a consumer telephone hotline, which deals with bookings, complaints, and other related issues. The customer representatives at Eurostar do not receive any special schooling for dealing with complaints, but the calls are routinely recorded and monitored, and the company strives to improve proceedings in terms of time- and cost-efficiency, as well as with regard to politeness issues and customer satisfaction.

In the telephone conversations, it is more difficult for me to determine what age the callers might have and what their occupation might be. Judging from the voices, the accent, and the contents of the utterances the ages and backgrounds are also fairly mixed in this part of the corpus.

In my corpus there are recurring problems which are the triggers for the conflict between customer and company representatives. Although I have two different data sets, with two different channels of communication (face-to-face communication versus telephone conversations), in the TV documentaries, as well as in the telephone conversations, the problems are fairly similar, and clustered around certain recurring topics. These are:

'Check-in closed' In this situation check-in for a flight or for boarding a train closes at a certain time; passengers who arrive later are usually not admitted for that flight or train anymore, and usually put on the next available one.
'ID-check' This scenario involves instances where passengers cannot show valid ID in order to be admitted onto a flight or on the train.
'Late or cancelled flights (or trains)' Situations which involve occurrences when flights or trains have been delayed or cancelled.
'Problems with bookings' Any occurrences when there are problems with bookings, usually made over the internet.

'Ticket prices' This kind of scenario usually involves disagreement about the amount to be paid for a ticket or for additional services.

4.4. Role Plays

In order to test the influence emotional involvement has on people's complaint behaviour, and more importantly, to get insights into people's expectations and assessments of particular situational contexts and the speech behaviour therein, I have recorded role plays, based on the two scenarios most frequently observed in the corpus of naturally occurring complaints ('check-in closed' and 'ID check'). The rationale underlying this is that in naturally occurring complaints, something occurred which affected people negatively and prompted them to utter a complaint. In such situations, people show a high degree of personal involvement and generally can be expected to be in an agitated emotional state. It is plausible to assume that anger and personal involvement will be reflected in people's behaviour in some way. In role plays on the other hand, people are told to *imagine* that they are in a certain situation, and to behave the way they *think they would* do in a real-life situation, but there is no actual personal involvement (other than being able to draw on past experience, world knowledge, and imagination). Role plays are therefore very unlikely to give us insights into people's actual complaint behaviour, but they can be very useful for determining people's attitudes towards normative behaviour. I chose to use "spontaneous open role plays"[8] in which only the initial situation, the roles and the goals are specified. The interactants keep their own identity, and the course and the outcome of the dialogue are open and will vary according what interactants want to do.

Role plays are usually used as a default option by researchers, either alone or in combination with discourse completion tasks, when naturally occurring data is unavailable, with scenarios that were constructed by the researcher. Role plays are used frequently in research on interlanguage pragmatics, as they allow the researcher to gather large amounts of data under controlled circumstances and in

[8] In a *closed role-play* the interactants merely react to a stimulus. In *a mimetic-replicating role-play* the subjects assume the role of a person whose picture they have been shown, in a *mimetic-pretending role-play* they assume the role of someone other than themselves (without having been shown a picture). In an *idiographic role-play* subjects remember and enact recent interactions, in other words, they replicate something which happened to them in the past

different languages (see for example Sasaki, 1998). There are a number of studies on complaints where role plays have been used (House & Kasper, 1981; Piotrowska, 1988; Trosborg, 1995), or where this method has been combined with reports or interviews in order to gain additional information about participants' motivations and evaluations. Although these data elicitation methods yield complaints and reactions to complaints, the analyses tend to focus on the complainer and fail to view complaining as a dynamic, interactive process. Several other studies use a combination of role plays with additional data elicitation methods, which are called self reports (Newell & Stutman, 1989) or verbal reports (Arent, 1996; Frescura, 1995). These reports provide the researcher with insights into the speakers' motivations and their assessments of the speech situation and their own speech behaviour. These investigations have in common an approach which relies on constructed data, which is then used to make assumptions about occurrences in the real world.

My own approach differs from these in several respects. In my dissertation, I do not use role plays as the principal data source, but merely as a complement for a larger corpus of naturally-occurring conversations. The scenarios used in the role plays are not constructed; instead, they reproduce typical real-life occurrences found in the main corpus. This novel approach has two main advantages: It will enable me to realistically compare role play data with authentic discourse, and it will provide me with insights into people's perceptions and expectations of complaint exchanges. Similar approaches have been adopted for a comparison of discourse completion tasks and natural discourse (Golato, 2003; Yuan, 2001), but not for role plays. With regard to a comparison of data elicitation methods, it will be invaluable to find out whether it is indeed possible to make claims about authentic speech behaviour from role play data and whether or not role play data can indeed be used as a substitute for naturally-occurring conversations.

Similarly to the personal comments found in the data from the fly-on-the-wall documentary, the participants in the role plays were asked to reflect on their performance and their attitude toward the interaction. The role plays were recorded at the University of Southampton and involved students exclusively (undergraduates and postgraduates). Therefore, this group is much more homogeneous in age and social background than the participants of the other two data sets.

4.4.1. Role play scenarios

1. Check-in closed

A: You are about to take a flight to Paris at 2 pm. You arrive at check-in at half past one. The check-in staff inform you that your flight is already boarding and you cannot get on the flight anymore, as check-in is closed. You absolutely have to be in Paris for an important appointment in the afternoon.

B: You work for an airline that specializes in low-cost flights. It is the airline's policy to close check-in 40 minutes prior to departure of planes. This needs to be done in order to insure that planes leave on time. Punctuality is crucial for your company, which is one reason why it can sell tickets that are so cheap. You cannot, under any circumstances, let passengers board who arrive late at your desk. You can, however, offer to the passenger to book them on an evening flight.

2. ID-check

A: You have been flying from Southampton to Glasgow on a weekly basis for the past year. You never needed any special ID because it is UK internal. The airline you used every time has now introduced a new rule where everybody needs picture ID. You are at Glasgow airport, nobody had told you about this (and you hadn't bothered reading the small print), and now you cannot get back to Southampton because you do not have any picture ID, apart from an old passport that was only valid until a couple of months ago.

B: You work for an airline which has just introduced a new rule where every passenger needs to show picture ID, even on UK internal flights. The new rule is mentioned in the booking information that every passenger gets. Your supervisors have told you that this rule has to be reinforced under any circumstances and that you cannot check anybody in without valid picture ID.

Questions:

1. Do you think the scenarios were realistic? Could something similar happen to you?
2. Looking back on the role play, do you think you would have acted similarly in real life?
3. What other thoughts or comments do you have?

4.5. Corpus length and Languages

The whole corpus contains roughly three hours of complaint material taken from the fly-on-the-wall documentary 'Airline', from telephone conversations recorded at the company 'Eurostar, and from role plays recorded on the basis of the most common scenarios in the authentic data.

The material from the TV documentary constitutes the main part of the corpus, with about 96 minutes of recorded complaints. In total, there are 30 complaint events, which all happen between customers and customer representatives of the airline EasyJet. The interlocutors are all native speakers of British English, with three exceptions, where two customers are native speakers of American English and one (presumably) is a native speaker of Australian English. The length of the exchanges varies considerably and ranges from as little as ten seconds to as long as four minutes and forty-five seconds. The exchanges involve either two people (a customer and a company representative) or more people (two or more customers, for example husband and wife, two or more company representatives).

The data set with telephone conversations includes seven complaint exchanges with a total length of almost 49 minutes. The individual length of these exchanges varies between two minutes forty two seconds for the shortest call, and seven minutes thirteen seconds for the longest call. On average, the telephone conversations are markedly longer than the complaint exchanges in the TV data. The interactions happen between company representatives and customers of the company 'Eurostar', and the interactants in these exchanges are all British native speakers, with the exception of one customer who is a native speaker of Australian English.

The role play set includes 16 role plays with a total length of 35 minutes. The individual role plays range in length from one minute to three minutes forty seconds. The participants in the role plays are students of Southampton University. There are two students per interaction, one impersonating a customer, the other a company representative of an airline.

4.6. Discussion and Summary

The question arises whether it makes sense to combine data from three different sources. The telephone conversations are comparable to the TV data, in the sense that they are based on the same kinds of problems (i.e. problems with ticket bookings, prices, delays) and that the service encounter frame is the same. There are some differences, though, which will enable me to get a clearer picture about complaint behaviour. It can be assumed that the two different kinds of interaction (face-to-face communication versus telephone conversation) entail a slight

difference in conversational and interactional style. In addition, the absence of a camera should be weighed against the (probably vague) awareness of being tape recorded. It also makes sense to have data from different sources, in order to get insights into reactions to complaints. Companies' policies on certain issues may vary, and from my corpus it transpires that EasyJet might be less service-oriented than Eurostar, an approach which is mirrored in the way complaints are dealt with.

A big and potentially important difference between the two kinds of data is the time issue. In the TV data, the complainers react immediately to a problem that has arisen at the airport, and they are usually under time constraints to bring about a solution (for example when they came too late for check-in and find out that, although the plane is still there, they will not be allowed to board it).

> Ford and Snyder suggested that teleservice differs from face-to-face service in two primary ways: (1) teleservice interactions are less "immediate", given limited availability of nonverbal cues to foster psychological closeness between the provider and customer; and (2) teleservice interactions are more likely to follow institutionalized scripts, often controlled by the organization, limiting the spontaneity of communication between provider and customer. (Zabava Ford, 2001: 21)

In the telephone conversations the interaction is less immediate and generally less spontaneous. The complaint as a rule happens after the problem has arisen, and the callers are usually at home or in their own workplace, as opposed to the complainers in the TV data, who are at the airport, and more specifically, at the EasyJet counter. We can assume therefore that the complainers in the telephone interactions had time to plan their line of argument – so their complaints in the telephone interactions, at least in theory, are much more premeditated and less spontaneous than the ones in the TV data. We have no way of knowing, however, whether, due to being further removed from the problem, the customers' anger has increased or diminished over time. It is a fair assumption that it takes a certain effort to call a company and to make a complaint, but this action might have been prompted by rational considerations (in order to get compensation) rather than by emotional impulses. One major difference between the two data sets is therefore that the complaints in the telephone data are all post-event and concerned mostly with monetary issues, whereas the TV data can be pre- and post-event, and usually come fraught with time pressure (which indirectly or directly is linked to monetary issues as well).

With regard to the power relationship in both data sets, there are very few differences. The power relationship is asymmetric, with the company representatives' in a clearly more powerful position than the customers. Ultimately, it is the company representatives who decide the course of the interaction and its outcome, which holds true both for the TV data and the telephone conversations. However, there is a marked difference in the way the company representatives approach their exchanges with the clients. The reason for this needs to be attributed to different company policies and different long term goals of a company. Whereas EasyJet as a low-cost airline is mostly concerned with delivering cheap and mostly punctual flights with little regard for the loyalty of their customers, Eurostar strives to retain customers and increase customer satisfaction. This approach empowers the customer much more than the one adopted by EasyJet does, which is reflected very clearly in participants' attitudes in the exchanges.

To sum up: the elusive nature of complaints justifies a mixed-method approach, combining data from various sources. The relatively new TV format of docusoaps proves an excellent source of naturally-occurring face-to-face interactions, especially in the realm of conflict discourse. Combined with ethnographic data, including customer complaints made via the telephone, it is possible to shed light on the ways companies deal with customer complaints and what the participants attitudes in such interactions are. Based on the real-life scenarios, role plays provide insights on speaker expectations regarding norms and appropriateness in specific situational contexts. A comparison of naturally-occurring discourse and the elicitated data may reveal what factors contribute to the discrepancy between speaker expectations and actual speech behaviour. This combination of data elicitation methods may prove adequate also for other kinds speech events, but foremost may be useful for research into cross-cultural pragmatics.

4.7. Transcription Conventions

[ ]	overlap
=	latching (no interval between turns)
CAPITALS	louder speech
! utterances!	stretches of louder speech
*	quieter speech
Italics	emphasis
?	intonation rising
.	intonation falling
!	animated tone
(.), (..), (...)	pause (short, medium, long)
:, ::, :::	elongation of utterance (short, medium, long)
But-	abrupt cut-off point
-	false start
((coughs))	transcriber's comments or descriptions
(only)	uncertain/unintelligible utterances
(xxxx)	untranscribable material

Chapter 5: Analysing Conflict and Complaints in Service Encounters

5.1. Outline

The analysis of conflict and complaints in service encounters necessitates an approach that combines various theoretical approaches. I will investigate my data mainly from a cognitive-pragmatic point of view, involving sociolinguistic and conversation analytic tools. One of the main aims of my analysis will be to uncover what are the mechanisms of conflict management in service encounters and what influence (negative) emotions may have on the interactions. My analysis is based on House's discourse comprehension and production model (2003: 30), which I have simplified and adapted for the analysis of conflict and complaints. The model will enable me and other researchers to establish on which conceptual level and for what reason a conflictual speech event takes a particular direction. The model incorporates the discourse frame, the participants' role relationship, the power constellation of the interaction, as well as cognitive-emotional factors. In this chapter, I will describe my adaptation of House's model and show how it can be used to analyse conflict and complaints in service encounters. The chapter will also serve to describe the main elements inherent in conflict management in service encounters and highlight the main act sequences and strategies in conflict exchanges with the help of sequential analyses of conversations.

5.2. A Model for the Analysis of Conflict and Complaints

As shown in previous chapters, conflict discourse, and complaints in particular, are difficult to grasp and to analyse. It is therefore imperative to adopt a multi-level and multi-method approach that takes the various contextual and interpersonal aspects at play in this particular kind of speech event into account:

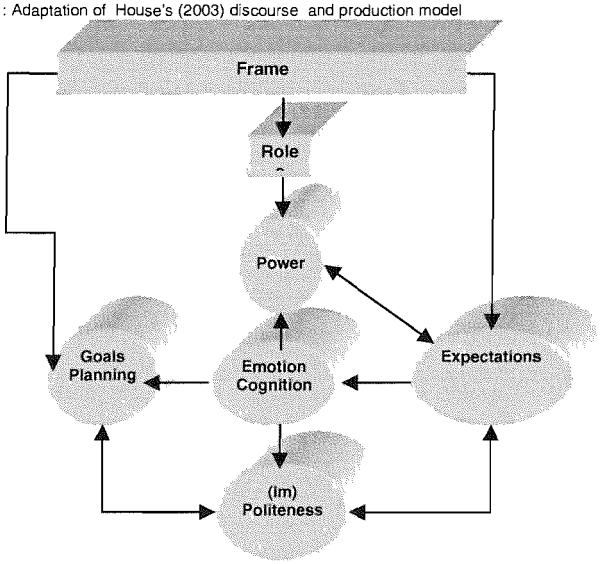
> Politeness is so closely linked to both cognitive-intentional aspects and linguo-cultural expressions that are conventionalised in a linguaculture (Agar, 1994) that only an approach combining the two seems fruitful. (House, 2005: 13)

My approach to the analysis of conflictual service encounters is based on House's (2003) integrative discourse comprehension and production model, which in turn is derived from Edmonson's original discourse model (Edmondson, 1987; 1989) and adaptations made to it (House, 1993; 2000). In House (2003) this model is used for the analysis of misunderstandings in intercultural university encounters. However, the model is not restricted to the analysis of misunderstandings, and proves invaluable for the analysis of conflict management and complaints in service encounters. House's (2003: 30) discourse comprehension and production model is a useful schematic representation of the key elements of discourse comprehension and production, taking factors such as context and interlocutors' motivations, but also cognitive and affective processes into account. Although the order of its graphic representation is not random, the processes described are by no means linear, but "interrelated in network fashion and the whole system operates in parallel and simultaneously" (House, 2003: 34). For my purposes, however, the model as it stands proves slightly too elaborate and overly schematic. I will therefore introduce my own version of the model, comprising some of the presented ideas into larger categories, and adding a few aspects which I feel should be explicitly mentioned, thereby creating an effective tool geared towards the analysis of conflict discourse, with special emphasis on complaints. The strength of House's model lies to a large extent in the fact that she incorporates emotion and cognition into her approach, but also in the fact that the model is very comprehensive and manages to include all the important stages at work during language comprehension and production. The model depicts the various stages of discourse comprehension and production as a series of boxes and distinguishes between input (speech comprehension) and output (speech production). This comprehensiveness, however, makes it difficult to process what the model describes. In order to make the key contents slightly more accessible, the model I want to suggest takes over the core elements of House's model, but slightly simplifies its structure.

My approach presents a hierarchical order, with the situational frame governing all other elements of the speech event. The frame shapes the role relationship of the participants, and establishes the initial power balance between the interlocutors. Frame and institutional roles remain stable

throughout the whole interaction, whereas the other elements of the model may undergo changes und readaptations, depending on the interlocutors' reactions. The remaining elements of the model are put in a circular relationship to each other, with emotion and cognition at the centre, as these are the factors that decide or at least influence any linguistic decoding and encoding (see Figure 1). Around these elements, in a circular fashion, indicating that there is no necessary sequential order of the elements, and in constant interplay with them are the goals the interactants have when approaching the interaction, the discourse planning that follows from these goals, the expectations the interlocutors bring to the exchange or develop in the course of the interaction, and any issues involving (im)politeness, or face considerations. The order of this model was chosen intentionally, suggesting the stability of the discourse frame and the participants' role relationship by positioning them above all other elements involved in the interaction. The remaining components revolve round the elements cognition and emotion, which are linked and cannot be separated from each other, and which are at constant interplay with the other elements.

Figure 1: Adaptation of House's (2003) discourse and production model



This fairly simple model includes all the relevant elements of conflict discourse, and proves very useful for the analysis of conflictual interactions because it helps specify where and why conflict has been exacerbated. This kind of model has two important purposes: For one thing it helps describe and

visualise the various aspects involved in (conflict) discourse, but more importantly, it enables the researcher to establish what happened in the interaction and on what level and for what reason the problem-solving process was hindered. In many cases a close analysis of verbal interactions shows that the interactants had different expectations, evaluated their respective role or their power relationship differently, or had differing preconceptions about the other's goals and obligations. Initially, the goals will be shaped by the discourse frame, but in the course of the interaction they might shift or change, depending on reactions from the interlocutor. Subgoals might emerge and take on a higher degree of urgency than the initial goals. The model presents itself as four circles orbiting round a central circle, with two blocks above them. The elements of the model are connected by arrows, which sometimes are unilateral, and sometimes pointing into two directions, representing the influence the elements can have on each other.

5.2.1 Frame and Expectations

In the particular context of the data analysed here, the frame or the situational context is that of a conflictual service encounter at an airport or over the phone. I shall argue with House that every particular discourse frame (Bednarek, 2005; Fillmore, 1976; Minsky, 1975; see section 3.4) triggers a number of related concepts or (culturally influenced) norms in the interlocutors' minds, as well as the range of appropriate linguistic representations associated with it. In my corpus this could be summed up as the 'problem-solving in a service encounter' frame. Generally we have very little factual knowledge about norms and people's perceptions of them. The particular combination of data collection methods in my corpus will help me get insights into people's perceptions of norms and appropriate behaviour within the 'problem-solving in a service encounter' frame (see also chapters 3 and 7). We can assume that speakers have interactional goals they bring to the exchange and others that emerge because of the direction of the discourse. In service encounters that would mean, roughly, that the participants' main goal is to solve the problem at hand to their own satisfaction. This would hold true for both sides of the discourse, for the customers as well as for the company representatives. In the course of the ongoing discourse interactional goals

might change, or subgoals might emerge, depending on previous moves and the interlocutor's reactions. Within the service encounter frame, customers and company representatives have opposing interests and expectations, which in many cases is the reason for the conflict in the first place. A typical situation in my data involves a situation where a customer is slightly late for check-in for a flight. The check-in procedure has been stopped, but it is clear that the plane has not departed yet and that it would theoretically be possible for the customer to reach it. The customer approaches this problem in the hope that the company representative will accommodate him/her, will be friendly and deferent and will put the customer's needs first. A company representative's expectations, however, are mainly shaped by company policy. Therefore, most likely, the customer's expectations will not be met and s/he will not be treated as expected (see analysis).

The discourse frame of the speech event under investigation here is similar in every situation. It varies slightly in the three different data sets.

a. Fly-on-the-wall Documentaries:

In the video data, the interactions invariably take place at an airport (these are several different airports in the UK), and more specifically, at a counter of the airline EasyJet. The interaction is immediate, in the sense that a problem is usually detected and negotiated on the spot. The participants are physically present and can see each other. In most of the scenarios, the customers are standing on the customer side of the desk and the company representatives are sitting behind the desk, facing a computer screen. Therefore there is a physical barrier between the interactants, and there is a slight asymmetry to their postures and their eye level, with the company representatives sitting down and the customers standing up.

b. Telephone Conversations

In the telephone data, normally some time has elapsed between the event which caused the problem and the time the phone call is made. Due to the constraints of the medium, the participants can only hear but not see each other and the number of participants is usually limited to two. Usually the company representative would be in the offices of his/her company, and the customer would normally call from home or his/her workplace.

c. Role Plays

In the role plays, the interactants can see and hear each other and usually are in a position to each other which they have chosen themselves, usually sitting next to each other or opposite each other.

5.2.2 Roles and Power

The participants in the TV data as well as in the telephone data are a company representative (or very rarely several) and one (or several) customers. In the role plays the participants are two students who assume the role of company representative and customer, respectively. Obviously, the participants' ages, social backgrounds, rank in the company, etc. will all have a certain amount of influence on their speech behaviour. Unfortunately, because of the nature of this particular corpus, a systematic investigation into the influence of gender, age, or social background proves impossible in this study. Nonetheless, these factors will be considered in the analysis whenever possible and whenever the relevant information is there.

In the context of conflictual service encounter discourse, the participants' roles are very clearly defined and shaped by the institutional discourse (compare chapter 3.3). The roles of customer and company representative naturally do remain stable in the course of the interaction; the power relationship, however, which is initially marked by the interactants' roles, may vary considerably, depending on the course of the interaction. The swaying of the initial power balance between the interlocutors can be brought about through the use of particular strategies, as power is also negotiated locally between the participants of conflict discourse and every participant is trying to influence and control the behaviour of the other (Brown & Gilman, 1972: 255).

5.2.3. Emotion/Cognition

Emotive and cognitive elements are of central importance for the analysis of conflict talk. In the course of the interaction participants have to make decisions pertaining to face considerations, and to "cognitive-intellectual processes evaluating the propositional content of a preceding turn" (House, 2003: 32). In the context of a problem-solving episode this might mean that a customer at this stage would internally compare the current situation with

similar past experiences, would consider the interpersonal relationship with the interlocutor and assess the pros and cons of reacting in a certain manner.

We can assume that the expression of opposing attitudes will cause negative emotions in the interlocutor. Hence participants have to weigh opposing discourse goals against each other. Will they give preference to venting their emotions, or do they prefer to achieve their interactional goals? Venting negative emotions is generally perceived as rude and face threatening, and might therefore have negative effects on the interpersonal relationships between the interlocutors, and consequently aggravate the conflict. That in turn would make it more difficult to seek a compromise in order to solve the problem at hand. Interlocutors, and in this instance especially customers, have to weigh their options carefully and have to choose a discourse strategy that is most likely to help them attain their discourse goals. These considerations are computed online and constantly readapted during the interaction, all the time depending on the interlocutors' strategies and reactions. This part of the model also represents a crucial point in terms of the power balance within a service encounter (compare chapter 3.3). Interlocutors need to take interpersonal and power relationships into account when settling on a particular communicative strategy.

5.2.4 Goals

Company representatives and customers usually have conflicting goals. Their main or initial goals (Márquez Reiter, 2005) as a rule are stable from the outset and can be described as follows. The company representative's main goal is to solve the problem at hand in accordance with the company policy, as time- and cost-effectively as possible. The customer's main goal is to see the problem solved in a way that serves his/her interests best. These primary goals are static and do not change in the course of the interaction. Both parties usually have secondary (or according to Márquez Reiter 'complementary') goals which can arise and evolve in the course of the interaction (for example *venting one's feelings*, *being proven right*, etc.). These goals prompt the interlocutors to use strategies which will help them reach their communicative goals. I will have a close look at how the participant's expectations of the

interaction and their perception of roles in the interaction influence their strategic behaviour.

5.3. Typical Act Sequences in Conflict Discourse

Conflict management in service encounters follows a certain pattern, revolving round the statement or manifestation of a problem and the negotiation of a solution. Usually, embedded in these two main actions, complaining is one sub-strategy among others. The speech events studied here usually contain the following main strategies, which can occur separately or overlapping each other:

1. Manifestation of a problem
2. Negotiation of solution
3. Blame/Justification
4. Argumentation/Persuasion

Generally, the interaction begins with the manifestation of some kind of problem. Sometimes this is initially verbalized by the customer, sometimes by the company representative. The other three elements, the negotiation of a solution, blame or justification, and argumentation/persuasion follow in no fixed order or are interwoven, depending very much on the situational context and the interlocutors' individual behaviour. This pattern can be found in all data types of my corpus, i.e. in the video data, the telephone conversations and the role plays alike.

A typical example taken from the video data may serve to illustrate such a sequence: In this scenario (Example 1: Family of Ten) a large family have missed their flight for the second time in a row. EasyJet's company policy in those instances is to transfer their customers to the next available flight, without charging for this service. However, this applies only for missing a flight once, not twice. In the sequence shown as an example here, a man, Shawn, who is travelling with his wife, their children and some friends, approaches the EasyJet check-in desk and informs the female company representative (who he has spoken to before) that he and his family have missed their flight. Having been in the same situation before, he probably assumes that they will again be transferred to a later flight free of charge.

Example (1) : Family of Ten

01 Shawn:	missed that flight an all
02 Ejwoman:	cause you already had a free transfer the only way that you can go on a later flight is to buy whole new seats
03 Shawn:	well (.) that monitor that we were sat next to needs checking out then [cause it's still (XXX)]
04 Ejwoman:	[(XXX)to be at the gate] thirty minutes before departure
05 Shawn:	[yeah well]
06 Ejwoman:	[and every other passenger made it] the aircraft
07 Shawn:	you need to check that monitor then
08 Wife:	it's pathetic
09 Shawn:	what is wrong now what is wrong now
10 Ejwoman:	on the monitor you are told to be at the gate
11 Shawn:	the monitor
12 Ejwoman:	the airport regardless you are told
13 Shawn:	[that monitor needs] to be sorted out
14 Ejwoman:	[to be there]
15 Shawn:	cause otherwise other people will do it as well whoever is responsible for that monitor is responsible for us missing that flight
16 Ejwoman:	at the end of the day
17 Shawn:	responsible for missing that flight
18 Ejwoman:	if you want to get home tonight you're gonna have to buy ten new seats cause there's ten of you (..) ((the conversation continues))

In turn 2 the EasyJet employee informs the customer that he will have to buy new tickets, a move which constitutes the manifestation of the problem. There is a short pause when Shawn takes that information in, planning his next moves. He then in turn 3 claims that it is the company's fault and not his own that they missed the flight and suggests that the monitors might be faulty. This move is clearly designed as a justification of his own behaviour, and simultaneously as a deflection of the blame. The ensuing turns repeat the strategies used in turn two and three. The company representative keeps explaining the company policy to the customer, using rational arguments to

convince him that she is in the right, and the customer tries to convince her that he is not to blame and that consequently he should not be made to pay.

In turn 8 Shawn's wife complains about the whole situation by saying that she thinks "it's pathetic". With this comment, she expresses her (negative) evaluation of how the situation is dealt with by EasyJet. Complaints such as this one appear as a subcategory of broader strategies, and can serve a number of different functions, depending on the complainer's intentions and emotional state. Negative evaluations or expressions of negative emotions are usually triggered when the course of events runs contrary to the customer's expectations. In this scenario, the group of customers think that they did nothing wrong and that their missing the flight was caused by misinformation they received from a faulty monitor. They therefore believe that they are in the right and should not have to pay for something which, in their opinion, is the company's fault. The wife's complaint is a negative assessment of the situation and serves to embellish her husband's line of argumentation. Together, they express their opinion that they are not to blame for what happened and that whoever is responsible for that monitor "is responsible for us missing that flight" (Shawn, turn 15). Typically, customers try to persuade the company representative to act in the customer's best interest, whereas the company representative tries to persuade the customer that he/she needs to adhere to the company policy. In the end, a solution is usually found which is unsatisfactory either for the customer or for the company, or sometimes it happens that the parties manage to agree on a compromise. In this example the solution was to have the customer pay for new tickets, but at a much lower price than was originally suggested.

5.4. Typical Strategies

5.4.1. Blame

Blame, or more generally, the question who caused the problem and who is responsible for the problem at hand, is of central importance in service encounters, as was already evident in the discussion of Example 1. Close analyses of conflictual service encounters show that very often the conflict-solving process revolves round the question who caused the problem. It

transpires that the interlocutors base their line of argumentation on their beliefs about who is to blame for the problem. Company representatives try to deflect the blame from their company towards the customer, whereas customers try to prove that they are not responsible for the problem and that it was caused by the company.

Example (2): Couple with Granddaughter

In this sequence an elderly couple (the husband seems to be French; the wife, who does most of the talking, is British) after having come from Edinburgh to Luton, want to travel on to Nice together with their little granddaughter Ally, who is about six. They had originally planned to take the wife's mother with them, but she cannot travel as she is ill. The wife had phoned EasyJet and changed the ticket over to Ally's name, and had been charged a hundred and sixty pounds for that service. The couple now deal with Leo, a young EasyJet representative, and find out that apparently the name change had not been done for the second leg of the journey, for which EasyJet now want to charge them again.

01 Woman:	we have- gave a ticket to my mother (.) and my mother was coming (.) from
02 Leo:	yeah
03 Woman:	from (silling) to nice with us (XXX) (.) and she's in hospital ill (.) so we- we did say we'd take Ally [instead
04 Man:	and we asked for the price]
05 Woman:	so we phoned up and I thought they'd just switch over the name and the [seat
06 Man:	no]
07 Woman:	and they said no (.) it would cost another hundred and sixty five pounds and said that was actually for the entire trip (.) so it's the same flight (.) so we paid a hundred and sixty five pounds
08 Leo:	you see ((showing them a print-out of the booking)) because of the Edinburgh leg there's extra changes

The interaction begins by Leo having trouble finding their booking in the computer (that sequence was left out here). While Leo is searching in the computer, the wife starts a narrative in order to explain why their booking might be filed differently from usual bookings (turns 1-7). Meanwhile Leo finds their booking in the computer and compares it to their written confirmation. In her narrative the wife explains why they had to take little Ally instead of her mother, and how they had phoned EasyJet and made sure that the changes were correct. She is very aware of the question of blame and indicates that she did everything correctly, thereby implying that the problem they encounter now must be caused by EasyJet and not themselves. She explains that she phoned EasyJet (turn 5) and learnt that a simple name change would cost them a hundred and sixty five pounds, which they paid (turn 7). The wife emphasizes the fact that she was assured explicitly on the phone that that would be for the entire trip, as they need to first fly from Edinburgh to Luton and then from Luton to Nice (turn 7 "... and said that was actually for the entire trip..."). Leo seems to be under the impression that the couple made a mistake when they did the name change and that they forgot to do it for the second leg of the journey. He tries to explain to them that it is normal that there are extra changes because it is a two-leg journey (turn 8). He does not give the impression that he believes the customers' account and instead wants to charge them yet again in order to change the name on the second leg of the journey. Clearly, the customers' narrative does not have the intended effect on the company representative, who reacts completely in line with his company's rules and regulations, although in this particular scenario that appears to be absurd.

```
09 Woman:      this is it it's EasyJet
10 Leo:        (XXX)
11 Man:        EasyJet made a mistake
12 Leo:        but but
13 Woman:      that's not our mistake [then it's
               EasyJet's
14 Leo:        (XXX)] as you see there your flight
               to nice-
15 Woman:      -but the tickets are a hundred and
               sixty five pounds
```

16 Leo: yeah that's for the Edinburgh Luton Luton Edinburgh one but (.) the connecting one hasn't been done
17 Woman: (.) but surely not a hundred and sixty five pounds for a child [from Edinburgh to Luton
18 Leo: it's] it's the same price (.) completely the same price
19 Woman: [but that's not our mistake
20 Leo: I know]
21 Woman: (.) we booked that (.) we booked from Edinburgh to Nice I have
22 Leo: eh eh
23 Woman: (.) at a hundred and [sixty five pounds
24 Leo: these are different]
25 Woman: it's not down there it's not our doing
26 Leo: these are different flights though (.) you probably need to change the Edinburgh Luton
27 Woman: no I changed that one
28 Leo: you haven't changed that one I'm afraid-

Now that they are confronted with having to pay even more money in order to fly to Nice, the couple openly blame EasyJet for the mistake (turn 9, turn 11, turn 13) and deny any responsibility for what is happening (turn 13, turn 19, turn 25, turn 27). They use this strategy repeatedly, but without success. The couple also wonder how this ticket can be that expensive when it is only for a child (turn 17: "but surely not a hundred and sixty pounds for a child"), and try to evoke the company representative's sympathy in this manner, which is underlined by the wife adopting something that could be described as imploring intonation. Leo remains unmoved by this, as "it's the same price" (turn 18) and is adamant that the name has been changed for only one leg of the journey. He keeps trying to prove that fact on the basis of what the computer and his printout show (turn 14: "as you see there your flight to nice"; turn 16: "(...) the connecting one hasn't been done"). When the wife claims to have changed the second leg as well (turn 27: "I changed that one"), Leo contradicts her (turn 27: "you haven't changed that one I'm afraid"). This is tantamount to calling the customer a lier, and runs counter to any expectations customers might have for a service encounter frame and is a far

cry from the 'the customer is always right' credo. Although Leo tries to minimize the face threat inherent in this utterance by using an apologetic utterance ("I'm afraid"), his tone of voice indicates a degree of finality and shows that he is not going to be convinced that the couple are in the right, which the wife picks up on directly and starts changing her line of argumentation.

29 Woman:	-we can't afford to buy a ticket we're going to see her aunt (XXX) in nice
30 Leo:	there's no way at all that we can get around not charging (.) this is something that we are not allowed to at the [moment
31 Woman:	((mumbling under her breath)) yeah we should have flown with ryanair]
32 Leo:	I mean the only thing I can suggest you do you ought (.) to write to customer support
33 Woman:	you know we can't believe the cost (XXX) of this ticket
34 Leo:	eh eh you [understand that it is
35 Woman:	(XXX)] we could have gone round the world for that price
36 Leo:	((to the camera)): somewhere along the line definitely there's been a communication breakdown (.) whether it's (.) us at fault or them at fault ehm (.) we're never gonna find the bottom of it (.) the trip they had bought was (.) quite good (.) but moneywise it's turned out extremely expensive (…) she's right (.) she said they could probably have gone round the world for that (.) probably could though ((laughs)) (..) but you have to do the job when you have to stick to the rules (.) that's part of it you know what I mean
37 Woman:	((to the camera)) there's obviously been some mistake made (..) ehm (.) by EasyJet (.) and it's the booking I mean to nice instead of a hundred they charged us another hundred and ((looking at her husband)) what was it
38 Man:	a hundred and [sixty pounds

```
39 Woman:       a hundred] and sixty pounds
40 Man:         it's their fault
41 Woman:       (XXX)  it's a lot of money ((nodding
                her head sadly))
```

The wife now uses the monetary argument that the flight is becoming too expensive and that they simply cannot afford to pay that much money (turn 29), again appealing to Leo's empathy. Still, this strategy is unsuccessful as Leo explains to her that he is not allowed to spare her these charges (turn 30), because he is bound to act within the rules of the company policy, which he explains again to the camera after the interaction (turn 36: "but you have to do the job when you have to stick to the rules (.) that's part of it you know what I mean"). Leo tries to be helpful and makes the suggestion that they write to EasyJet's customer support (turn 32) in order to reclaim some of the money. The interaction ends with the customers giving in and paying the extra charges, but expressing their displeasure in an indirect complaint (turn 33: " you know we can't believe the cost of this ticket"; turn 35: "we could have gone round the world for that price").

After the encounter, both Leo and the couple address the camera and give their assessment of what went on. Leo admits that he does not really know whether the problem was caused by EasyJet or by the customers (turn 36: "whether it's (.) us at fault or them at fault ehm (.) we're never gonna find the bottom of it") and admits that they had to pay far too much money (turn 36: "but moneywise it's turned out extremely expensive"). As mentioned before, Leo explains that his actions were influenced by the company policy (turn 36: " but you have to do the job when you have to stick to the rules (.) that's part of it you know what I mean"). Indirectly we understand that he might think that the customers were wronged in this instance, but that it was not in his power to help them because he had to act in accordance with company policy.

The couple in their assessment of the event repeat that this must all be due to some mistake (turn 37: "there's obviously been some mistake made") and that the whole thing was EasyJet's fault (turn 40: "it's their fault"). They are clearly very disappointed that they had to pay a huge amount of money for the simple reason that the name on the ticket needed to be changed. For them it

was clearly important that the whole problem was caused by EasyJet and not by themselves.

The analysis of this service encounter shows that the question of who caused the problem is central for both the company representative and the customers. Their whole line of argumentation is built around the fact that the other party is to blame and furnishes them with the reasons why the conflict should be solved in their respective interest. Although in this particular scenario it looks as if the customers were in the right, and the problem was indeed something caused by an EasyJet employee, the customers are unsuccessful with their complaint and have to pay the additional charges anyway. We can assume that this leaves them disappointed with the company, and will probably cause them to write complaint letters (in order to retrieve some of their money), but, more importantly, it might cause them to choose another airline in the future, in order to avoid incidents like this one. Not accommodating the customers and not admitting the company's service failure here might reflect badly on the company and might cost them two customers.

5.4.2. Persuasion/Argumentation

Example (3): Booking Confusion

In this example, a young businessman, Rory, turns up at Belfast airport a day later than the date stated on his ticket. Rory claims that someone else booked the ticket for him and apparently confused the dates. Since the ticket is not valid anymore, Rory will now have to pay for a new ticket, which he wants to avoid, claiming that he cannot afford the price. Central to this exchange are the persuasive strategies Rory uses in order to convince the EasyJet employees to decide in his favour.

```
01 Rory:        ((looking worried, waving his right
                arm a lot)) I got someone else to
                book it for me and they always got my
                regular flight and  they've they've
                messed this up is (..) there anything
```

we can do I'm flying with you every single week there must be some sort of=

02 Ejwoman: other than buying a new seat sir I'm afraid not

03 Rory: and how much is a new seat

04 Ejwoman: hang on let me see for you now is it one way

05 Ejwoman2: well you've got the booking

06 Rory: (XXX)

07 Ejwoman: a hundred twenty seven ninety nine

08 Rory: ((slightly slapping the desk, then putting both hands to his face)) ooh no ((stepping away from the counter, with his back towards the counter))

09 Rory: (...)((turning around slowly, his hands still covering his face, then removing his hands, returning to the counter, clearly thoughtful, with a worried look on his face)) (...) I certainly don't have a hundred twenty seven pound ninety nine (.)

10 Ejwoman2: unfortunately that's the cheapest ticket EasyJet have on that flight at the moment

11 Rory: this is a *to*tal nightmare for me I I I (.) because I can't I simply can't fly back at that price ((becoming more insistant))and literally fly you can check the reference every single week day in day out I fly I must be your most loyal customer on this (..) is there *no* way you can do something (.) because I I I mean this is not the sort of service (XX) led me to believe you could offer (XXX) is there a manager I could speak to or-

12 Ejwoman: -yes I am I'm the manager

13 Rory: you *are* the manager

((the dialogue is interrupted by the narrator))

14 Rory: it strikes me here that ever since (Stelios) let go and released the new management reigns

15 Ejwoman: yes

16 Rory: of this company (.) it just hasn't provided service that is's provided (.) I remember in the early days when he first started he was hungry for success I once got a flight out of Athens it was two hours delayed and we all got a new flights we got a

		lovely dinner now *every* single flight is delayed every single time now the *one* time somebody in my office has made a mistake booked me the wrong flight you are charging me a penalty of a hundred and twenty seven pounds
17	Ejwoman:	I do
18	Rory:	why is that
19	Ejwoman:	I do understand your situation sir
20	Rory:	to get back to
21	Ejwoman:	and I'm quite (XXX) but there is no physical way that I can open up the flight once it has closed
22	Rory:	the whole service disgusts me (.) *absolutely* disgusts me (.) now here I am (.)having to pay for it ((later))
23	Rory:	((after handing over his credit card)) I will be writing to the Easy Crew
24	Ejwoman:	that's fine
25	Rory:	or the EasyJet whoever now is currently managing stairs I'll do my best to find out 'cause I now have every documented receipt I ever spent on EasyJet in the last twelve months and it's it's a lot of money
26	Ejwoman:	I understand sir we do appreciate your custom your custom is valuable to us but
27	Rory:	so we're out in Belfast starting this little business everything is going into the mortgage rates I've sold two motorbikes sold a couple of cars I've sold all the toys I once had everything has gone into this company and money is very very tight we're making it work (.) but this is the la:st thing I need right now the la:st thing I needed and ehm as I said it's it's a bugger
28	Ejwoman:	let's get you checked in
29	Rory:	right
30	Ejwoman:	ok
31	Rory:	ok
32	Ejwoman:	((later, to the camera)) hopefully he will (.) grace us with his custom again I hope it doesn't put him off and again I do understand his point why he is frustrated

We join the exchange at the moment when Rory explains that someone else booked the ticket for him and that it is that person's responsibility that things went wrong (turn 1). He is vague about this by using the personal pronoun "they" for the person who booked the ticket. He then in the same turn asks whether EasyJet can help him with his problem. (turn 1: "is (..) there anything we can do"). By using the personal pronoun "we" he shows that he is willing to help in finding a solution for this problem. He justifies this request for help by telling the EasyJet representative that he is a frequent flyer (turn 1: "I'm flying with you every single week"), thus establishing that he is a loyal customer. Using this strategy is motivated by his expectation that as a loyal paying customer he has a right to be accommodated ("there must be some sort of"). At this point, one of the two female EasyJet representatives behind the counter cuts him short by letting him know that she cannot help him and that he needs to buy a new ticket (turn 2: "other than buying a new seat sir I'm afraid not"). She uses the polite address term 'sir', and shows a certain degree of regret for not being able to help ("I'm afraid"), but is categorical in her rejection of his request. In reaction to this Rory simply asks for the price of the new ticket ("and how much is a new seat"), and when he is given that information, he finds the price too high. He is clearly shocked at hearing that he has to pay that much, as in turn 8 he just says "ooh no" and takes a few steps away from the ticket desk, burying his face in both his hands and turning his back towards the desk. Very slowly he turns round again, with his hand still on his face, then takes them away and stares ahead for a few moments, clearly pondering the problem and any possible strategies that might get him out of having to pay. In the ensuing turns Rory becomes increasingly disappointed and angry, as the various persuasive strategies and complaints he employs fail to convince the company representatives to act in his favour. After returning to the counter and having thought about what to do next, Rory informs the two women that he does not have the required sum (turn 9: "I certainly don't have a hundred twenty seven pound ninety nine"). The EasyJet representative reacts with an apologetic utterance (turn 10: "unfortunately"), but makes it clear that there are no cheaper tickets available. Her tone of voice is fairly monotonous and clearly conveys that she is not about to suggest any solution in Rory's favour. She distances herself from the whole problem by

her choice of vocabulary ("unfortunately that's the cheapest ticket EasyJet have on that flight at the moment"), using the company's name instead of a personal pronoun such as "we" or "I").

In reaction to this Rory now expresses his displeasure and lets her know that this is causing him huge problems (turn 11: "'this is a total nightmare for me'") and again mentions that he cannot afford a ticket at that price. His desperation is clearly showing, and his whole demeanour is deploring and pity-enducing at first, but changes in the course of this turn, with his voice becoming more insistent, when his argumentation changes track and he points out the fact that he is a regular customer with EasyJet (turn 11: "I I I (.) because I can't I simply can't fly back at that price and literally fly you can check the reference every single week day in day out I fly I must be your most loyal customer on this"). After a medium pause, during which no reaction from the EasyJet employees is forthcoming, Rory again asks whether there is no other solution (turn 11: "is there no way you can do something"), and when he gets no reaction to this seems to become increasingly angry and starts criticising the company's service indirectly by pointing out that his expectations of the company have been disappointed (turn 11: " because I I I mean this is not the sort of service (XXX) led me to believe you could offer"). This criticism is directly followed by a request to speak to a manager (turn 11: "is there a manager I could speak to"). This request to deal within someone higher in status is very typical for complaint behaviour in service encounters and is designed to sway the power balance in the customer's favour.

Rory's request to speak to a manager was presumably uttered in the hope of being able to talk to someone else who might be more inclined to help him. When the EasyJet representative he had been talking to so far informs him that she is in fact the manager (turn 12), he is slightly taken aback, because asking for the manager for him probably was one of the strongest strategies in his complaint repertoire. He does not give up his efforts, though, and after a short moment of hesitation once more mentions the declining quality of EasyJet's service, launching into an assessment of the qualitative changes after the founder of EasyJet (Stelios) left the management of the company over to other people (turns 14 – 16) and then launches into a narrative about how much better the service was in the past (turn 16: "I

remember in the early days when he first started he was hungry for success I once got a flight out of Athens it was two hours delayed and we all got a new flights we got a lovely dinner"). He contrasts these idyllic memories by resorting to extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) which paint a bleak picture of EasyJet's current service (turn 16: "now *ev*ery single flight is delayed every single time") and ends his tirade by pointing out that someone in his office made a mistake just the once, stressing that it was a one-off, and clearly not his own responsibility, and contrasting that with the large amount of money EasyJet want to make him pay now as a penalty for that (turn 16: "now the one time someone in my office made a mistake and booked me the wrong flight you are charging me a penalty of a hundred and twenty seven pounds" , and then demands an explanation (turn 18: "why is that").

For the first time his anger and indignation seem to have gotten through to his interlocutors, as one of them is trying to express some understanding of his situation (turns 17 + 19: "I do I do understand your situation sir"), further expressing her respect by the use of the address form 'sir', trying to get through to Rory who is still not finished talking. The EasyJet manager tries to justify her behaviour towards Rory through the technical and institutional constraints her work brings with it (turn 21: "but there is no physical way I can open a flight once it has closed"). This explanation is probably meant well, but does not really explain anything to Rory, as the problem is not the flight being closed, but him having to pay extra money for it. Consequently he expresses his negative evaluation of the situation very strongly at the same time giving in to the inevitable, taking out his credit card to pay (again!) for the flight (turn 22: "the whole service disgusts me (.) *absolutely* disgusts me (.) now here I am (.)having to pay for it").

However, he still has not given up completely and possibly as much for venting his anger as in a last attempt to sway things in his favour, he announces that he will write a complaint letter to the EasyJet management (turns 23 + 25), a threat which is met by calm and encouraging reactions on the part of the EasyJet manager (turn 24: "that's fine"; turn 26: "I understand sir we do appreciate your custom but"). These reactions, however, do not seem to have the desired effect and sound rather rehearsed and little heart-felt. In a last attempt to appeal to the women's empathy Rory launches into another

narrative about him running a little start-up company in Belfast, which he had to sell all his man-toys for, trying to explain that "money is very tight" thereby again stressing his point in an extreme fashion (turn 27) and then expressing his anger and desperation by using a swear word (turn 27: "it's a bugger'), again trying to express how very grave this situation is for him. In reaction to this the EasyJet employee ends their conflict talk by changing the topic and making him move on (turn 28: "let's get you checked in"), and their reciprocate "Oks" finally end the dispute.

Conceptually, in this exchange, customer and company representative have different expectations with regard to what their respective roles entail and what to expect from the other. The customer approaches this discourse frame with the expectation that his goals will be appreciated and accommodated, and that certain discursive strategies (justification, narrative, appeal to empathy, etc.) will help attain his transactional goal of not having to pay extra, despite the fact that in he is technically in the wrong. The company representative, on the other hand, is completely focussed on the fact that the company is in the right, and therefore does not see any need or possibility to accommodate the customer. Referring back to my adaptation of House's (2003) discourse and production model (see 5.2, figure 1), we can clearly locate the core of the problems between the interactants in the discrepancy of their interpretations and expectations vis-à-vis the discourse frame and their respective roles. Both parties evaluate the current problem differently, and base their discourse moves on their respective interpretations and expectations. This, inevitably, leads to aggravation of the conflict, as both discourse participants do not only have goals that are at variance with those of the other, but also appear to have little awareness of this discrepancy in perception on either side.

5.5. Discussion and Summary

In an attempt to provide a visual representation of the key elements determining conflictual service encounter discourse, I have suggested an adaptation of House's (2003) model of discourse production and comprehension. The aim here is to have a clear, easily comprehensible image

of the elements determining speech behaviour within the conflictual service encounter frame. In the course of a qualitative analysis of conflict discourse it enables the researcher to attribute certain behavioural patterns to specific elements in the model. The superordinate components determining conflict discourse in service encounters are the operant discourse frame and the participant roles, which in the model are positioned above all other elements. Naturally, in the 'conflict in a service encounter frame', the participant roles are clearly defined by that institutional frame as those of customer and company representative. Both of these levels relate to the conceptualisation participants have of behavioural and linguistic norms. In the model we find a third level of elements which is arranged in a circle underneath the 'role' element and includes 'power', 'goals/planning', 'expectations', and '(im)politeness' as factors orbiting round the central field of emotion/cognition. This level constitutes the procedural elements of the speech event and, unlike the first two levels, which are stable, these constituents are subject to changes, re-assessments and adaptations, depending on the course of the interaction. Qualitative analyses of conflict episodes show very clearly how the elements in the circles shape the interaction, and how certain elements are influenced by others.

In a close analysis of problem-solving interactions in service encounters, referring back to House's model helps in determining on which conceptual level the participants' evaluations and expectations regarding the ongoing interaction differ from those of their interlocutor. The problem-solving process is very often hindered or exacerbated by such divergent expectations, which can be rooted in how participants interpret the discourse frame or context, and how they evaluate their respective role relationships and the distribution of power that is linked to the roles. Based on these initial interpretations, participants plan their discourse moves in order to attain their transactional goals. Interestingly, in service encounters, we can observe a marked difference in the interpretations of nearly all of the elements in the model made by customers and company representatives. This is mostly due to the institutional context of the interactions, where the company representatives are insiders of the institution, and the customers are outsiders. This results in a clear asymmetry, not only of power, but also of knowledge, with the

customers usually unaware of the routines of the companies and the reasons and inner mechanisms at work in specific companies. Apparently, because of such different expectations and interpretations of the discourse frame, additional conflicts arise.

In the examples discussed so far, typical strategies for the realisation of complaints and conflict talk have been discussed. Such strategies go beyond the concepts of my model, but speakers' motivations and the procedural path for their production can be explained in terms of the expectations participants bring to the exchange, and how they have to adapt them in the course of their talk, in terms of the transactional and interactional goals they pursue and how these affect their planning and choice of strategies, including (im)politeness considerations and the division of power between the interlocutors.
The following chapters will discuss these elements and their interplay in more detail.

Chapter 6: (Im)Politeness in Service Encounters

6.1. Outline

Smooth interactions in service encounters depend largely on people's perceptions of each other's behaviour. Whether they perceive their interlocutor as polite and considerate of the other's needs, or as rude and confrontational, will have a great deal of influence on how they behave in turn. In this chapter I will analyse examples from my various sub-corpora from a politeness-theoretical perspective. Underlying the analysis will be the basic assumption that (im)politeness phenomena are not necessarily inherent in particular utterances (Culpeper, 2005, 41), but dependent on the context in which an utterance was made and the way it was interpreted by the interlocutors. Recent approaches to the phenomenon of politeness agree that its mechanisms can only properly be explained when taking its discursive nature into account (see 3.1). I will have a close look at which (im)politeness strategies are used in what particular context, and what reactions these strategies evoke. How can we explain that politeness considerations figure more prominently in elicited data than in naturally occurring complaints? Are the interactants in real-life complaints really concerned with face considerations or do goal orientation and emotional involvement override these considerations? How important is face-work in service encounters where the focus is transactional rather than interactional (Brown & Yule, 1983)? I will argue with Beebe (1995) that rudeness can indeed be instrumental, or in other words functional and purposeful. In Beebe's view "it serves two functions: to get power and to vent negative feelings." (Beebe, 1995: 154), something which is certainly true in some of the scenarios of my data.

6.2. (Im) Politeness in Role Plays

A comparison of naturally occurring complaints in service encounters with similar role plays reveals remarkable differences with regard to face-work and the use of politeness formulae and apologetic expressions, which are much less frequently found in the naturally occurring service encounter complaints than in the role

plays. This leads to an array of questions as to why these discrepancies occur. We need to start from the assumption that role play behaviour reveals people's perceptions and attitudes about behavioural norms and appropriateness. Therefore, from the role plays we can learn about people's conceptions of complaints in service encounters, whereas from naturally occurring discourse we learn about people's actual speech behaviour.

6.2.1. Non-Confrontational Behaviour

From a close sequential analysis of the role play material it is possible to find out how people think they would conduct a conflict exchange as a customer, and also how they expect a company representative to behave. In the role plays we see a lot of concern for the interlocutor's face expressed by both parties. Apparently that is how people view a conflict exchange in a service encounter, but that is not quite how the actual service encounters unfold in real life (see below). The behaviour observable in the following two particular role plays is fairly typical, although there are a few role plays in my corpus which contain slightly more confrontational behaviour.

Example (4): Role Play Kyle and Rachel (Check-In closed)

In this first scenario, the customer is slightly late for check-in. The check-in counter closes 40 minutes prior to departure of the flight. The customer has missed that deadline and is now trying to be admitted onto that flight anyway, because she needs to be in Paris in a few hours for an important job interview. The participants in this role play are two students in their early twenties, Kyle in the role of the company representative, and Rachel in the role of the customer. The interaction consists of two parts, with the first one mainly establishing the problem at hand (turns 1-11) and the second one representing a struggle for a solution (turns 12-34).

```
01 K:          hello (.) how can I help you
02 R:          hi (.) I'm here to check in for my eh
               flight to Paris at one
03 K:          (.) I'm afraid you're too l- (.) you
               missed the deadline by ten minutes
```

04 R: (.) no you don't understand I have to get on to this flight (.) [you need to put me (XXX)
05 K: [I can] I can offer offer you a flight that leaves at six pm
06 R: ((shaking her head)) no (.) [no
07 K: which will be free of charge]
08 R: I need to be able to get to this interview at five it's *very very* important I get to this interview at five in paris
09 K: [well (.)]
10 R: [I must leave at one]
11 K: our airline (.) ehm (.) ((reading from the role play instructions)) believes that punctuality is crucial (.) ((stops reading)) and that ehm (.) in order to keep that punctuality we need to eh have our planes departing (.) at the right times (.) in which case (.) check-in has to happen (.) when-(.) by the (.) the deadline

The analysis of the role play first of all shows that the exact nature of the role play instructions (compare chapter 4.4.1) is very important. It is much easier for a student to imagine what to do and feel in the passenger's situation than in the company representative's. Rachel seems to be quite able to imagine what she would do in such a situation, and why, whereas Kyle, especially in the first part of the exchange, tends to rephrase the role play instructions when he is at a loss for words (especially in turn 11). We can thus observe already that, for role plays to work, the scenarios have to be familiar to the test subjects, and the instructions should be clear and informative.

Throughout all the role plays of this corpus, participants tend to adhere closely to the role play instructions. Kyle, who impersonates the company representative, accordingly does not deviate from company policy and, as stipulated in the instructions, will not let the passenger on the plane. This attitude can be expressed in various ways with a repertoire of different conversational moves to choose from. Kyle, throughout the interaction, opts for a matter-of-fact polite approach and tries to show his concern for his interlocutor's face by frequently using apologetic expressions ("I'm afraid" – turns 3, 13, 32 and "I'm sorry" – turn 19) and expressing his understanding for the client's predicament (turn 13). His overall

attitude is friendly but relatively firm, and it is clear throughout that he will not (and cannot) deviate from company policy. For Rachel, in the role as the client, the situation is confusing. Kyle greets her with a promising, but really quite meaningless "how can I help you" (turn 1), but does not undertake any actions to help her at all. Rachel (and this is true for all customers, in the role plays and the real-life data) approaches the interaction in the firm belief that the company representative will eventually solve her problem in accordance with her needs and objectives, which means in favour of her as the customer. She tries various avenues of explanation and persuasion, but invariably fails. At first she tries to impress upon Kyle that she really needs to get onto the flight urgently for an important job interview (turns 4, 8, and again 14). She repeatedly points out that Kyle does not understand the nature of her problem (turns 4, 14). Switching between strategies, after unsuccessfully trying to persuade Kyle that her job interview is very important, she justifies her lateness by blaming it on the bus company that took her to the airport pointing out that it is through no fault of her own that she is late (turn 12).

Since this is a role play, the two people are playacting, there obviously is no real emotional involvement present. However, Rachel seems to be capable of imagining how she would feel in such a situation, and manages to use the appropriate arguments and lexical choices. She tries to show the importance of that interview in Paris to her, and at the same time tries to evoke some empathy in Kevin. This is very common behaviour for customers, be it in role plays or real life scenarios. Customers approach an interaction of this kind with the expectation that they will be able to convince the company representative to help them, be it by using arguments, excuses, or invoking their interlocutor's empathy in some way. What customers usually do not expect is the fact that company representatives tend to be more motivated in their reactions by adhering to the company's policy than by serving the interests of the customers.

```
12 R:   but I would have been here at ehm twenty past
        had I not missed the bus (.) and because the
        bus has got- it's not my fault I was late I had
        to (.) [get this bus]
13 K:   [I understand] whatever it is your fault or not
        but this is the black and white bit (.) this is
        it in black and white you miss the d- check-in
```

deadline then I'm afraid you cannot get on the flight

14 R: you don't understand how much I need to get to this interview I *need* this job

15 K: [if]

16 R: [if] I don't get to the [interview]

17 K: [if]

18 R: there's no chance of me getting a second interview

19 K: I'm sorry for the inconvenience (.) but this isn't down to us that you missed this flight it's down to the bus company that (.) was late or you [missed]

20 R: [how can] they help me [they can't give me a bus to paris]

21 K: [they can't they can't]

22 R: I can't get there so now I am gonna miss my interview you don't understand how [important it is]

23 K: [I'm afraid] you're gonna have to try and reschedule your interview then

24 R: (.) but that's not possible pleas- what is [ten minutes]

25 K: [well]

26 R: I'm before the flight can't you just check me in just this once

27 K: (.) no (.) because (.) if we let it go this once then (.) what about the next time that happens and the next time=

28 R: =there wouldn't be a next time next time I'd be on time because [I wouldn't miss it]

29 K: [well] what about other people they'll feel (.) ehm unfairly treated

30 R: yeah but they would

31 K: what about the last person on the last flight (xxx) and he sees you go on late

32 R: I need to get to the interview (.) it's really really [important that I get to that interview]

33 K: [I'm afraid] that (.) company policy stands and that (.) I'm afraid you're gonna have to (.) take the six pm flight which is free of charge (..) or (.) figure out another way of getting to paris

34 R: (..) I'm gonna have to find another way then (.) thank you very much for your help

35 K: (.) no problem

As discussed above, in the first part of this role play, the interactants establish the problem at hand. Rachel explains her problem and the urgency why she needs to be on the plane now; Kyle has explained the options and what the company policy is. Rachel then tries evoking empathy as a new strategy, which also fails. In the second part of the role play (from turn 12 onwards) she reverts to her first strategy of stressing how important this particular job interview is for her. During the entire conversation, both interlocutors are fairly unagitated, probably much less so than they would be with actual emotional involvement in a real-life situation. They both point out after the event, that as a customer in real-life, in such a specifically important situation, they probably would be much more assertive or confrontational. As it is, their interaction is fairly non-confrontational. Rachel's strategies include justifications and other-blame (turn 12) as well as attempts at persuading Kyle how important that particular interview is for her. She does not, at any point in the whole role play, utter any form of complaint or dissatisfaction with the kind of service the company is offering or rather not offering and she is neither confrontational nor aggressive. There is quite a bit of overlap in the conversation, though, and in this respect the interaction resembles naturally occurring discourse. Similar to many similar real-life situations in my corpus, the participants discuss the issue whose fault the passenger's lateness is. Rachel uses the bus company whose bus was late as an excuse for her lateness and in order to deflect the blame. From the two participants' discussion after the role play, it transpires that they both think the whole problem is really the customer's fault and that they themselves would avoid such an occurrence by arriving at the airport in good time.

In this role play we have observed behaviour which was non-confrontational on the part of the company representative as well as on the part of the customer. It is a good example for the fact that role plays are useful tools for eliciting conversational strategies, which would be fairly similar to the ones used in reality. However, role plays lack involvement and therefore the performance does not completely resemble real-life interaction.

6.2.2. Confrontational Behaviour

Example (5): Role Play Neal and Vicky (Check-In Closed)

In conflict situations in service encounters, there is usually a certain amount of friction between the interlocutors, which often results in confrontational behaviour. In the following example, which uses the same scenario as the role play discussed above, we can observe much more confrontational behaviour on the part of the student impersonating the customer.

Note: ((both interlocutors grin a lot throughout the whole interaction, V. Slightly more than N.))

01 V: eh hi (.) I'm here for my (.) one o'clock flight to Paris?
02 N: ah I'm sorry (.) I'm afraid check-in's closed (.) ehm I- the only thing I think I can do for you now is offer you the next available flight free of charge which is at six pm
03 V: (..) no (.) I'm sorry that's not- not good enough (.) I've got a job interview at five o'clock and I *need* to make that interview it's really really important
04 N: [I'm sorry]
05 V: [can you not] just let me on I mean there's still half an hour before it leaves=
06 N: =sorry but there's nothing I can do in order for the plane to leave on time we have to close check-in forty minutes early (.) ehm unfortunately [the only thing]
07 V: [that's ridiculous!]
08 N: the only thing I can do ehm is offer you the next flight which leaves at six pm and that can be free of charge unfortunately (.) there's nothing else we can do
09 V: (.) well that- that's not good enough my my interview is at *five* (.) if it's at six then I'm- I'm gonna be extremely late! (.) that's not good enough I can't I can't *change* it
10 N: I'm sorry (.) as I said there's nothing we can do to help you
11 V: (..) right (.) gonna have to speak to your supervisor I'm afraid (.) I'm not liking this
12 N: ok (.) that's fine.
13 V: (.) ok then

Questions:

01 N: ok (.) first of all (.) ehm (.) I guess this was a realistic scenario because it does happen all the time in airports (.) ehm (.) and (.) we see it on tv as well that eh people do turn up late for their flights but there is nothing people can do eh (.) once the flight has closed check-in

02 V: yeah (.) I think I think it was it was definitely realistic and if I was in that situation I would probably have acted the same as I did (.) on here eh 'cause obviously I am gonna be a bit upset about not being able to get onto my flight it'my interview and blablabla ehm (.) so yeah I think it was it was (.) pretty (.) real to life ((nodding her head once in conclusion))

03 N: eh (.) looking back on it I think (.) I probably would have done something similar because it's important (.) from my point of view that the eh person behind the desk stays polite and tries to stay calm ehm [bas-]

04 V: [even] though I was getting a bit irate ((laughing))

05 N: yeah very upset but it's important to stay calm because otherwise the customer could end up getting *very* upset and eh they also need to know there's nothing that can be done

07 V: *very good*

08 N: (.) ok

Again, the interactants are a male and a female student, both in their early twenties, with Vicky in the role of the customer and Neal in the role of the company representative. Vicky uses fairly strong complaints in order to attain her transactional goals; however, the tone of voice in which these complaints are delivered does not match the content of the utterances. She is also much less direct and confrontational than some of the customers in the naturally occurring conversations. Incongruously, her facial expression is friendly throughout the interaction, and she is smiling most of the time. What is most interesting about this exchange is how the interactants themselves view their actions afterwards. They both view the customer's behaviour as fairly confrontational, which holds true for the locution, but not for the way it is delivered. It becomes clear that they both

think that Vicky was extremely angry and that she came across as such. Comparing her behaviour with similar behaviour from real-life data, her attitude seems devoid of emotion, and therefore is not as confrontational as it would be if she really were in that situation.

This serves to show that people do indeed know pretty well what they would say in certain stereotyped situations, but that the way they bring their message across depends to a large extent on actual emotional involvement. In this exchange, the customer utters a classical complaint in a service encounter in three instances (turns 3, 7, 9, 11). These utterances are fairly prototpyical complaint moves in service encounters, with the customer first expressing dissatisfaction with the company's services or reactions (turns 3 and 9: "that's not good enough"), and with the judgmental negative evaluation of Neal's explanations (turn 7: "that's ridiculous") which is then followed by a request to speak to someone of higher rank in the company, as well as an expression of negative feelings (turn 11: "right (.) gonna have to speak to your supervisor I'm afraid (.) I'm not liking this"). In the questions about the interaction Vicky afterwards judges her behaviour as "getting a bit irate" (turn 4), an evaluation Neal seems to agree with, as he saw her as "very very upset" (turn 5). In terms of his own behaviour he expresses the opinion that it is important for a company representative "to stay clam because otherwise the customer could end up getting very upset" (turn 5). And it is certainly true that he remained calm and polite throughout the whole interaction, although whether that was because of his being in a role play or due to his views on how a company representative would behave is difficult to determine.

6.3. (Im)Politeness in Naturally Occurring Discourse

Compared to the tendency observed in role plays, there is much more confrontational behaviour than non-confrontational behaviour both on the part of the customers as on the part of the company representatives (although the level of directness is usually lower here). The discussion of some examples will highlight the fact that emotional involvement heightens the concern for self-face and reduces (or rather annihilates) the concern for other-face (compare chapter 3.1.2). Both parties seem mostly driven by self-preservation and by considerations of

transactional goals and mostly guided by predetermined assumptions about their respective roles and rights in the interaction.

6.3.1. Confrontational Behaviour

Example (6): Telephone Conversation (Eurostar Pricing)

In this interaction taken from the corpus of telephone conversations, a seemingly simple question for information turns into a complaint exchange about company policy. Faced with a fairly confrontational customer, the company representative in this exchange remains remarkably calm and friendly.

01 ES:	eurostar thank you for waiting how may I help
02 Man:	yeah hi I wanna find out two things (..) one ehm (.) are there any last minute (.) prices (.) eh (.) to go from London to Paris (.) eh there is nothing on your website (.) and secondly (.) why has the fare gone from (.) twenty nine pounds (.) to thirty four pounds eh (..) or even a hundred and forty four pounds over a week or so
03 ES:	right
04 Man:	(XXX)
05 ES:	right (.) just to let you know you are talking to Lucinda may I take your name please
06 Man:	yeah C.
07 ES:	ok welcome well the *point* is they all go on availability? (.) so it might have been a week ago availability was there at a lower price but since then it's sold out which *can* happen. (.) the more tickets we sell the higher up the prices go?
08 Man:	and why is that
09 ES:	the only way the I mean that is just the way our system works
10 Man:	well it's chaotic (.) and it's totally unfair
11 ES:	it's basically unavoidable you see it's just the way our system works

The man calling Eurostar's booking line has already found information about Eurostar tickets on the Internet. He is mainly disappointed that the company does not offer any special last minute deals. What also puzzles and annoys him is the fact that prices can vary greatly and for no apparent reason. He complains strongly about Eurostar's policy (turns 10, 25) but on the other hand still wants to use the company's services, as he has no other option (turn 25). This exchange shows confrontational behaviour on the part of the customer, and non-confrontational, accommodating behaviour on the part of the company representative.

However, the politeness markers we would expect, judging from the role play behaviour, are virtually absent here. In the first part of the exchange, greetings are exchanged and the customer explains his problem by asking the company representative two questions about the pricing policy on the internet. Before replying to the question, the company representative introduces herself and asks for the customer's name (turns 5, 6). She then proceeds to answer the customer's questions and explains to him that Eurostar's prices depend on the availability of tickets, and that prices go up the more tickets are sold (turn 7). The customer wants more clarification as to why the policy is that way, to which the company representative has the unsatisfying answer that that is just how the system works at Eurostar (turn 9). In the next turn the customer utters his first complaint and very blatantly classifies the system used by Eurostar as "chaotic" and "totally unfair" (turn 10). This fairly provocative utterance is met with a friendly reply by the company representative, repeating the argument that that is how the system works at Eurostar. (turn 11).

23 Man:	yeah but what happens if you can't book more time in advance (xxx) why should I be penalized for that
24 ES:	unfortunately that's a decision our management at the moment you- you know department's decided to take
25 Man:	well I think you should tell whoever it is upstairs that it sucks and (.) it puts Eurostar in extremely bad light (..) I- I would prefer not to use you (.) but I don't- unfortunately I don't think I have any options
26 ES:	ehm I mean the only thing to do is check the dates you're looking at (.) and the times you're looking at and

		see what the price is coming to and let you know the times you don't know if you like
27	Man:	well I checked online but I'm wondering if there are any- if there is any last minutes (.) you know *deals* that you give-
28	ES:	no
29	Man:	a couple of days before or something
30	ES:	no we don't the more in advance you book the cheaper it gets we don't have sort of any last minute deals no. everything goes on availability but sometimes at the last minute you get a low price cause there has to be availability there for that to happen
31	Man:	(.) well I think it's pretty deplorable picture it's just pretty chaotic you know people having to book three weeks in advance well I think it's a pretty (XXX) I have the same problem with airlines at least airlines have last minutes- there's last minute deals to be had (.) but Eurostar is completely (XXX) and you know (XXX) frankly and I find that pretty deplorable eh customer serv- you know customer relations (.) but eh if you could check to see what the lowest prices are eh for Saturday the twelfth (.) returning on Sunday the thirteenth

In the second part of this phone exchange, the customer again tries to find out whether there are last minute deals on offer at Eurostar. He seems incredulous that such a thing should be absent here and asks why he should be penalised for not being able to book a long time in advance (turn 23), to which the company representative can only reply that Eurostar's management department has decided to proceed in that manner (turn 24). As with his earlier complaint, the customer probably hoped to elicit a different kind of reply from the company representative. The question for information, and with it the inherent complaint, are most likely not really geared at getting the appropriate reply, but rather at receiving a cheaper offer. The customer presumably hopes to get a bargain after all, and is disappointed when the company representative just reiterates what she has been saying before. Here, obviously, the company policy and the customer's expectations are clashing,

which we have already seen to be the case in other examples. The customer approaches the conversation with a set of expectations that, to his disappointment, he finds are not met. What he cannot understand, from his perspective, is that the company representative is bound to acting within the limits of the company policy, and therefore cannot meet all of his expectations, even if personally she might like to help him out.

After explaining that the management decided on this particular price system for Eurostar, the customer utters a very strong complaint. He asks the woman to relate to those in charge that in his opinion the system "sucks" and that "it puts Eurostar in extremely bad light", and finally that he "would prefer not to use" Eurostar (turn 25). Strangely enough, in the same turn, he also admits that he still wants to use Eurostar, as he has no other options. This whole utterance puts the company representative in a very awkward position. She remains remarkably calm and friendly, and only after a very small hesitation suggests to the customer to help him with his dilemma by checking the dates and prices for him, to find a cheap ticket (turn 26). In this utterance, she completely ignores the negative assessment the customer made, a choice of strategy which seems wise under the circumstances.

32 ES:	ok certainly let's have a look for you ok that's from London to (.) Paris (.) ok what sorts of times would be ideal for you sir
33 Man:	any times
34 ES:	any time
35 Man:	coming back could be around four or five [in the afternoon]
36 ES:	[yeah] (..) I'll see what I can get for you I mean to get the lowest fare (.) it's gonna be cheaper going over in the evening to be honest for the Saturday
37 Man:	I can't do that (XX)
38 ES:	right (.) I'll see the best one for you in the morning then (...) is it just yourself travelling sir
39 Man:	yes
40 ES:	and are you looking at first or standard class
41 Man:	first
42 ES:	first (.) ok

43 Man: and there's something else I noticed on your website it's about the standard fare (.) why it's only like (.) ten pounds less (.) than first [class]

44 ES: [it can be] it depends [on availability]

45 Man: [and then two weeks ago] it was like a hundred pounds different

46 ES: it can be (.) standard class sells out-

47 Man: it's amazing it's amazing the first class fare doesn't go up but the standard fare does

48 ES: the standard fare first class will go up if there's more tickets- you know there's more (.) availability in first class sorry sometimes standard will sell out so quickly that first class has more availability than standard therefore it works out best that's why (.) I mean *coming back* I've got sixteen o seven that get's you there at seventeen sixteen (.) or I *can* do later

49 Man: (.) no no no that would be fine

50 ES: that's ok (.)

51 Man: what about going out

52 ES: going *out* the lowest price would be going out at seven o nine in the morning (.) that gets you to Paris at ten fifty nine

53 Man: (.) ok (XX)

54 ES: the lowest fare I can do there for you would be one that must have a Saturday night away (.) and one where the booking is completely fixed no money back no changes or refunds at all ehm (.) basically times have to stay as they are (.) that would be looking at being a hundred and thirty four pounds return at the moment

55 Man: (.) is that the price you can do

56 ES: it is yeah the only way for it to come down would be to come back earlier on the sunday

57 Man: (.) how much earlier

58 ES: ehm I could do it for (.) let's have a look for you let's see (.) (XXX) actually (...) at the moment I have got availability on fifteen nineteen which get you there at sixteen twenty four at a hundred and twenty four the same type of ticket

59 Man: plus phone charge
60 ES: an extra ten pounds
61 Man: so I have to book this online otherwise I would have to pay the phone charge
62 ES: if you do it over the phone there is a five pound booking fee yeah obviously availability especially coming back then (.) the sooner you can get online the more chance there is it will still be available or you might be looking at that changing again (..) it's not-

In the next part of the interaction, the company representative again ignores the strong complaint the customer made, and instead concentrates on finding him the ideal ticket. She is obviously set on keeping his custom, and tries to find him the best price for the dates and times he intends to travel (turns 32 – 62). What is remarkable about this lengthy exchange is the fact that throughout the company representative can only operate within the limitations of company policy. Other than expected by the customer, she can only give him the prices she finds on her computer screen. These prices depend, as she told her customer before, on availability and certain Eurostar-internal regulations.

63 Man: I don't li- I mean I really don't like it I would really like to make a complaint you know with the chair or the board or whoever it is
64 ES: (XXXX) I can give you a contact number of the customer relations department or an address for them if you'd like to take either of those
65 Man: yes please
66 ES: which would you prefer or would you like both
67 Man: yeah
68 ES: ok the telephone number is o one triple seven (.)
69 Man: yeah
70 ES: triple seven again (.)
71 Man: yeah
72 ES: eight seven nine (.) then you need to press option one which takes you through to the (XXX) speaking line and then option two and that will take you straight to them (XXX) and it will

put you through fine. the address is customer relations (.) eurostar house (..)

73 Man: yeah

74 ES: waterloo station (..)

75 Man: mm mm

76 ES: london

77 Man: mm

78 ES: six e one

79 Man: yes

80 ES: eight x a

81 Man: what's the eh chair of the board [(called)]

82 ES: [the head] of customer relations is a lady called samantha richardson

83 Man: (.) yeah (.) right thank you

84 ES: you're welcome is there anything else I can help with [at the moment]

85 Man: [*no*] (.) thank you

86 ES: well thank you for phoning *take care now*

6.3.2. Strategic (Im)Politeness

Example (7): Face-to-Face Interaction (Departure Screens, Part 2)

This interaction is a good example of the application of various (im)politeness strategies by a customer, all employed strategically in order to attain her interactive goal. The customer, on the whole, is fairly confrontational, but uses a slightly softer approach with a higher-status, male EasyJet employee than with a lower-status, young female employee. In this scenario, EasyJet customer Lindy has missed her flight because, according to her, the screens at the airport which announce boarding and departure times were not working correctly. The interaction first takes place between a young female EasyJet employee and Lindy, and then, after Lindy demands to speak to a manager, between the manager, Matt, and Lindy. The fact that Matt is male and closer to Lindy in age seems to affect her behaviour and her interactional strategies to some extent. This interaction is particularly interesting because it shows a deliberate change in attitude depending on the situational context as well as on the sex and age of the interlocutors.

The viewer joins this particular interaction when Lindy, after having missed her flight, is talking to the female EasyJet employee, trying to get onto the next available flight leaving the same day, although there are no more seats to be had. The viewer gets the necessary background information from the explanations both women give to the camera crew, Lindy claiming that the information on the screen was faulty, the EasyJet employee claiming that the screens are automatic and therefore always reliable (turns 1 and 2):

01 Ejwoman:	((speaking to the camera crew)) she claimed (.) ehm basically that they didn't put their screens on final call which they always do it does it automatically
02 Lindy:	((speaking to the camera crew)) I was watching that screen (.) *all the time* (.) that went from (..) go to gate sixteen to gate closed

These two utterances already establish the tone of the interaction. Both women think themselves in the right and the other in the wrong. Their conversation starts with the EasyJet representative implying that Lindy had said herself that she had the relevant information for boarding, but chose not to go to the gate. This upsets Lindy, and she reacts by accusing the EasyJet employee of calling her a liar. From the beginning, Lindy adopts an attitude which comes across as highly confrontational. Her facial expression is serious and indignant, and both her arms rest on the counter. This means that in the course of the interaction she repeatedly uses her left hand to support her utterances, and repeatedly menacingly points her index finger in the direction of the EasyJet employee.

03 Ejwoman:	(all you are saying about yourself) saying to me is that the screen did say that gate was [boarding]
04 Lindy:	((pointing and gesticulating with her left index finger, invading the company representative's space)) [no no no] it did not I can promise you it did not (..) are you calling me a liar
05 Ejwoman:	I never [said that]

06 Lindy: [no no no] no you *are* basically aren't you (.)
07 Ejwoman: no I'm not=
08 Lindy: =you're basically calling me a liar you told me that I- what I told you is not true (.)
[so you are basically calling me a *liar*]
09 Ejwoman: [no I didn't]

In turns 3 to 9 Lindy gets more and more agitated as she repeatedly accuses the EasyJet employee of calling her a liar, while the EasyJet employee repeatedly rejects that accusation, though without using any apologetic expressions. Lindy comes across as highly confrontational, whereas the EasyJet employee appears very serene. From her body language in the video, however, we can see that she feels under attack. Her shoulders are slightly hunched, and her gaze seems frightened.

In order to solve this problematic and uncomfortable situation, she offers Lindy a transfer to a flight leaving the following morning. This, however, is unacceptable to Lindy, who wants to travel that same day. The EasyJet employee's reactions to Lindy's questions and appeals for help become shorter and shorter. Clearly, the employee is unwilling to help Lindy. This in turn infuriates Lindy even more. We can therefore see that the conversation deteriorates based on the reactions the two interactants receive from their interlocutors. Neither shows any conceivable consideration for the other's face wants, and therefore they both react in a more and more abrupt manner.

10 Ejwoman: all I can do for you is transfer you to a flight tomorrow morning
11 Lindy: I wanna be on the flight tonight
12 Ejwoman: you cannot *get on the flight tonight* there is not *one* available seat
13 Lindy: and when the flight is not full cause people don't turn up what are you doing
14 Ejwoman: *nothing*
15 Lindy: well I think you should do something for me
16 Ejwoman: I can't do anything for you when people have booked-
17 Lindy: right I'm a journalist and you *be* (..) ((bobbing her head for emphasis)) I'll write about how very bad behaved you

guys have been because quite frankly it's crap (..) you're gonna put me on the flight tomorrow morning

18 Ejwoman: (.) ehm I thought you thought our airline is crap

19 Lindy: ((tapping on the desk with her hand)) can you get me a manager

20 Ejwoman: (.) I *can* do but he'll say exactly the same=

21 Lindy: ((tapping on the desk with her left hand)) =can you get me a manager

22 Ejwoman: yes I can eh if you=

23 Lindy: =good=

24 Ejwoman: =give me a minute

25 Lindy: yeah

In turns 10 to 25 things escalate between Lindy and the EasyJet employee. Lindy wants to be on the evening flight, but as there are no spare seats, the EasyJet employee is unable to accommodate her. What is remarkable about Lindy's approach here is that she does not show any concern for the EasyJet employee's face. Her utterances are entirely unmitigated, and when she sees that she will not be helped she even uses a threat (turn 17) in combination with a derogatory term ("crap") to express what she thinks about EasyJet. She then demands to be put onto the flight for the next day after all, as she has apparently given in to the inevitable. When the EasyJet employee does not fulfil this request, but retaliates with the remark that she thought Lindy found EasyJet crap – thereby implying that she probably does not want to fly with a 'crap' company, Lindy has had enough and asks to speak to a manager.

In conflict and complaint situations in service encounters, this is a very common strategy and really one of the very few resources customers have to get what they want to achieve in such an encounter. And indeed, the interaction with the manager unfolds surprisingly differently. Lindy, who at first is as confrontational as in the first interaction, seems to be subdued and much less confrontational at the end of it.

26 Matt: ehm I understand that you were in the bar

27 Lindy: yeah

28 Matt: and that you missed the your final call to your gate

29	Lindy:	((still very agitated and confrontational)) why the hell should I be at some poxy gate (.) when you are not even gonna take off for another two or three hours
30	Matt:	(.) ok (.) can I just bring you to the point now it did it say on there go to gate sixteen
31	Lindy:	of course it said go to gate sixteen=
32	Matt:	=but you didn't go
33	Lindy:	no I didn't go because the other the other the other people were saying
34	Matt:	what do you expect me to do
35	Lindy:	the other people were saying it's not the final call
36	Matt:	yeah
37	Lindy:	when it says final call you run (.) you go
38	Matt:	well (.) you can choose to do that and then you run the risk of being off-loaded which you have
39	Lindy:	absolutely bollocks
40	Matt:	(that's child language try not to use swear words)
41	Lindy:	(..) bollocks is not a swear word

Matt tries to establish first what the facts are and quickly finds out that the fault must indeed lie with Lindy, as she has the strategy to only go to the gate when it says 'final call' because "why the hell should I be at some poxy gate when you are not even gonna take off for another two or three hours" (turn 29). Lindy still assumes that she is in the right, and that a self-righteous and confrontational stance will eventually get her a place on the flight that same day. Turns 26 to 41 serve to establish the problem for Matt, the manager. He tries to find out what really happened and thereby solve the problem. Matt quickly establishes that Lindy indeed waited too long to go the gate and does not know how to help her. His attitude is calm and he projects friendly authority. This already seems to have a slight effect on Lindy and she tries to deflect the blame from herself to other people (turns 33 and 35). Matt then explains to her that Lindy's strategy of waiting till the last minute is risky, which causes Lindy to revert to her confrontational attitude by claiming that what Matt says is "absolute bollocks" (turn 39). By choosing offensive language *and* questioning the truth content of Matt's utterance, Lindy has shown that she has absolutely no concerns whatsoever for Matt's face

wants, and her utterance induces him to reprimand her for using child language and a swear word. With that Matt puts her in her place, and after some short hesitation, Lindy reacts in a childish manner again, by claiming that "bollocks is not a swear word" (turn 41).

After being reprimanded she seems to realize that being confrontational does not help her cause and she switches strategies completely. In the video, we can see how her facial expression mollifies, and we hear her voice change from steely to teary. She now appeals to Matt's sympathy by using her daughter as an argument to be let on the flight on that same day.

42	Lindy:	((in a teary voice)) I'm now gonna miss a night with my daughter (.) I've got very little time with my daughter (.) and it's not fair
43	Matt:	don't be upset
44	Lindy:	no I *am* upset 'cause you don't *care*
45	Matt:	I *do* care
46	Lindy:	no you *don't* care (.) get me on that flight you don't care I have a small child that's dying to see me
47	Matt:	ok
48	Lindy:	I work *so hard* for my living
49	Matt:	((going away to check the screens)) back in ten minutes

Apparently this strategy of Lindy's is slightly more successful than her confrontational approach. By mentioning her daughter and the little time she has with her, she manages to evoke Matt's empathy. This is confirmed later by himself when he evaluates what happened in front of the camera crew (turn 56), expressing sympathy for her plight. Lindy next accuses Matt of not caring about her and her daughter (turns 44, 46) thereby obviously pressing all the right buttons with Matt, because now he does pity her and, trying to be helpful, goes away to check whether it was indeed the screens that were broken down and not a mistake Lindy made herself.

However, it turns out that the screens are working fine and that it is Lindy's own fault that she missed her flight after all, something we learn when Matt comes back and addresses the camera before speaking to Lindy again (turn 50).

50 Matt: ((addressing the camera)) I've just gone and compared both screens the one that's in the bar and the one that's in the main food court (.) and they're both running in sync and they're both showing exactly the same information *so* (.) all I can assume is that the passengers have had some confusion with (.) what they managed to see at the time they looked on the screens

When he comes back after having checked the screens Matt diplomatically announces to the camera that he thinks that the screens are working correctly and that passengers might have had some confusion and maybe looked at the wrong flight or the wrong time. Matt then tries to get across to Lindy, even more diplomatically, that it was indeed her fault that she missed the flight, and not the airline's, a fact which Lindy grudgingly accepts.

51 Matt: all I'm saying is that your strategy of boarding flights (.)
52 Lindy: ((cocking her head)) right=
53 Matt: =those two or three minutes have cost you a flight
54 Lindy: are you telling me it's *my* fault
55 Matt: I'm not- it's not a fault thing it's just the strategy you tried has failed you today

56 Matt: ((addressing the camera crew)) I'm sympathetic to the fact especially that she has a child in Nice but (.) at the end of the day she (.) had made that mistake herself

Matt avoids the term mistake, in order not to offend his customer, instead he just points out to her that her strategy of boarding flights has failed her in this instance (turns 51, 53, 55). Lindy then explicitly asks him whether he thinks this is all her fault (turn 54) and still Matt refuses to confirm the word 'fault', saying this is "not a fault thing" (turn 55). With this he tries not to blame Lindy directly, while still getting his message across to her. After the interaction, when Lindy is gone, he addresses the camera and explicitly says that this was all Lindy's own mistake, but also that he feels sympathy for her because she has a child in Nice (turn 56).

6.3.3. Rudeness

Example (8): Face-to-Face Interaction (Father and Daughter)

In this example, the problem of rudeness is openly discussed in the interaction. Both customers and company representatives feel treated impolitely by the other party, and there is a general atmosphere of ill-will. Again, as throughout most of the examples in the various corpora, the animosities and negative feelings are caused because the interactants bring different assumptions to the interaction and pursue conflicting goals.

In this service encounter, Delphina, a young woman, probably a student, wants to fly to Paris. She arrives at check-in shortly after it had closed and is promptly transferred to a later flight by the EasyJet personnel. When she rejoins her father, who has taken her to the airport (and was busy elsewhere while she tried to check in), she tells him that check-in was closed already and that she has to take a later flight. Her father is outraged and tries to get her on the plane anyway.

01 Delphina	((Delphina tells her father what's going on but we cannot hear it))
02 Father:	*jesus christ* ((he then walks over to check-in and addresses a woman there)) hi
03 Ejwoman:	hi
04 Father:	I've got my daughter who's supposed to be going to France and she's been told that she can't get on the plane?
05 Ejwoman:	yeah the check-in closes quarter past one=
06 Father:	=but the plane doesn't go for another 25 minutes (checking his watch)=
07 Ejwoman:	=[that doesn't matter once that check-in closes]
08 Joanne:	[=it's already boarding now]=
09 Ejwoman:	=we can't accept any late passengers
10 Father:	(..) that's UNBELIEVABLE
11 Ejwoman:	yeah the check-in has been open for two hours you see and it closes promptly 40 minutes before
12 Father:	(.) so what's
13 EasyJet:	[seven]

14	Father:	[she supposed] to do now
15	EasyJet:	the next one which is at (.) [quarter past seven]
16	Father:	[I don't believe that] that is so *incredibly* inflexible (.) I mean there there is still another 25 mins [to go before]-
17	Joanne:	[it's already boarding the aircraft]
18	Father:	but I mean it's board*ing*=
19	Joanne:	=yes
20	Father:	=but it hasn't board*ed* [I mean they are still loading up the aircraft]
21	Joanne:	[no no it hasn't boarded no] it is *boarding* now
22	Father:	so she was to join end of the boarding queue now she would be absolutely fine wouldn't she?
23	Joanne:	no. we only have twenty minutes turn-around and we have to meet them times (...)

At first the conversation takes place only between father and daughter, away from the camera. We cannot hear the first part of the exchange in which Delphina explains the situation to her father. This is where the spectator comes in and we can hear the father react angrily, swearing, or rather blaspheming (turn 2).

He then takes action and walks over to the check-in desk. He is annoyed, but also very convinced that his authority (as a father, as a grown-up, as a customer, and in all likelihood as a businessman) will allow him to remedy the situation and get his daughter on the plane after all. He talks in a very decisive, authoritarian tone and after exchanging greetings with the EasyJet employee, just states the situation (turn 4): "I've got my daughter who's supposed to be going to France and she's been told that she can't get on the plane". Implied in this utterance is that there must have been a mistake and that it is completely ridiculous and out of the question that his daughter cannot board the plane. He expects EasyJet to be forthcoming and accommodating, and to provide a solution in his daughter's favour.

Contrary to his expectations, he gets a negative reaction and is told in a very matter- of-fact way that check-in is closed (turn 5). Now the father supplies the first in a line of arguments in his daughter's favour (turn 6): "but the plane doesn't go for another 25 minutes ((checking his watch))". His approach starts from the

assumption that the employees will be willing to help him, and will be open to rational arguments. What the father does not know, and what he is being told only a lot later (turns 56, 57), is that there is no use for arguments as Delphina has already been transferred to the next available flight, which is a fait accompli for the EasyJet employees. On this background we can see why the EasyJet employee is unimpressed by this argument. She is sticking to company policy, according to which check-in closes exactly 40 minutes before a plane's departure. Any passengers who arrive after check-in has closed will be transferred to the next available flight. The father, not knowing any of this, is incredulous at this kind of reaction, but still thinks that talking to the staff will remedy the situation. He cannot, throughout most of the lengthy exchange, grasp that he cannot change things, which upsets him, all of which becomes clear from his utterances and the way he partly raises his voice (turn 10): "that's UNBELIEVABLE"; (turn 16): "I don't believe that that is so *incredibly* inflexible I mean there is still another 25 minutes to go before-". These utterances serve two purposes: they show the fathers's incredulity and they are complaints about what is going on. The EasyJet personnel do not like to be complained about and criticised in such a way, because from their point of view they have done nothing wrong. They do not understand why their customers are upset with them, whereas the customers do not understand why the EasyJet personnel are not more accommodating. The Father therefore still thinks that a solution can be found and he is absolutely convinced that there is still a way to get his daughter on the plane. However, he gets nowhere with the EasyJet staff and all his arguments that his daughter could still easily reach the plane are rejected (turns 17 - 23)

	((The father's cell phone is ringing. He is speaking to someone on the phone. The daughter is standing next to him looking on and listening, and the EasyJet employees are listening as well))
24 Father:	hiya
25 Mother?:	((we cannot hear what the person at the other end of the line is saying))
26 Father:	hi ehm because they're saying that eh she's missed it by about 30 seconds so eh they have to close the flight and the flight is now closed

27 EasyJet: [thirty seconds?
28 Joanne: not thirty seconds
29 Ejwoman: ten minutes]
30 Father: and there is absolutely no way that she can get on the flight and [she's gonna have to]
31 Delphina: [NOT TEN MINUTES]
32 Father: ((to EasyJet employees showing his watch with the phone still pressed to his ear)) it's only ten minutes now I've been down there
33 Delphina: ((very agitated and pointing with her arm to where she went)) excuse me I had to go down there and lug a heavy thing back here
34 Ejwoman: yeah but it was twenty-five past when you turned up here
35 Delphina: oh well yeah that makes a big difference
36 Ejwoman: yeah
37 Father: by the time we got here not by the time she was *there*
38 Ejwoman: yeah when you got
39 Delphina: !why do you think it's funny!
40 EasyJet: I don't find it funny I'm not laughing
41 Delphina: well well you are pissing yourself laughing there
42 Ejwoman: no I'm not
43 Joanne: !excuse me you don't have to be rude to us!
44 Father: hang on it's ehm well actually she's totally pissed off so you can expect a little bit of rudeness I would have thought and you should be trained to *handle* customers who are pissed off
45 Joanne: I am [but nobody swears at me I]
46 Delphina: [well you're not good at your job are you]=
47 Joanne: =can you please step away from the desk (.)((Delphina goes away from the desk)) now we don't have to be spoken to like that I'm afraid we weren't late for the check-in
48 Delphina: (XXX)
49 Father: ((to person on the phone again)) no they won't let her on the flight and [they're being stroppy at the gate here] ((looks at EasyJet employees))
50 Joanne: [it's been open for two hours the gate]
51 Father: ((on the phone)) you know they're saying it's been open for two hours but

so what it doesn't mean you have to be *here* two hours beforehand ((looking at EasyJet people again))

Then the conversation is interrupted by a phone call the father receives on his cell phone (by his wife, presumably). This creates a very interesting constellation, with the father talking on the phone, and thereby indirectly, and at a later stage, directly, addressing the EasyJet staff (because he is still at their counter), while the EasyJet staff talk amongst themselves (making snide comments) and have a heated conversation with the daughter. It is also very clear that they are all aware of the camera(man's) presence, and father and daughter both address the camera.

This is also the point were things start to really escalate and where tempers rise on all sides, and not just, as before, on the part of the father. On the phone the father explains the situation (to his wife?), which gives him an opportunity to vent his anger (his tone is animated and hurt). The EasyJet staff are listening to the conversation and interrupt/correct him when he presents the facts in a, from their point of view, distorted manner. This develops into a heated argument where daughter and father are united against the EasyJet staff. The person on the phone is still there but forgotten for a while. Then the daughter walks away from the desk after having been sent away by the EasyJet staff for being rude, and the father resumes his telephone conversation.

Most remarkable about this part of the exchange, from a politeness-theoretical point of view, is the meta-discourse about impoliteness that is observable here. It begins when Delphina gets the impression that the EasyJet employees enjoy her predicament and are making fun of her (turns 39 and 41): "!why do you think it's funny!"; "you are pissing yourself laughing there". The EasyJet employees reject the accusation of making fun of Delphina, and, most importantly, take offence with her slightly vulgar language. Joanne directly complains about this (turn 43): "excuse me you don't have to be rude to us". Now the father intervenes and justifies his daughter's behaviour by arguing that she is angry. Interestingly, he uses the same kind of language that the EasyJet employees took offence with (turn 44): "she's totally pissed off so you can expect a little bit of rudeness I would have thought and you should be trained to *handle* customers who are pissed off". Joanne replies in the affirmative, that she is indeed trained to deal with difficult customers,

but that she does not need to take abuse (turn 45): "I am but nobody swears at me". This utterance causes Delphina to launch another attack, questioning Joanne's professional qualities (turn 46): "well you're not good at your job are you". This upsets and offends Joanne so much that she terminates her conversation with Delphina and sanctions her by sending her away from the check-in desk and complaining again about the customers' rudeness (turn 47): "can you please step away from the desk (.) now we don't have to be spoken to like that I'm afraid we weren't late for check-in". Joanne manages to convey that she will not tolerate rude behaviour from the customers, and justifies that by reminding them that they are at fault, and not she. Her remark about them being late for check-in serves as justification of her own behaviour, and as blame. As a reaction the father resumes his telephone conversation and tells the person at the other end about their problems and that they are being treated rudely by the EaysyJet personnel (turn 49): "no they won't let her on the flight and they're being stroppy at the gate here". He makes sure the EasyJet employees hear him and looks at them pointedly when he utters that last remark. This again nettles Joanne and she defends herself by saying that the gate was open for two hours (turn 50), implying that the customers would have had plenty of time to board if they had arrived earlier.

52 Father: ((not on the phone anymore, now speaking to the camera)) we were here what thirty seconds after closing? (.) and they're telling us 'no you can't get on the plane now' (..) she's got to meet her grandparents in eh in France who are coming *miles* to pick her up and now we're being told we're on the what flight ((turning to the EasyJet employees))

53 Ejwoman: quarter past seven innit

54 Father: seven fifteen. so what are we supposed to do now any other airline and I have travelled *all around the world* (..) and have been able to get- I have never missed a flight I've never come across an airline that's as inflexible as this
((Delphina looks at the camera grins and rolls her eyes, slightly embarrassed because of her dad's ranting))

so. ehm there is absolutely no way you're saying that she can get on this flight I mean even if you speak to somebody *nicely*=

55 Joanne: =we've already transferred her when she came before I already transferred her you didn't realize you were fine before when I said ehm (.) you had missed this flight

56 Father: why why how fine can you be

57 Delphina: (XXX)

58 Joanne: quit shouting because you've gone to see our dad and your dad said why can't you get on

59 Father: !absolutely right because I've been travelling all around the world for the last *forty* years (.) you know I'm talking to *you*! (...)

60 Joanne: but you're already on the next one anyway now which goes tonight (.) that's all EasyJet policy is anyway it's a free transfer to the next available flight

61 Father: well I can see we're gonna get nowhere [with (these creatures)]

62 Delphina: [yeah]

63 Father: here so eh

64 Delphina: yeah ((the EasyJet employee is smirking and trying to suppress it))

65 Father: ((to the camera)) she got her grandparents picking her up in France who are travelling what 200 miles to the airport to pick her up (.) a::nd so: we need to try and somehow get in touch with them but they are elderly people they don't have mobiles and I don't know how the hell we are going to get in touch with them=

66 Delphina: ((speaking to the camera)) =as I went over to my dad I said 'hang on' we only got like what (.) we still got like you know half an hour ((pointing at her watch)) and before the plane goes and so I thought why the hell not (..) I thought he might be able to get me in

67 Father: this crew here reckon it's impossible you know rules is rules and their jobs I suppose is what we're talking about here (.) so we are pissed off to here ((shows with his hand over his head to

	where)) as you can imagine (.) right (.) so: when we come back hopefully this crew will have changed((Father and daughter walk away and talk to each other indiscernible for us))
68 Joanne:	she came here before my shift and I told her she was late and she accepted that and I didn't even realize she was going to come back till her dad started shouting ((changes her voice)) 'how incompetent we are here at Liverpool' (..) and she was clearly late for the check-in and she was very unreasonable (.) obviously she can't speak for herself she needs her dad to come and do it for her

After the incident the main interactants give their view of what went on to the camera. The father explains why it was so vital from his perspective to get his daughter on this flight instead of a later one. She is going to visit her grandparents living in France, who have to travel far in order to meet her at a Paris airport and cannot be contacted to inform them that their granddaughter will be late (turn 65). He then (turn 67) lets us know that he is very angry ("so we are pissed off to here") that the crew are so inflexible, although he seems to understand that they do not have a choice in the matter and might lose their jobs if they acted otherwise (turn 67): "this crew here reckon it's impossible you know rules is rules and their jobs I suppose is what we're talking about here". Delphina (turn 66) does not really seem that angry, she seems to know that she arrived too late for check-in, and just thought her father's authority might sway things in her favour.

The most drastic evaluation comes from the EasyJet employee Joanne (turn 68), who is clearly annoyed by the customers' behaviour. She feels that her own and her colleagues attitude was perfectly normal, as Delphina arrived late for check-in and therefore was at fault. She claims that Delphina at first accepted to be transferred to the next available flight, and that Joanne herself was surprised when she was back and her father began to cause trouble. She claims that he was shouting at them and mimics his behaviour in his labelling of them as incompetent. Delphina's behaviour she finds unreasonable and childish and she thinks that "she obviously can't speak for herself she needs her dad to come and do it for her" (turn 68).

6.4. Summary and Discussion

In a conflictual service encounter frame (im)politeness considerations seem to be less clearly defined than in other contexts. Most astonishingly, people's expectations about behavioural norms and appropriateness seem to be counteracted in real-life interaction by factors such as emotional evolvement and strong goal orientation. When comparing role plays and naturally-occurring discourse which are both embedded in the same discourse frame and have similar situational contexts, the role plays help reveal speakers' expectations about how customers and company representatives would and should behave in a conflictual service encounter frame. Politeness markers, such as apologetic expressions ("I'm afraid", "sorry"), the use of terms respectful terms of address ("sir", "madam"), and the use of mitigating devices and hedges, are much more frequently used in the role plays than in the naturally-occurring discourse from my corpus, both in the role of the customer and the role of the company representative. Confrontational behaviour can be observed to a much lesser extent than in the naturally occurring discourse, and rudeness is consciously being avoided. Interestingly, participants in these role plays show a high degree of awareness that (im)politeness considerations are crucial in these particular contexts, a fact which is revealed in their metacomments during the interaction ("that was really rude of me"), as well as when answering the question about their role play behaviour.

Although role plays are constructed situations which do not involve the participants emotionally, the discourse frame seems to trigger cognitive and emotional representations of similar situations in the participants' minds (Bentall & Kinderman, 1999), thereby enabling them to simulate real-life behaviour fairly realistically even going as far as expressing emotional states ("I am not happy", "I am really angry"). However, the typical prosodic and kinesic manifestations of emotions are missing in the role plays, as one would expect in the absence of any actual emotional involvement.

The conflictual nature of the service encounters in my corpus demands a high degree of planning and strategy adaptation from its participants, especially from the customers, who are usually the ones who have a problem that needs solving. In an institutional context, with rigid rules for behaviour prescribed mainly for the

company representatives, we find an astonishing discrepancy between the expectations people have about service providers' behaviour and their actual performance in naturally occurring discourse. In both data sets, which come from different companies with different approaches to customer service, the frequent use of politeness markers, which we would expect from service providers, are markedly absent from their discourse.

The institutional context puts the customers at a disadvantage in the power balance of the interaction, and they have to weigh rational considerations against emotional needs in their strategic planning (Schwarz, 2000) in the choice of discourse strategies most suitable for attaining the transactional goals of the customers. The high emotional involvement of participants, who experience emotions such as anger, disappointment, and frustration predominantly, prompts them to be much more confrontational than the customers we observed in the role plays, using lexical intensification (for example swear words) and upgraders ("terribly", "very") much more frequently.

Emotional involvement can be presupposed for all participants in the naturally-occurring discourse to some extent, but there still seems to be a clear distinction between displays of emotion which are mostly involuntary, and others which are of a more strategic nature, and more conversational gambits designed at goal achievement. Telling the difference between the two is not always evident for the researcher, who often needs to resort to interpretations of the 'contextualization cues' (Gumperz, 1992). Rational considerations seem to have a huge impact on the choice of (im)politeness strategies customers employ in a conflictual service encounter frame, with rudeness as a possible strategic choice for goal attainment.

Chapter 7: Power Relationships in Service Encounters

7.1. Outline

Interactants' interpretations of their respective roles and personal alignments are often very clearly reflected in their language use, and become apparent for instance in the use of personal pronouns, or pre-fabricated phrases ("we appreciate your custom") or passive versus active voice, while power relationships, especially in the language used by the company representatives, can be inferred most clearly from the use of modal auxiliaries. Company representatives show a clear tendency to use a particular style in order to distance themselves from the customer and to 'hide' behind the company policy. This, to some extent, results in a depersonalisation and dehumanisation, which customers tend to perceive as exaggerated and uncooperative (Kalaja, 1989).

In this chapter, I will investigate how power is distributed between customers and company representatives in service encounters, how power becomes apparent in discourse, and how the institutional context influences the perception and interplay of power relationships.

7.2. Roles and Power Relationships

Example (10): Role Play – Jenny and Laura (Photo ID)

In this role play, we can see very well how the interactants position each other in the role of customer and company representative respectively. It is interesting to see how the company representative expresses the obligations dictated by company policy, and how the lexical and strategic choices she makes resemble the speech behaviour we can observe in comparable naturally occurring interactions. Again, this interaction needs to be regarded mainly as a power struggle between customer and company representative. Throughout the interaction it becomes clear that, just as in similar real-life situations, it is the company representative who is in a more powerful position, since the interaction takes place on company territory and is based on the conditions dictated by the company policy. This, however, is not

something a customer is aware of when entering a service encounter situation. Customers have the illusion that their customer-role, and the fact that they paid for certain services, endow them with a certain degree of power vis-a-vis the company they are dealing with. In reality, this often proves quite wrong and leads to anger and frustration on both sides. In this role play, we will take a closer look at what stance the person in the role of the company representative takes vis-à-vis company policy and how the power balance between company representative and customer is negotiated. As we have seen in chapter 6, the behaviour in role plays tends to be more other-face oriented than the one in naturally occurring conversations in similar situations. In terms of choice of conversational strategies, however, the role plays are remarkably similar to naturally occurring discourse.

In this role play, both participants are female students, with Jenny in the role of the customer, and Laura in the role of the company representative. In their talk it becomes clear that the company representative has the power to decide whether or not to let the customer on the plane without valid identification. It is, however, not her own decision, but one that is bound by the rules and regulations of the company's policy. The policy dictates her behaviour, and she constantly refers to her own as well as the customer's obligations.

01 J: hi I'm here to check in for the Southampton to Glasgow flight?
02 L: ok can I see your tickets and your passport please.
03 J: I can ju- here's them tickets (.)I'm afraid I don't have my passport it's an internal flight I don't need it do I?
04 L: (.) ehm do you have any other form of ID? (.) *pho*to ID.
05 J: no I'm afraid I don't
06 L: ehm (.) well (.) we have to see some form of photo ID we can't let you on the plane without it (.) security
07 J: oh (.) but this is a new rule I've been flying from Southampton to Glasgow *weekly* (.) and I never needed it before
08 L: yeah it's a new policy that we've just brought in (.) but it was clearly (.) stated on your tickets
09 J: I think it should be made slightly more clearly especially for those of us that fly *weekly*

10 L: well I'm sorry but you've got to *read* (.) every time you like book your tickets (.) you have to read the small print
11 J: but surely you could have sent out an extra letter or something informing us and (.) detailing that this was gonna happen (.) can I check in anyhow?
12 L: well I'm afraid we can't let you on the flight
13 J: [you can't]
14 L: [it's company policy] we *need* to see your photo ID
15 J: you can't let me on the flight without photo ID.
16 L: [no we can't]
17 J: [on an *internal* flight] between Glasgow and Southampton.
18 L: no I'm afraid not (.) security measures
19 J: but I've been doing this flight for *years*
20 L: [I'm sorry-]
21 J: [and I've never needed it before]
22 L: I can't help you is there anyone that can (.) fax it to you or anything
23 J: ehm not that I know of I'm afraid I've got I've got an old passport with this photo ID would that work work
24 L: mmh let me see that
25 J: it was valid until a couple of months ago
26 L: but it's not valid now
27 J: no I'm afraid not
28 L: well I'm afraid that we can't help you then (.) is there anyone that can fax like a copy of your passport
29 J: no
30 L: (..) no one at all
31 J: not that I know of
32 L: well (.) I'm afraid I can't let you [on the flight then]
33 J: [could you not just]
34 L: you'll have to find another means of transport *back to* Southampton
35 J: but I'm already on your record you know who I am you see me *weekly* (.) why is it necessary to have ehm ID with a photograph [what difference does it make]
36 L: [security]
37 J: it makes no difference I'll go to all the security checks
38 L: yeah but (.) we need to know it's you (.) you could be pretending to be someone else
39 J: [I don't]
40 L: [photo ID] proves that it's you

41 J: yeah but so does all the other identification that I've handed in
42 L: no cause you could have stolen someone else's
43 J: maybe but I haven't
44 L: ((laughing)) yeah well I'm afraid we can't take your word for it you're not (.) going to board this flight
45 J: ok but I think in the future when you change your policies you should make it more clear
46 L: yes (.) sorry to have *inconvenienced* you

The first six turns serve to establish the problem, namely that Jenny does not have any valid photographic identification and that therefore Laura is not allowed to let her board the flight. How Laura aligns herself with the company and how she manages to distance her own person from the responsibility for what is going on is reflected in her use of modal auxiliaries and personal pronouns.

Turns 6 – 22 constitute a first round of negotiations and explanations, which ends with Laura telling Jenny that "we have to see some form of photo ID we can't let you on the plane without it" (turn 6), by using the personal pronoun "we", she on the one hand identifies with the company she is working for and on the other hand deflects responsibility away from her own person to the more abstract concept of the company. Throughout the exchange, she consistently uses the personal pronoun "we" when she rebukes Jenny, only switching to the more intimate pronoun "I" when using apologetic expressions ("I'm sorry" – turn 10, "I'm afraid" – turn 12, 18, 28, 32, 44). Although Laura is not a real company representative but a student play-acting, she seems to have a clear idea about the demands of the company and the obligations that these entail for the customer. In her use of modal auxiliaries she expresses the notion that the company is *forced* to ask for photo ID from every customer as a security measure. Obligations for the company or the customer she expresses by using the modal auxiliaries "must", "have to" or "need to". In terms of what the company's requirements are, she points out that "we have to see some form of photo ID" (turn 6), "it's company policy we need to see your photo ID" (turn 14), "we need to know it's you" (turn 38). From these obligations follows that there is a certain restriction as to what is allowed and feasible. She uses the negative form of the modal auxiliary "can" in these instances in order to show the impossibility of complying with the customer's demands. Even though she herself, as well as the company as a whole,

might be *willing* to accommodate the client, they are *unable* to do so because of new security measures. She tells her client that she cannot get on the plane without photographic ID ("we can't let you on the plane without it " , turn 6), an utterance which she repeats almost verbatim in turn 12 ("we can't let you on the flight") and in turn 32 ("well I'm afraid I cant't let you on the flight then"). When Jenny, in the role of the customer, tries various arguments in order to be admitted to the flight after all, Laura informs her that it is not in her power to help her (turn 22: "I can't help you"; turn 28: "I'm afraid that we can't help you then").

Interestingly, the customer's obligations seem to be much more numerous than the ones the company has. By pointing these out repeatedly and in a certain way, Laura attempts to put the blame with the customer, away from the company. She informs Jenny that it is her duty to read every piece of information carefully: "you've got to read every time you book your tickets you have to read the small print" (turn 10), and after having had an exchange of arguments without coming to a solution, she even suggests to the client that she should look for transport elsewhere turn 34: you'll have to find another means of transport back to Southampton"), thereby rejecting all responsibility and effectively shutting down all avenues of help for the customer.

Throughout the exchange, Laura instinctively makes lexical choices which deflect the responsibility away from her own person to the greater entity of the company she is working for (in her role as a company representative), and other choices which serve to shift any possible blame or responsibility for the problem to the customer. These strategies, as well as her lexical choices, are remarkably similar to what can be observed in comparable real-life conversations. The main difference between them and the role play seems to lie in face considerations, as Laura uses apologetic utterances in order to show her consideration for her interlocutor's face to a higher degree than the real-life company representative in my corpus.

7.3 Inherent Power Struggles

Example (9) – Face-to-Face Interaction (Late Passengers)

This example is one of the rare instances in the corpus in which it is a company representative rather than not a customer who utters a complaint. This interaction is a good example of an underlying powerplay where the tension is almost intangible but clearly perceptible in subtle pauses and small conversational gambits.

In this particular instance, a male (probably Australian) customer is late for a flight, and the crew is waiting for him. When he finally arrives at the check-in desk, the company representative, John, utters an indirect complaint, asking the man where he has been. In this short exchange, the initial complaint turns into a small power battle, with the customer refusing to acknowledge the company representative's right to complain to him.

01 John: sir you're travelling quantas? (..) which which airline are you travelling on sir
02 Man: (..) Qantas.
03 John: ok you're late sir. (.) so where have you *been* sir
04 Man: in russia
05 John: ok alright but where have you been tonight
06 Man: where've you- where have YOU been
07 John: (...) sorry
08 Man: where have *you* been
09 John: I've been here waiting for *you* sir to board
10 Man: ok I've been in Russia right ((Woman from somewhere, saying sth. unintelligible to John))
11 John: ((in reaction to that)): ok alright
12 woman: do you have your on-board coupon sir (.) and your passport
13 John: sir we need to be *quick* ((looking at his wristwatch)) because the aircraft should have gone five minutes ago but we've been waiting for you
14 Man: mate I can't help that
15 John: ok alright but you should have been here on time sir
16 Man: I do the best I can

17 John: ok
18 woman: your boarding pass ((handing it over))
19 Man: thank you
20 John: sir you *really will* need to be quick otherwise the aircraft will go without you
21 Man: what's your name
22 John: my name is john coale I'm the duty manager
23 Man: good on you John I'm doing the best I can mate
24 John: ok (.) if you'd like to hurry sir we- you're keeping the aircraft waiting ((leading him through)) thank you
25 John: ((to the camera and his colleague)): that man just didn't care did he (.) he was- just couldn't care

Initially, the exchange revolves round the question where the customer has been, with John, the company representative, first establishing that the man is due to be on the Qantas flight (turns 1 and 2). John reproaches the customer by telling him that he is late (turn 3) and utters an indirect complaint by asking the customer where he has been (also turn 3). He wants to make sure the customer knows that he is in the wrong in some way and that the airport personnel are making an effort on the customer's behalf. With his utterances John probably intends to create awareness of this in the customer, and possibly also wants to coax some kind of apology out of him. The customer, however, refuses to acknowledge that he is to blame for anything. He gets slightly annoyed by John's repeated questions where he has been and the implied reproaches. He counters these by asking John in turn where he has been (turn 6). John at first is slightly taken aback by that question and doubts whether he heard the customer correctly. After a prolonged pause he intimates that he did not understand the question (turn 7: "sorry"). The customer then repeats his question and John replies that he has been at the airport waiting for the customer (turn 9), thereby reiterating the implied complaint about the customer's lateness.

From the beginning of the exchange, the customer comes across as uncooperative and dismissive. He is slow at responding to John's questions, and in the first few turns of the conversation we find pauses and hesitations which should be absent in what, on the surface, seems to be a simple exchange of factual

information. The pause in John's first turn was first intended as a transition relevance place, giving the customer the chance to reply to the question for information. John simply wants to know whether this particular customer is the one he is waiting for. The customer does not reply at first, probably sensing the underlying reproach, and John feels the need to rephrase his question by specifying that he would like to know which airline the customer is travelling with (turn 1). After some hesitation the customer finally replies and confirms that he is travelling with Qantas and therefore indeed the passenger John was waiting for. The customer's reluctance to cooperate with John seems to annoy the company representative, and he reacts by reproaching the customer. This attitude in turn has a negative effect on the customer, who becomes more obstinate and cooperates even less. Things improve a bit when the customer becomes slightly more accommodating and tries to justify his behaviour. When John tries to coax him into hurrying and reproaches him again for making a whole plane wait for him (turn 13), the customer, almost apologetically, replies that he can't help the circumstances (turn 14), and when John tells him that he should have been there on time, the customer replies that he is doing the best he can (turn 16). We can assume from his utterances that he does indeed mean to be friendly and cooperative, although he does not come across as such.

What is happening in the first and second part of this exchange is a battle that involves the power balance between the two men, as well as a struggle about interpersonal obligations. In order to explain what's happening here, we have to refer back to the adoption of House's discourse and production model (compare chapter 5.2). Again we can observe that the customer has expectations and goals which are at conflict with those of the company representative. Customers automatically assume that they will be accommodated because they paid for a service and they are usually unconcerned with the particular demands and problems involved with delivering the service. This particular customer, who probably is an Australian citizen (indicative of this is his using the Australian company Quantas, as well as his language use with Australian colloquia such as "good on you" and "mate" (turn 23), and some of his intonation patterns), has been travelling for quite a while now (he has come from Russia to Great Britain and seems to be on his way back to Australia). He is probably exhausted from travelling, and is not quite aware that he is causing delays, but more importantly,

he does not seem to care. Customers generally see themselves invested with a certain degree of power, and in that vein he refuses to acknowledge John's right to address him the way he does. After having shown his own goodwill and cooperation (turns 14 and 16), and even having tried to create some kind of familiarity or bond with John by addressing him as "mate" (turn 16), the customer seems to get annoyed by John's repeated complaints and reproaches.

John's implied threat that the plane will leave without the customer if he does not hurry up (turn 20) coaxes the customer into reacting harshly by abruptly asking John for his name (turn 21). The underlying intention here is presumably not that he wants to be able to address John by his name, but a power gambit. One way for customers to exert their power is to complain about company representatives to someone of higher rank within the company. This is something every company tries to avoid, as every complaint sheds a negative light on their activities and only a high proportion of satisfied clients guarantees business success and smooth operations (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987). In order to imply that he might file a complaint about him, and as a means to intimidate him, the customer asks John for his name. This strategy slightly backfires for the customer, as John shows no intimidation and clearly states his name and his status as duty manager (turn 22). With the mention of the term 'manager', John has won the power struggle between the two of them, as this denies the customer the possibility to speak about John with some (other) manager. John is the highest in rank and status there at the moment, and the customer realises this at once. He again tries to be as friendly as he can under the circumstances, and reiterates that he is doing the best he can (turn 23). He also addresses John by his name and again calls him "mate" (turn 23). This is not helping with John's attitude, however. After the passenger has finally boarded the plane he addresses the camera and his colleagues and expresses his disappointment about the customer by saying twice that the customer did not care (turn 25). From his perspective, he was doing the customer a favour by making the plane wait for him and for this accommodating behaviour, John would have expected some token of consideration in return, which he thought he did not get from the passenger.

From all this we can see that the two people in this interaction behaved at cross-purposes, without realising it. Neither of them felt in the wrong, but somehow managed with their speech behaviour to upset the other and put into

motion a struggle for power within the conversation. With every hesitation, and with every utterance, they instigated more upsetting behaviour in the other. This mainly happened because they both had different assumptions about their interpersonal roles and the obligations connected with them. Neither of them realised why the other behaved in a way that went contrary to their respective expectations. They parted with the customer probably feeling treated rudely and inconsiderately, and the company representative feeling that his customer did not appreciate the special service he received and the extra work he caused.

7.4. The Interplay of Power Relationships and Confrontational Behaviour

Example (11): Face-to-Face Interaction (Queuing Confusion)

In this conversation, a husband and wife (they are probably in their late fifties; she is called Lynn and is a teacher, the husband's name or profession remain unknown to us) have been queuing at an EasyJet counter, but when they finally arrive at the front of the queue, they learn that check-in for their flight has closed and that they have missed their flight. They will have to be transferred to another flight, leaving the following morning. Lynn and her husband are confronted with two female EasyJet employees (one in her twenties, Nell, and one a manager whose name we do not learn, in her forties), who fail to see the couple's point of view. What the customers do not know is that EasyJet have changed their check-in system that very day. Previously, each destination had a separate counter, whereas with the new rules people can check in at any counter for any destination. The new system causes a lot of confusion amongst customers and company representatives alike. The two company representatives in this encounter are confused themselves and try to deal with the new circumstances as adequately as possible.

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01 Lynn:    ((with a look of indignation and matching
            tone of voice)): we arrived here at
            quarter past five  we've been standing in
            the queue and [when we get there]
02 Man:     [nobody said anything]
03 Lynn:    nobody actually came through and said the
            Berlin flight was closing at any point
04 Nell:    I actually heard it myself
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05 Lynn: well I'm sorry I didn't (.) and
06 Man: [no]
07 Lynn: [I've got] pretty keen hearing
08 Woman: there was a lady allocated to go along the whole queues and then moved all over
09 Man: at one time it said queue at desk *fifty* which is what we did an hour and a quarter and now we're told it was here
10 Woman: well they did come along the queue sir
11 Man: they didn't do you think [we would have stayed]
12 Woman: [they did sir FORTY FIVE MINUTES] before they did that
13 Man: no no they didn't
14 Lynn: Dubai they did that was the only one they mentioned not earlier
15 Woman: they said berlin and moved them from fifty to fifty nine
16 Man: the girl
17 Woman: sir we know that people moved over we checked all the people in that moved over
18 Man: do you think we would have stood there if we- if we'd heard it
19 Woman: I can't really say sir but I know that but we've had fifty people that moved over from those queues over to the desk
20 Lynn: I shall never *ever* fly EasyJet again and I shall be writing to the managing
21 Nell: good I don't have to transfer you then
22 Lynn: you don't have to transfer me
23 Nell: no not if you don't want to tra- travel with us
24 Lynn: I have no alternative on this occasion
25 Nell: are you telling me you want to travel
26 Lynn: yeah I *will* on this occasion but never again
27 Nell: so (XXX)
28 Lynn: so are you refusing now to give me a ticket to go to Berlin
29 Nell: you don't want to travel with us
30 Lynn: no don't be (perky) with me I would like a ticket now (XXX)
31 Nell: now I *am* refusing to transfer you yeah
32 Lynn: ((addressing Ej manager woman)): ehm this lady is now refusing to give me a ticket to travel out of here to berlin tomorrow
33 Woman: madam I'll transfer you onto tomorrow morning's flight
34 Lynn: meanwhile what do we do till then
35 Woman: (.) ehm well you want a hotel we can give you a hotel list

36 Lynn: at our cost
37 Woman: yes you have to take it up with EasyJet I'm afraid (.) so that's all done for you for tomorrow morning-
38 Lynn: -yes but I don't know what's happening tomorrow morning
39 Woman: one second madam ok (.)your flight tomorrow is at nine forty check-in will close eh six thirty check-in will close at six o'clock on the dot
40 Lynn: let me be absolutely clear (.) the flight tomorrow is at six thirty
41 Woman: yeah
42 Lynn: how long before the flight do we need to be here
43 Woman: the check-in will open two and a half hours before
44 Lynn: right
45 Woman: and it will close at six o'clock
46 Man: (XXX)
47 Woman: the best thing to do is to look at those screens so take a look at the screen as you come in
48 Nell: ((addressing the camera)): the day here has just been bedlam (.) nobody knows what they are doing (.) the check-in didn't have allocated desks (.) so everything was everywhere people didn't know if they were coming or going
49 Lynn: ((addressing the camera)): appalling (.) absolutely appalling (.) the young woman over there was extremely rude
50 Man: ((quoting Nell)) said she didn't *have* to give us [the tickets]
51 Lynn: [you know] eh (.) in customer service terms I think she would rate zero out of a hundred

The interaction begins by husband and wife jointly stating the problem, which is that they have been waiting in the queue for a long time and that nobody announced their flight or the fact that check-in for their flight was closing. This statement of the problem, which at the same time serves as a complaint, as self-justification and as blame, is conducted over the first three turns by the two of them, with Lynn doing most of the talking. Both come across as highly indignant and unfriendly. Their attitude (tone of voice, body language) is highly confrontational.

The next fifteen turns revolve around the truth content of this initial statement, with arguments bouncing back and forth between the customers and the two company representatives. The company representatives keep saying that the flight was definitely called and that the other people who wanted to take the flight were aware of having to change queues, whereas the couple keep up their claim that they did not hear their flight called. The customers approach this part of the interaction in a self-assured and rather aggressive manner, which suggests that they expect their explanations and arguments to have the desired effect, namely to explain the problem and to receive compensation for the confusion caused by EasyJet. In the argument about whether or not their flight had been called, Lynn maintains that she did not hear anything, although she has "pretty keen hearing" (turn 7). Her husband tries to convince the two company representatives by twice using the argument that if they had heard an announcement they would not have remained in the line (turn 11 "no they didn't do you think we would have stayed" and turn 18 "do you think we would have stood there if we'd heard it"). In this stretch of conversation they jointly try to convince the EasyJet employees that their claim is valid and that it was EasyJet's fault and not their own that they missed the flight. The more senior company representative is quite agitated and maintains in a rather loud tone of voice that there was indeed someone who walked the queues and directed people to the right check-in desks. The company representative's agitation shows her own emotional involvement. The situation is stressful for her, but it was not she who changed the rules and she probably feels under attack for something she cannot influence.

The interaction escalates in turn 20, where Lynn exerts her power as a customer and threatens to never fly with this company again, as well as threatening to write a letter to the management. These are two of the strategies at a customer's disposition to show that they have power, and which they try applying to influence a situation in their favour. Here, this move merely has the effect that the younger customer agent, Nell, refuses to give them a ticket at all, as she takes the utterance at face value and argues that if they never want to fly with EasyJet again, they would not want a ticket now (turn 21-23). Not only does she react 'logically', but she counters the customer's move with a symmetrical one, evoking her own power as a company representative. She shows that it is in her power to deny them a transfer, but she makes it sound as if that were their own choice, because they

claimed that they never wanted to use EasyJet again. Using the modal auxiliary "have" (turn 21 "I don't have to transfer you then") Nell indicates that Lynn's previous utterances free her of the obligation to transfer them. Lynn reacts by simply repeating Nell's statement, presumably in order to understand her meaning, as this is a totally unexpected reaction to her threats. We can assume that she made her utterance (turn 20) in the hope of receiving a positive and helpful reaction, but in this she is disappointed by Nell.

In the ensuing turns the interaction escalates, as Nell does not act according to the customer's expectations of a company representative's behaviour. The initial problem has shifted after this interaction and consequently the customers' goal orientation changes along with it. Whereas before, the customers were merely indignant about waiting for a long time and then missing their flight because of miscommunication, now they fear that they might be rejected altogether. They feel treated unfairly and perceive Nell's behaviour as rude (as they say to the camera afterwards, turns 49 – 51).

Lynn admits defeat in turn 24 ("I have no alternative on this occasion") but repeats her threat that she will never fly with EasyJet again (turn 26). Although Lynn has made it clear that she wants a ticket, Nell still refuses to give her the transfer. Lynn checks with her again (turn 28: '"so are you refusing now to me a ticket to go to Berlin") which Nell reacts to in the same manner as before (turn 29: "you don't want to travel with us"). Now Lynn gets really angry and reprimands the woman, who is much younger than her, for her impolite behaviour (turn 30: "no don't be (perky) with me") and clearly demands a ticket (turn 30: "I would like a ticket now"). Nell reacts with some mumbled, unintelligible reply, but still not by issuing a ticket. This prompts Lynn to address the other company representative, who is older than Nell and also more senior in rank. She complains that Nell refuses to issue a ticket for them (turn 32: "ehm this lady is now refusing to give me a ticket to travel out of here to Berlin tomorrow"). This strategy is finally successful and the second company representative at once grants the request for a transfer ticket and uses the respectful address term 'madam' (turn 33: "madam I'll transfer you onto tomorrow morning's flight"). Lynn only now achieved what should have been the least the company could do for them after making them miss their flight. She does not receive an apology or any kind of compensation, and on

the contrary, after the way Nell behaved, she almost needs to be grateful to be transferred at all.

Having missed their flight and having to spend the night somewhere, Lynn asks for information about what they should do next (turn 34: "meanwhile what do we do till then"). This utterance can be interpreted as a request not only for information, but indirectly also for some sort of compensation or accommodation, which is indeed the way it is interpreted by the older EasyJet company representative. She knows perfectly well that her customers will need a place to stay for the night, but it is not in her authority to compensate the costs. Within her powers, she tries to be helpful and offers to provide them with a list of nearby hotels (turn 35: "ehm well you want a hotel we can give you a hotel list"). The initial hesitation in this utterance serves as a hint that EasyJet will not pay for the hotel room, a fact which is picked up by Lynn (turn 36: "at our cost"). The company representative confirms that statement, and seems to interpret it as an indirect complaint, as she adds that they will have to complain about that with the company itself (turn 37: "yeah you have to take it up with EasyJet I'm afraid"). This is the only point in the whole interaction where either of the two company representatives shows any kind of apologetic behaviour ("'I'm afraid") and she also seems to think that the customers should not have to pay for their room themselves. However, the company representative is forced to behave within the limitations of the company policy, which do not allow her to refund customers for the cost of accommodation.

After this exchange Lynn tries to salvage the situation by trying to avoid their missing their flight again in the morning. She indirectly ask for information about the proceedings by stating her ignorance of them (turn 38: "I don't know what's happening tomorrow morning"), and the rest of the interaction consists of an exchange of information (turns 39 – 47)

After the interaction, both the customers and the company representatives separately address the camera team and give their assessment of the situation. These assessments are often helpful in order to find out what motivations people had for their behaviour in an encounter. The young company representative Nell seems unaware of having done anything wrong. Her take on the situation seems to be that the customers were confused because of the new queuing system (turn 48). She does not see that it might have been her responsibility as a representative of

the company who *caused* all this confusion and therefore created problems for the customers, to apologize and try to make things right. This attitude can possibly be explained by the briskness of tone adopted by the customers. They must seem overly aggressive to the already stressed company representatives, and therefore did not evoke their sympathy or understanding. The customers are left clearly baffled and bemused by the treatment they have just received. In their eyes Nell's behaviour qualifies as rude (turn 49) and not very service-oriented (turn 51). They are totally unaware that their aggressive approach in the beginning might have aggravated the situation.

The analysis of this episode shows that consumer power is very limited and that customers' argumentation and persuasion is useless when they are confronted with company agents who follow company policy by the book, without regard for the circumstances or the origins of the problem. It also highlights the importance factors such as tone of voice may have for an analysis of dialogue. The aggressive attitude adopted by the customers was not conveyed in the locutions themselves, but almost exclusively by the tone of voice they adopted, and clearly did not help the customers' plight. It has also been shown that the wielding of consumer power can be counter-productive and may aggravate the situation rather than improve it for the customer. It was very clear from the interaction that the company representatives were acting in alignment with EasyJet company policy, which was their first priority, a fact that was only reinforced by the aggressive stance of the customers. This kind of behaviour did little to awaken concern in the company representatives about the customers' rights or their own obligations towards them. The interaction was shaped by EasyJet company policy, and therefore by the power behind the encounter (Fairclough, 2001), but to a large extent also by the confrontational behaviour of the customers.

Example (12): Face-to-Face Interaction (Woman with Uncle)

In this interaction, the female customer, Margaret, who is accompanied by her uncle, who took her to the airport, apparently did not check the dates on her flight confirmation – she had wanted to fly today, but on her reservation she was booked for the day before. The power struggle between her and the female company

representative, Leanne, revolves round the question of who is at fault here, the company or the customer. Although it is the company representative's conviction that in this case it is clearly Margaret, the customer, who is to blame for things going wrong, Margaret's strong personality and her forceful complaints at first make it look as if she might swing the power balance in her favour.

01 Margaret: (XXXX)
02 Leanne: you checked your confirmation,
03 Margaret: (.) well I asked for the date and the date that I asked for I assumed was on the ticket. maybe I overlooked it t to check it (.) I checked my *times*, (.) I checked everything else,
04 Leanne: so it's not (XXX)
05 Margaret: [I did-]
06 Leanne: [(XXX)]
07 Margaret: I didn't ask it I didn't notice it no I assumed it was right
08 Leanne: you didn't check that then
09 Margaret: now I feel like I'm back in primary school
10 Leanne: you never checked it that's what you're telling me yeah.
11 Margaret: wait a minute love (.) don't you highhorse me
12 Leanne: you have it here in black and white it says Friday [(XXX)]
13 Margaret: [wait wait] it doesn't say in black in white (.) what I asked over the phone (XXX)
14 Uncle: now. who is at fault (.) the professional (.) or the ordinary traveller
15 Leanne: [the ordinary traveller.]
16 Margaret: [how about]
17 Uncle: [please] the ordinary traveller?
18 Margaret: how about how [about if I ask you eh eh eh]
19 Uncle: [lovely customer relations]
20 Leanne: ((after a short stretch which is inaudible)) Saturday morning
21 Margaret: I'm saying that again I'm paying no more money. you are asking me to pay more money for a mistake I didn't make? I don't think so! () you have to get me home when I want home. no way am I giving you more money love (.) I paid

my- and I booked in advance you know (..)

22 Leanne: ((silent, just staring back at Margaret))

23 Margaret: it's not my mistake

24 Leanne: (XXX)

25 Margaret: ((raising her voice, but not quite shouting)) I don't give a damn. you get me wherever you wanna get me I'm giving you no more money? (.) is there something wrong with your head?

26 Leanne: ((just looking at her, playing with a pen in her right hand))

27 Margaret: what can I do? (.) you making me- you starting to make me feel totally in- (.) stupid. I don't know what I'm doing? (.) I don't know when I'm travelling I don't know when I'm coming home? (..) I assure you I do

28 Leanne: (XXX) to belfast

29 Margaret: I may come from Belfast love but I tell you love I'm not really totally stupid

30 Leanne: when you booked the flight (.) the lady who logged it said that she had put in

31 Margaret: -well then the lady who logged in the system obviously has made a mistake (it might have been an oversight of mine) but I booked from Friday to Friday so (XXX)

32 Leanne: ((after calling the customer relations department at EasyJet in order to find out how to solve this problem))EasyJet said (.) they are not gonna- they are not gonna compensate cause you haven't you haven't read your confirmation and they say that they can see you got your flights wrong

33 Margaret: I didn't

34 Leanne: back to your argument there and they are saying that the lady that you booked it with has actually put it in the (.) in the booking that she's reconfirmed all your details with you and you confirmed them with her and she actually sent you that and you never checked it so now you are gonna pay that fee for the flight which will depart tomorrow

35 Margaret: I have already paid

36 Leanne: (XXX)

37 Margaret: you now ask me for a hundred and twenty pounds to fly tomorrow? (.) after I've had to pay (XXX)((she is fighting back tears, her voice is giving in)) (.) for

	going down to wales? I'm paying you another hundred and twenty pounds?
38 Leanne:	(tomorrow night there's a flight that's slightly) cheaper
39 Margaret:	I just want home (.) I have family at home waiting for me ((crying))I can't stay here much longer I want home ((sobbing)) it's enough
40 Uncle:	((afterwards, speaking to the camera)) it's a third world company trying to work in the first world (.) (XX) that's what it is it's disgusting (.) *now* they are asking her for another fifty five pounds to what (.) to travel at the most *inconvenient* of times tomorrow night
41 Margaret:	((addressing the camera afterwards)) when they asked (I said I would be there) it's not what I had in mind. I paid dearly for it (.) I definitely won't be using EasyJet again ever
42 Leanne:	((addressing the camera afterwards)) there's no argument there (.) she she had the confirmation there (.) and she hadn't checked (.) so she has to travel tomorrow (..) might not be happy about it but there's nothing I can do for her

In the first part of the exchange (turns 1-19), the problem is identified and the discussion focuses on the question of blame. For the company representative, Leanne, this question is central. Once she got Margaret to admit that she had checked the letter of confirmation, for her it is clear that the problem was caused by Margaret and not by EasyJet. Acting accordingly, she initially does nothing to help Margaret, as she does not see any reason to do so. This kind of attitude infuriates Margaret and her uncle, who has accompanied her to the airport. Margaret's approach at first is hesitant, and she makes the strategic error of admitting that she might indeed not have checked the dates on the confirmation (turns 3 and 7). This only reinforces Leanne's attitude who keeps repeating that Margaret did not check the dates (turn 4, 8, 10). This prompts Margaret to complain about Leanne's attitude towards her, which she perceives as condescending and impolite (turn 9:"now I feel like I'm back in primary school"; turn 11: "don't you highhorse me"). Her uncle then intervenes, with a strategy based on his assumptions about consumer power. He wants to know whether

Leanne really wants to imply that it is the customer at fault here (turn 14: "now who is at fault the professional or the ordinary traveller"), to which Leanne replies, deadpan, that it is the ordinary traveller (turn 15). This prompts a resigned, sarcastic comment from the uncle, who labels this kind of assessment "lovely customer relations" (turn 19), his intended meaning of course being that this shows that EasyJet treat their customers quite badly. Margaret is so shocked by Leanne's reaction that she can only stutter at that point, but does not manage to make herself heard (turns 16 and 18).

In the second part of the exchange (turns 20 – 31), Leanne suggests a solution which is not to Margaret's liking. She can fly the following day, which is a mistake, Saturday, but she will have to pay extra. Margaret is still adamant that she did not and vents her anger by now adopting a highly confrontational attitude. This is her way of trying to get the upper hand in the exchange – she shows no sign of intimidation anymore and goes for a full frontal attack. In turn 21 she emphatically refuses to pay the company more money because she -so she claims- did not make a mistake. She also points out to Leanne that it is the company's obligation to take her home, on the grounds that she paid for that service. All this is delivered in an agitated, slightly aggressive tone of voice and receives no verbal reaction from Leanne. After a pause Margaret points out again that this is not her mistake (turn 23). Unfortunately, Leanne's reaction to this is indiscernible, but whatever she said prompts Margaret to become really angry. She raises her voice and starts swearing: "I don't give a damn" (turn 25) and again points out that it is EasyJet's duty to take her home, although in her agitation her meaning becomes slightly confused: "you get me wherever you wanna get me" (turn 25). Again she refuses to pay more money and then insults Leanne by doubting her sanity: "is there something wrong with your head?" turn 25).

This combination of raised voice, swearing, and personal insult is very confrontational and a common strategy for customers who feel that they are treated unfairly and try to get what they feel is their due. In such instances it sometimes proves successful to intimidate a company representative in order to get them to act in the customer's favour (or just to get the customer off their back) but does not seem quite the right approach in this instance. Leanne counters this personal attack with silence, which prompts Margaret to show again that she is on top of the situation. She admits that she finds Leanne's behaviour intimidating, which shows

in her utterance, as well as in the hesitant way she produces it (turn 27): "you making me- you starting to make me feel totally in- (.) stupid". She then seems to regain her former bravado and firmly tells Leanne again that she knows what she is doing (turn 27). This is (presumably, as Leanne's utterance is mostly unintelligible) countered by the same argument, that she booked the wrong date to return to Belfast, and that she omitted to check the confirmation for errors. Margaret picks up on this mention of her hometown, and on top of everything else now seems to be piqued in her native pride: "I may come from Belfast love but I tell you I'm not really totally stupid" (turn 29). With this she reiterates the topic of being made to feel stupid by Leanne and rejects that implied accusation. Leanne, however, now claims to have verbal evidence from the person booking the flight that they put in the correct dates (turn 30), but gets interrupted midsentence by her customer, who then tries to deflect the blame from herself to the person who dealt with her booking by claiming that they must have been the one who made a mistake, not Margaret herself, since she knew she wanted to travel from Friday to Friday (turn 31).

Obviously, Margaret's confrontational behaviour, and her insistance that she is not to blame here, gain her the upper hand with Leanne, as the company representative does not reject her outright, but calls her superiors at the EasyJet customer service office on the phone in order to find out what to do about Margaret. Sadly for Margaret, what she hears on the phone confirms Leanne's attitude and the decision that has been made is not in Margaret's favour. The company can prove that the booking had been made for the previous day, and that Margaret had agreed to their terms and conditions and not read the written confirmation carefully that had been sent to her. The blame, therefore, from the company's perspective, lies entirely with the customer, and they do not see any obligation to help her with her problem. Leanne explains all this to Margaret, who still tries to deny that any of it is her fault. She interrupts Leanne's lengthy explanation pointing out that she didn't get her flight dates wrong (turn 33), and informs Leanne again that she already paid for a service from EasyJet that she is not getting now (turn 35). When Margaret finally realises that all her attempts at swaying things in her favour have been in vain and that she will indeed have to pay extra in order to get home, she bursts into tears. This does not look like a strategic move on her part, but seems to be honest desperation. She points out that she only

wants to go home and that her family is waiting for her at home (turn 39), but this appeal to Leanne's empathy does not help either - Margaret will have to pay extra in order to get home. In the end she has lost the power struggle and has to adhere to company policy. Her initial attitude that she should be accommodated as a customer has been delusional, and she is now bitterly disappointed.

After the interaction, all three interlocutors address the camera and tell us their opinion about what went on. The uncle expresses his disgust with EasyJet (turn 40), and Margaret says that she will never fly with EasyJet ever again (turn 41). Leanne points out again that Margaret had not checked her confirmation and therefore Leanne was unable to help her (turn 42). In this exchange the interaction revolved around the question of blame, and the power struggle was quite confrontational on the part of the customer. Since the company decided that they were not to blame in this instance, even the customer's anger and disappointment in their services did not sway the power balance in her favour.

7.5. Summary

Conflictual service encounter discourse involves an asymmetrical relationship between company representative and customer, with the company representative as the more powerful participant, due to the institutional context. Evaluations of this power balance are clearly at variance between the interlocutors, with the customer approaching the discourse under the (mistaken) assumption that the power balance is at least equal or even higher in their own favour, as they believe in some construct like 'consumer power'. Even though the power relationship between the interlocutors is clearly defined by the operant discourse frames and the roles they have there within, it is not a stable variable and something that is negotiated and re-evaluated online, with the possibility of the power balance shifting at any point in the interaction (compare chapter 3.3). It can be said that such power shifts are one of the main aims of conflictual service encounters, as it is the participants' main transactional goal to exert power over their interlocutor in order to change their attitude or behaviour.

Power relationships and the stance or alignment (Goffman, 1981) of participants become manifest in the use of certain lexical items (for example personal pronouns, modal auxiliaries). In order to shift the power balance within an

interaction, interlocutors resort to interpersonal strategies either designed to attack or appease the other's face wants. Customers in conflictual service encounters tend to employ highly confrontational strategies and direct complaints in an attempt to win the power struggle, a strategy which, as the data from my corpus shows, is rewarded with rather limited success.

Chapter 8: Emotion in Service Encounters

8.1. Outline

In conflictual service encounter exchanges, the participants' emotional state is very important for their behaviour, influencing their choice of discourse strategies, but also determining the kind of relational work they commit to. By analysing verbal utterances together with features such as body language (Argyle, 1988; Beattie, 2003), gestures (Cassell, McNeill, & McCullough, 1999; Enfield, Kita, & de Ruiter, 2007; Gullberg & Holmqvist, 1999) gaze (Adams & Kleck, 2005), facial expressions (Ekman, 1999; Wierzbicka, 2000), and spatial positioning (Luchjenbroers, 2006), and by observing intonation patterns (Coulthard, 1992; Cruttenden, 1986; Crystal, 1969; Curl, Local, & Walker, 2006; Schegloff, 1998), we can learn a lot more about how emotion is expressed and what effect this might have on the interlocutor. The above-mentioned elements reveal more about a person's emotional involvement because they are largely subconscious and less influenced by rational considerations. I want to argue that people have much greater control about and greater awareness of verbal utterances than where facial expressions, body movement etc. are concerned. The same holds true when interpreting utterances. Expressions of emotion are often processed only subconsciously, and not always correctly. Conversely, a hearer's own emotions might influence the interpretation of preceding turns.

In accordance with their respective roles, customers and company representatives will, at least at the beginning of a complaint event, have very different emotional states with which they enter into the talk. We expect the company representatives to be in a neutral emotional state, dealing with their job on a day-to- day basis, trying to solve any occurring problems as best as they can. These problems do not affect them personally, and therefore we can assume that, apart from personal issues which have nothing to do with their work, the company representatives will be in a fairly neutral emotional mode. This is quite a different matter for the customers, though. The problem that needs solving affects them negatively in some way, and therefore we can expect them to experience negative emotions. The quality of emotion experienced by the customers varies considerably,

however, which is dependent on an array of factors and circumstances. We need to consider the seriousness of the problem, the effect it has on the customer, the likelihood that it will be solved, etc. More importantly, the reactions by the company representative can also have an effect on the customer's emotional state. We can observe a variety of emotions in customers, ranging from hope, guilt, feeling treated unfairly, to disappointment, anger, and outrage. The customers' behaviour, similarly, might affect the company representative's emotional state, and might change it from neutral to feelings of annoyance, feeling attacked, feeling hurt, and feeling angry on the negative side, but also to feeling sympathy for the customer, being torn between loyalty towards the company and its policy, and feeling empathy with the customer on the positive side.

In what follows I will discuss three examples from my corpus, with special emphasis on what causes negative emotions, how these are expressed and in turn what effect this has on the interlocutors. Naturally, emotion has been an integral part of the examples discussed up to now, but I feel that the expression of emotion influences the participants' choices and aggravates the conflict in the following examples to a much greater extent.

8.2. Anger and Frustration

Example (13): Face-to-Face Interaction (Wife needs ID)

In this example from the TV corpus, a married couple and their son want to fly from Luton to Edinburgh, but only the husband has brought photo ID, which is now a requirement for all passengers, even on UK-internal flights. They are dealing with a young female EasyJet employee whose name we do not find out. This is a prime example of an instance where the rigidity with which company representatives adhere to company policy can be a cause for anger and frustration in customers.

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01 Mell:        I've got my passport and my driving
                licence my wife hasn't got her (.) eh
                passport and neither does my son
02 Ejwoman:     you do have to have one form of ID like
                it says you haven't got one of those have
                to have photographic ID like I said the
                same rules apply
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03 Caroline: so now we can't fly
04 Ejwoman: no (XXX) policy ((pointing to rule chart on desk)) get your ID and transfer you onto the next flight
05 Caroline: ((rubbing her forehead)) (..)I just can't get my head around it (.) there must be something you can do
06 Ejwoman: no there's not though=
07 Caroline: =absolutely not (.) why what are you worried about that I'm-
08 Ejwoman: anything
09 Mel: if I get on the if I get on the train I don't actually have to have a passport to go
10 Ejwoman: that's a train sir
11 Mel: of course it's a bloody train but it's going to the SAME PLACE!
12 Ejwoman: right (.) just lower your voice sir
13 Mel: I'm just getting slightly p..t off with this
14 Caroline: she's not she's not going to do anything about it
15 Ejwoman: I can't do anything about it mam we have no discretion
16 Caroline: I've got lots of identification I've got loads of cards but I haven't got a photograph ((in an agitated voice))
17 Ejwoman: you haven't got one of those
18 Caroline: no
19 Ejwoman: there's nothing I can do
((Mel and Caroline walk away from the desk))
20 Mel: the problem appears to be that we haven't got a (.) photo ID to (.) try and travel to Scotland which is as far as I can remember was in the british isles (.) what can we do we're actually hamstrung by these (..) thickheaded people (.) wearing orange suits (.) who say ((changing his voice)) can't do this (.) can't do that ((back to his normal voice)) when they know it's my son and my wife (.) it's not as though I'm importing some sort of (.) strange eightarmed monster (.) how stupid is that

We enter the scene at the point where the husband (Mel) is stating the fact that he has a passport and his driving licence with him, but that both his son and his wife

do not have any photographic ID. By explaining all this, he presumably wants to make clear that the others are related to him and that his ID should be sufficient for all of them. The EasyJet customer agent reacts by telling him that each of them needs to have an individual photographic ID. She stresses the obligation by using the modal auxiliary "have" twice (turn 2: "they have to have"; "you have to have") and refers to the rules (turn 2: "the same rules apply"). The couple now begin to understand that the wife and the son will not be allowed to fly. The wife Caroline expresses her incredulity (turn 5: "I just can't get my head around it") and demands the customer agent's help (turn 5: "there must be something you can do") in a very abrupt manner. The customer agents denies being able to help (turn 6: "no there's not though") which induces husband and wife to start a sequence of arguments designed to change the customer agent's attitude and to make her help them anyway. Caroline first makes sure the customer agent's statement that she will not help still holds true (turn 7: "absolutely not") and then asks for the reasons, thereby again expressing her incredulity.

Her husband Mel at that point cuts her off and uses a rational argument by pointing out that if he went to Scotland by train, he wouldn't need a passport (turn 9: "if I get on the if I get on the train I don't actually have to have a passport"). The customer agent points out that there is a difference between trains and planes (turn 10: "that's a train sir") showing respect by using the polite address term "sir". However, Mel gets angry at this reaction and in his next turn raises his voice and uses a swear word (turn 11: "of course it's a bloody train but it's going to the same place"). He tries to get across the essence of his rational argument, namely that Edinburgh is in the same country, and that therefore a passport should be unnecessary. The customer agent counters this by ignoring Mel's line of argumentation, merely reacting to his interactive style and asking him to keep his voice down (turn 12: "right (.) just lower your voice sir"). Again she shows her respect by using the polite address term "sir". Mel is still upset and says so (turn 13: "I'm just getting slightly p..d off with this"), thereby explaining and justifying why he had to raise his voice. He is outraged and angry, and he feels wronged as a customer for reasons that seem illogical and superfluous to him. He expects EasyJet to accommodate himself and his family. Meanwhile his wife Caroline has come to the conclusion that arguing is pointless and will get them nowhere, which results in her not even addressing the company agent anymore, but just talking about her to

her husband although they are still right in front of her at the desk (turn 14: "she's not going to do anything about it"). The company representative reacts to this by explaining that she cannot help them (turn 15 "I can't do anything about it mam we have no discretion"). She uses the personal pronoun "I" together with the modal auxiliary "can't", thereby showing that she might like to help, but that she is unable to do so, since she and her colleagues (expressed in the personal pronoun "we") have no discretion (which indirectly refers to company policy). In reaction to this an upset Caroline then tries one last line of argumentation and mentions in a very upset tone of voice that she has a lot of other cards that might prove her identity with her (turn 16), but again that does nothing to change the customer agent's attitude, who reacts by repeating her statement that she cannot help (turn 19 "there's nothing I can do"), which prompts the couple to give up and walk away from the desk.

Mel explains the situation to the camera crew afterwards (turn 20), and complains about the customer agent's attitude. He vents his feelings by using irony and by slightly insulting the EasyJet employees ("thickheaded"). Eventually the couple accept the situation and solve it. Caroline hurries home and gets her passport, and makes it just in time to catch the flight.

In this exchange the anger the customers experienced was caused mainly due to the constraints of the company policy. The problem was conceived as something that should have been overcome with some common sense and a more customer-friendly attitude. We do not know whether the customers' angry attitude had any effect on the company representative, as she managed to remain calm and non-confrontational even though she could not help them. On the whole, this episode was marked more by frustration than by anger, and things did not escalate, mostly due to the fact that the company representative remained calm, respectful, and professionally detached throughout. In the following we will look at an example where the circumstances cause angry behaviour in the passengers, which in turn influences the company representative's emotional state, and consequently his behaviour and willingness to cooperate.

8.3. Anger Spiral

Example (14): Face-to-Face Interaction (Two-Year-Old Passenger)

In this example from the TV corpus, the problem at hand is that a young mother wants to return back home with her two-year-old son. At the time of booking the plane tickets, as well as when flying out, the son had been under two years old and did not need a ticket. While they were away, visiting the boy's grandmother, it was his birthday and he turned two, which means that he now needs his own ticket. The mother and the grandmother learn this upon check-in and are asked by Leo, the company representative, to purchase another ticket for the little boy.

01 Leo:	what I can do I think we've got availability and you will have to buy another seat
02 Grandmother:	((turning away from Leo)) (XXX)
03 Leo:	it's the law that any person under the age- over the age of two has to purchase a seat
04 Grandmother:	((approaching Leo again)) (XXX) passengers you go on the net
05 Leo:	yeah
06 Grandmother:	and see I actually tried to go through every phone number that you had
07 Leo:	yeah
08 Grandmother:	and what I keep getting is an automated voice (.) I didn't get anybody that I can actually talk to (.) the flights were booked in december (.) that was way before his second birthday
09 Leo:	yes
10 Grandmother:	yeah ehm he turned two Monday ehm ((picking up the child))
11 Leo:	it's it's law that you have to purchase a seat (.) but there is nothing I can do
12 Grandmother:	how do you purchase a seat
13 Mother:	it doesn't work by booking single tickets cause on the way over
14 Leo:	mh mmh
15 Mother:	you would book a seat for him to sit on my knees (.) [and on the way back]

16 Leo: [yes]
17 Grandmother: it doesn't
18 Leo: then you'd have [to make a separate reservation for the seat]
19 Grandmother: [it doesn't give you an option to *do* that]
20 Leo: yes it does you need to go back in once you've got that reference number make a single booking for just him (.)
21 Grandmother: !but you *can't* make a single booking for a *child* (.) the child has to go with an adult! ((rolling her eyes, looking around))
22 Mother: (XXX)
23 Leo: right let me just try and see if I can find out
24 Leo: ((to the camera, with a smirk on his face)) what I was saying there (.) I wasn't a hundred percent sure myself that you could actually book a single for a chi:ld but and it appears that you *can* do that (.) I just went over and checked and you definitely can do it so she didn't follow it through properly (.) she just assu:med eh and unfortunately if you assu:me something you don't know much about it means (XXX) and you've got to give us more money ((a little bit later, after Leo checked)) it's gonna be eighty five pounds (.) in total
25 Mother: for what
26 Leo: (.) for the extra seat
27 Grandmother: (…) eighty five pound
28 Leo: eighty five pound
29 Grandmother: I'm not paying eighty five pound
30 Leo: we (.) won't be able to accept you without that booking (.) by law we got- we cannot accept you
31 Grandmother: ((with a very shrill, agitated voice))!what happens if she doesn't have eighty five pound?!
32 Leo: we can't accept (..) [you guys without it]
33 Mother: ((clearly angry)) [that's ridiculous] thirty five pounds for me and him to come over return and then you charge him eighty five

	pounds (.) !for a *two year old!* to go back to sit in his own seat which he probably won't sit in his own seat anyway because he's used to sitting on my knee he won't even sit in the seat by himself
34 Grandmother:	!so what do we do about the flight she's already paid for!
35 Leo:	you can write (.) to customer support but [I doubt very much whether-]
36 Grandmother:	![oh yeah] I've heard about your customer support (.) and I have read the fact that they don't take it any further because you make it so bloody difficult to (make anything) to (XXX) you know!
37 Leo:	I'll give you this back.
38 Grandmother:	!what are you doing?!
39 Leo:	ok I'm trying to help you
40 Grandmother:	!what do you mean you're trying to help?!
41 Mother:	((with one hand to her mouth, mumbling something to her mother)) (XXX)
42 Grandmother:	!so what? (.) she doesn't have eighty five pound!
43 Leo:	((addressing his colleague)): we'll have to close the desk yeah
44 Colleague:	ok
45 Leo:	yeah
46 Grandmother:	!she has *got* to get *home!*
47 Leo:	you are not getting on board this aircraft
48 Grandmother:	((walking to the desk, getting her money out)) (..) (XXXX) but this is absolutely pathetic
49 Leo:	((Leo is standing next to the grandmother in front of the desk, ignoring her)) certainly (.) mary mary we're gonna have (.) we're gonna have
50 Grandmother:	!please (.) she can't! (XXX)
51 Leo:	((shouting himself)) mary will you- !stop shouting please! (..) the child can't go.
52 Grandmother:	!what do you mean he can't go!
53 Mother:	((shouting)) !she's *paying the money for him!*
54 Leo:	you are gonna pay for him
55 Mother:	[yes]

56	Grandmother:	[!yes!]
57	Leo:	right
58	Grandmother:	!I don't have a *choice* you're telling me!
59	Leo:	(do we have another) seat (..) ok that's eighty eight pounds in total
60	Mother:	(XXX) luggage
61	Leo:	((not looking at them any more)) luggage (.) through the gate here ok (walks away)
62	Leo:	if she was unable to get that (.) Belfast flight what we would have done is put her on the one first thing tomorrow morning which I think is about seven fifty five in the morning (.) so it would have meant quite a long wait (.) eh but I can't work the impossible I can't do things which are against our policy (.) I wish I could (.) it would be be ((smiling)) much easier but I've got to go along with it and (.) it doesn't make everybody happy unfortunately
63	Grandmother:	((walking away, still very agitated and shouting loudly)) !eighty eight pounds for a child to get home (.) you're kidding!

In turn 1, Leo, the EasyJet representative, suggests a solution to the problem which is in keeping with company policy and disadvantageous to the customers. He uses three different pronouns (*I, we, you)* in this turn. He expresses his own willingness to help (turn 1: "what I can do"), then talks about his company and himself being able to offer the customers an extra seat ("I think we've got availability"), making it sound as if he were doing them a favour, and then points out the customer's obligations ("you will have to buy another seat"). The modal auxiliary "have" makes it clear that there is no choice, and that the customers will be forced to behave accordingly. This notion is reinforced in turn 3, where Leo tells the customers that he is acting according to the law ("it's the law that any person...."). This argument is taken up again in turn 11, after some discussion, where Leo points out again that the rules are made according to the law ("it's it's law") and therefore rejects having any personal responsibility ("there is nothing I can do"). The discussion then revolves round the technical possibility of purchasing a ticket for a child alone, and

Leo goes and checks at the computer where he finds that that is indeed possible. This line of argument ends with him informing the customers that they definitely have to purchase another seat.

At this point the whole interaction starts to get out of hand. Up to now, the customers were still under the illusion that this problem would just go away by itself, but now they are informed that they will have to pay a large sum on top of what they already paid, just in order to get back home. Leo makes it very clear to them, that, unless they pay another eighty-five pounds, they cannot fly home (turn 30: "we won't be able to accept you without that booking"). This comes across as very threatening to the customers, and the grandmother challenges him by asking what would happen if they simply did not have that kind of money (turn 31: "what if we don't have eighty five pound"). In reply to this Leo reiterates his threat that they would not be accepted on the flight in that case (turn 32). This upsets both the mother and the grandmother. Especially the grandmother gets very agitated and raises her voice. Her agitation translates into a very shrill, very annoyed and annoying tone of voice, whereas her daughter, equally annoyed, does not come across as quite as menacing, because she raises her voice less, but also because hers has a darker timbre. Both of them are outraged at the insanity of the rule that a two-year-old has to sit alone all of a sudden.

They also see a disproportionate difference between what the ticket originally cost (turn 33: "thirty five pounds") and the eighty eight pounds they are asked to pay now. The grandmother tries to get out of paying first with an outright refusal to pay (turn 29: "I'm not paying eighty five pound"), to which Leo reacts by reconfirming that in that case they would not accept them on the flight. He justifies that by pointing out that that is the law (turn 30: "we (.) won't be able to accept you without that booking (.) by law we got- we cannot accept you"). His utterance is marked by pauses and hesitation, and he is working hard to stress their obligation, making it sound as if it was the law's, not EasyJet's responsibility. This upsets the customers, and the grandmother next tries to get across that her daughter cannot afford to pay that kind of money, probably in an appeal to Leo's empathy (turn 31). Quite unmoved by this, Leo repeats what he said earlier, that they would be unable to accept them on the flight (turn 32). The mother interrupts him (turn 33) by pointing out how ridiculous she finds the whole affair, pointing out the low initial

price, as well as the fact that her son is used to sitting in her lap and that it would be very unlikely for him to even use that expensive seat EasyJet is forcing them to buy.

The grandmother then asks Leo what would happen to the flight her daughter already paid for (turn 34). This prompts Leo to tell them about the possibility of writing to customer support, but he seems to think that would be pointless, because from his perspective the customers are in the wrong here (turn 35: "you can write (.) to customer support but [I doubt very much whether-]"). At the mention of the word 'customer support' the grandmother becomes even angrier than before. Still shouting shrilly, at the top of her voice, and with a menacing look on her face, she interrupts Leo and tells him what she really thinks about EasyJet's customer support (turn 36: "oh yeah I've heard about your customer support and I've read the fact that they don't take it any further because they make it so bloody difficult to (make anything) to (xxx) you know").

This is the crucial point in this interaction – the grandmother's confrontational attitude towards Leo's friendly move, together with her shouting and using a swear word, makes him angry and prompts him to abandon any idea of trying to get her relatives on the plane after all. He breaks off the communication very abruptly (turn 37: 'I'll give you this back'), his tone of voice colder and more matter of fact than before. This is a very unexpected reaction for the customers, and the grandmother can hardly believe this is happening. She demands an explanation (turn 38: "what are you doing"), in reaction to which Leo explains his earlier behaviour, namely that he was only trying to help them (turn 39: "ok I'm trying to help you"), thereby implying that HE is the one who is helpful and cooperative and his customers are confrontational and unreasonable.

This attitude is even more surprising (and anger-inducing) to the customers, as they really do not experience Leo's attitude as helpful. From their point of view he is making their life much more difficult and is making no moves to accommodate them at all. The grandmother expresses her incredulity (turn 40: "what do you mean you're trying to help") with her agitated voice conveying her anger, and the following turns repeat the earlier argumentation, the grandmother claiming that her daughter cannot afford to pay the money, and with Leo repeating that they are not going to get on the plane without purchasing the ticket. He is even more abrupt about that than before, also because there is time pressure and check-in is closing (turn 47: "you're not getting on board this aircraft").

Having understood that there is no more room for negotiation, the grandmother resigns herself to paying. She approaches the desk and gets out her purse, all the while complaining about what is going on (turn 48: "but this is absolutely pathetic"). Leo misjudges her intentions, as he simply does not understand that the grandmother is willing to pay now, and tries to get his colleagues to close check-in, by now fairly agitated himself. Only when the mother of the child interferes and explains to Leo that her mother is about to pay for the child, Leo begins to understand and grudgingly makes arrangements for them to get onto the flight after all. There are no apologies from him, and no moves suggesting any kind of consideration for the customers' face. He even avoids looking at them and after having sorted the necessary things out, he simply walks away from them, without addressing them any further and without saying goodbye.

Clearly, the grandmother's angry behaviour was received by Leo as a personal attack. Being shouted at repeatedly, he failed to separate his own emotional reactions from his role as company representative. As such, he was unable to understand the customer's position and felt treated unfairly, as he perceived his own behaviour as helpful and friendly throughout, a perception that was clearly not shared by the customers.

8.4. Communication Breakdown

Example (15) – Face-to-Face Interaction (The American Man)

This exchange is an even more outspoken example of a turmoil of emotions which leads to anger and frustration for the customers as well as the company representatives. Matters get out of hand so much that eventually there is a complete breakdown of communication.

In this exchange, the situation is aggravated because it is Christmas Eve and many people are desperate to get home to their families. Bad weather conditions have caused problems and delays, and a handful of people have missed their flight to Paris. These people were advised by airport personnel to take a taxi to another UK airport in order to catch another flight to Paris there. They spent two hundred pounds on the taxi ride and it took them four hours to get to the other airport, but when they

arrive there, they learn that they have missed this flight as well because check-in has just closed. They will have to wait for the next available flight, which is on Boxing Day, two days later. Understandably, these people are upset now, especially since it is still half an hour before the scheduled departure of their flight. Together they try to convince the female company representative Leanne to admit them onto the flight after all. A black American, John, is clearly their spokesperson, and he gets help from a young Greek called Sapadinos and from another man whose name we do not get to know.

The precariousness of these people's situation cannot be stressed enough. It is a very special day, on which, understandably, they want to be home with their families. If they cannot get on the plane, their Christmas will be ruined and they will face a very uncomfortable forty eight hours at the airport (or at a nearby hotel at their own cost). They have just spent a huge amount of money only to fail again. Naturally they are upset when they learn that EasyJet are not going to do anything to help them. They try arguing and rationalising with Leanne, but get nowhere.

01 Leanne:	((leaning over the counter, addressing everybody in general)) we're not gonna accept any more late passengers for the paris flight
02 John:	we just came by taxi (.) they gave us the ticket to get on this flight we used a taxi all the way from up north I mean come on man there's gotta be something
03 Sapadinos:	you know the plane's still here (XX)
04 John:	!if there was a major drop or something there wouldn't be a problem (.) you always late!
05 Leanne:	please lower your voice
06 John:	we're late
07 Leanne:	lower your voice
08 Man:	(we are just in time here you can be trusted)
09 Sapadinos:	((with supplicating hand gestures)) yeah the flight is still here the flight is still here it's leaving at seven twenty
10 Leanne:	as soon as you can you shall be asked (XXX)
11 Man:	it's still here
12 Sapadinos:	it's leaving at seven twenty here (.) thirty minutes, ((leaning on the desk, leaning in towards Joanne))

13 John: come on
14 Leanne: yeah
15 Sapadinos: well DO SOMETHING ((slapping the desk and then pushing some papers off it towards Leanne in a very aggressive manner))
16 Leanne: just calm down
17 Ejman: go away now no no no come back in a minute you definitely have to go away now
((They are led away from the counter by John))
18 John: ((John is coming back to the counter, trying to be conciliatory, with supplicating hand gestures)) seriously come on (.) we're- I know how airlines work !five minutes is not a big deal five minutes is not- on major airp- on major flights!
19 Leanne: sorry just lower your voice
[lower your voice]
20 John: [!you can't give us an extra minute!] yeah ((waving her off, lowering his voice)) I'm trying I'm trying
21 Leanne: in order to let everybody on that aircraft has to be refuelled and they won't do that [they accept no one]
22 John: [that's a joke] that's a joke airlines do not work like that major flights always wait for people you're trying to tell me *you* wouldn't wait for people for five minutes?
23 Leanne: [no we wouldn't]
24 John: [no. what is it based on] what is it based on
25 Leanne: check-in closes (XXX)
26 Man: [we are here]
27 John: check-in has to close at a specific time ((slapping the desk)) what's five minutes
28 Leanne: yeah
29 John: what's so like you have to close at that time (.) unless [there's gonna be-]
30 Leanne: [we have to close some time] we have to close some time
31 John: ((raising his voice and becoming very agitated again)) !yeah is that the closing time people trying to get home home is that what it is people's trying to get *home*!
32 Leanne: why don't you calm down
33 John: !cause you're not giving me any reason here!

34	Leanne:	I have given you a reason
35	John:	((shouting even louder)) !what's this supposed to be about a closing *time*? ((slapping the desk in rhythm with his words)) there is *no such thing as a closing time*!
36	Leanne:	yes there is
37	John:	((still shouting)) !there is on a competition between pilots or something (.) who's gonna make it on time?!
38	Leanne:	(why don't you calm down)
39	John:	!because you're not giving me any *reason*!
40	Leanne:	((raising her voice too)) I'm telling you [we have to close on time]
41	John:	that's ridiculous
42	Leanne:	-it closes on time forty minutes before for every single flight
43	John:	no but that's approxi*maticly* [forty minutes]
44	Leanne:	[no] check-in closes
45	John:	it can be a little less here a little more-
46	Leanne:	*-hello*:! check-in [closes]
47	John:	![oh come on] I used to work on airlines I know sometimes- most of the time you close *after* supposedly closing time.!
48	Leanne:	no
49	John:	it depends on who's the agent right here
50	Leanne:	no no
51	John:	!I'll give them one more minute I'll give them ten extra minutes ((pointing at his wristwatch)) maybe the one that was there today ((pointing at another desk)) decided we should get home!
52	Leanne:	!excuse me excuse me ((reaching over the desk, past John, towards one of her colleagues and then points at John and Sapadinos)) could you take this guy and this guy away from the desk cause I'm not listening to their shouting any more!
53	John:	((walking away)) !I'm done I'm *through*!
54	Leanne:	so you are.
55	John:	((a little while later, after having come back to Leanne's desk, in a very soft voice)) you- you off?
56	Leanne:	((head down, moving around behind the desk initially not looking him in the face)) sorry?
57	John:	you getting off
58	Leanne:	am I getting off?
59	John:	yeah

60 Leanne: no I don't really wanna deal with you
61 John: ((looking suprised)) why don't you wanna deal with me?
62 Leanne: because I don't like the way you've spoken to me
63 John: I haven't spoken to you in a specific way
64 Leanne: (you were rude to me)
65 John: in a rude way did I say anything to you did I say any bad word to you (.) I don't recall that (..) I was maybe being a little agress- agressive on the tone of my voice or whatever but it was not towards *you*
66 Leanne: right.
67 John: so why would you take it personal if that's your job you should be able to adapt to any situation and you are not- are you planning on working in any agent- many air- major airlines or whatever once
68 Leanne: (XXX)
69 John: cause this is what you're gonna have to deal with
70 Leanne: (XXX)
71 John: ((getting agitated, waving his right hand)) I'm sorry but she has to deal with me I wanna deal with you
72 Leanne: I don't wanna deal with you [that's my choice]
73 John: [you wanna be] professional you wanna be
74 Leanne: I am being professional
75 John: I'm giving you a chance here to adapt yourself
76 Leanne: no (XXX)
77 John: ((raising his voice, leaning into Leanne's space, waving his right hand around)) I'm just a passenger I don't know you personally I've got nothing against you and you should not have anything against me
78 Leanne: [ok] (carry on) ((walking away))
79 John: [this is just] see keep on being (XXX) you got it
80 Leanne: ((addressing the camera afterwards)) ((she seems quite rattled and dejected)) obviously it's sad that all those people missed (..) christmas they're not gonna have christmas in Paris it was for most of them (..) it doesn't make our christmas day nice and nobody likes being here on Christmas Eve

81 John: ((addressing the camera afterwards)) they just put us on the next flight (.) on the 26th (.) which is- which leaves us here for like two days (.) basically with nothing open everything is closed cause it's Christmas so (.) that's about it man.

The whole episode is marked by shouting matches and flaring tempers, with communication completely shutting down no less then three times (at turns 17, 54 and 79). After first trying to convince Leanne as a group (turns 1-17), later in the exchange the conversation happens almost exclusively between John and Leanne.

We as the spectators enter the interaction when Leanne informs all the bystanders that check-in for the Paris flight is closed and no more passengers are accepted for it (turn 1). Apparently our group of travellers had just arrived and therefore were only seconds late. John tries to explain to Leanne that other EasyJet employees had booked them onto this flight and that they had to take a taxi to get here (turn 2). He implies that there has to be something she can do for them. This notion is taken up by his fellow travellers Sapadinos and another man, whose name we do not learn. They both argue that the plane has not left yet and that there is still plenty of time for them to get on it. All of them are very upset, because there is so much at stake and because they have invested so much in this. This shows mainly in them raising their voices considerably, but is also manifest in their facial expressions and their body language. On the whole, they come across as menacing and aggressive. Especially the Greek man shouts with a lot of intensity and his tone of voice, his facial expression, and use of aggressive movements (he angrily sweeps some papers from Leanne's desk) must appear quite aggressive. All these combine into a very menacing attitude and cause a male colleague of Leanne's to tell him to go away from the desk for the time being (turn 17).

John helps leading him away and then comes back to the desk in an attempt to make things right. He adopts a conciliatory tone of voice and his hand gestures (hands open, palms upward) suggest friendliness and mutual understanding. Nonetheless, he is as agitated as his fellow travellers and does not succeed in keeping his voice down for long. There is a lot at stake here, and his first approach is to rationalise the situation. He refers back to his knowledge about how airlines operate (although this is probably mostly based on experiences he had in the USA)

and claims that waiting for five minutes usually is no big deal (turn 18). He mentions major airlines, but what he does not understand in this context is that EasyJet is NOT a major airline and operates completely differently. Whereas customers might be right in their assumption that a major airline would probably still allow them on the flight, this is not the case with EasyJet where the company policy is very rigid in this respect.

Leanne does not react to his argument because he is practically shouting and she just asks him to lower his voice (turn 19). When that request sinks in with John he complies and tells her that he is trying to do that. Thereby having shown his willingness to be cooperative, Leanne finally replies to what he said before and explains to him that they cannot let them on board because that would mean that they would also need to refuel the aircraft, which would cause even further delays. Apparently (and she omits to explain this to John), the amount of fuel in an aircraft depends on the weight the plane is carrying. Extra passengers apparently increase the weight and therefore also the amount of fuel necessary to reach the destination. Giving him this (incomplete) explanation, Leanne does nothing to convince John that she really cannot do anything for him and the other passengers. He repeatedly says that she is not explaining to him why they cannot be allowed on the plane (turns 33 and 39: "you are not giving me any reason). This is the crux of the conflict between the two and the reason why they are both getting increasingly angry with the other. From John's perspective, Leanne is fopping him off with some phoney explanation, which, as far as he can see, has no relation to reality. She comes across as unwilling to help, especially under the aggravated circumstances of it being Christmas Eve and there being no alternative flights for a full two days. From Leanne's perspective, the customer is overly aggressive and does not listen to her (from her point of view) perfectly reasonable and adequate explanations. He also cannot know that she is bound to act within EasyJet's company policy and has no power to change the circumstances at all.

The ensuing turns are just a repetition of their initial arguments, both repeating over and over what they have already said and thereby initiating a spiral of increasing mutual anger and finally leading to Leanne refusing to continue their conversation. After a while (and after it has been firmly established that there is no hope for them to catch this plane), John returns to Leanne's desk. He seems a completely different person, his anger has clearly abated and his voice is much

softer than before. When he approaches the desk, Leanne does not look at him and does not acknowledge his presence, which prompts him to ask her whether she is off (duty) (turn 55). Apparently Leanne does not understand this, which is indicated by her saying "sorry" with a rising intonation (turn 56). This prompts John to repeat his question more clearly (turn 57). Still, Leanne does not seem to understand him, as she repeats his question verbatim (turn 58).

What is really going on here is that she does not want to talk to John anymore, which she clearly tells him in her following turn (60) where she informs him that she is still on duty, but does not want to deal with John. This really surprises him and he asks her for her reason (turn 61). She gives him the reason and it transpires that she is (still) angry and hurt about the way he addressed her in their earlier conversation (turn 62: "because I don't like the way you've spoken to me"; turn 64: "you were rude to me"). John reacts very surprised and claims that he was not rude to Leanne (turn 63) and he asks her whether he said "any bad word" (turn 65) to her. In the same turn he concedes that he "was maybe being a little agress- agressive on the tone of my voice" (turn 63), but he claims that that was not directed at Leanne personally.

Clearly, these two people have a completely different assessment of what went on between them. Leanne was obviously strongly offended by the way John talked to her. His shouting was perceived by her as a personal attack, and now she is unwilling to continue their conversation. He does not judge his way of speaking as rude because he did not use any "bad words" and did not attack Leanne personally. He is aware that he might have come across as aggressive because he raised his voice so much, but he fails to grasp that Leanne might have been scared and angered by this. This attitude of John's is explained in the ensuing turns, where he points out to Leanne, incidentally in a more and more aggressive way, again, that he thinks it is her business to deal with aggressive customers (turns 67: "so why would you take it personal if that's your job you should be able to adapt to any situation and you are not"; and turn 69: "cause this is what you're gonna have to deal with"). In the following John even implicitly criticises her as being unprofessional (turn 73) and reproaches her for not wanting to deal with him any more (turn 77: "I'm just a passenger I don't know you personally I've got nothing against you and you should not have anything against me"). In this turn he gets fairly agitated again, raising his voice and gesturing. His criticism of Leanne's behaviour, together with his raised

voice and aggressive body language cause Leanne to break off communications with him again, this time by walking away herself.

In order to explain what went on between these two people, we have to remember two things: first of all it is important that, although they are both native speakers of English, they come from different cultures, where different ideas about interpersonal norms and appropriateness might prevail. John is a black man, Leanne is a white woman; he is from the United States, she is from Great Britain. It is difficult to gauge exactly how all these factors come into play here, but it is certainly true that John's attitude is different from what we would expect from someone from Britain. Customer expectations seem to be higher in the USA, and criticism seems to be a lot more outspoken there. What makes this particular exchange especially interesting is the outspokenness with which John explains his attitude. He is not afraid to clear the air, and does not understand why Leanne does not reciprocate that attitude. From his perspective, he was entitled to his angry behaviour for two reasons: for being a customer and because he was wronged. We also have to bear in mind the different roles these interactants have in this conversation and how these influence their respective expectations and goals. John is firmly rooted in his beliefs about relationships between customers and service providers, whereas Leanne is influenced by EasyJet company policy. Both lack the willingness and the intuition to see the other's point of view, and this makes communication between them impossible. Instead of analysing the situation in terms of cooperativeness, they conceive each other's behaviour as offensive and uncooperative, assuming the worst of each other and ultimately parting in anger.

8.5. Summary

The analysis of three examples from my corpus has shown how different roles, goals and expectations can result in anger, and how this anger is assessed as uncooperative, thereby compromising any chance of successful problem-solving. Anger in these contexts can be induced for a large number of reasons, either on a transactional level, in relationship to the problem that needs solving, or on an interpersonal level, based on the way the participants interact. Either way, it is often rooted in the fact that interlocutors misjudge the situation and the other's expectations. For customers, it is frustrating to be confronted with rules and

regulations that seem pointless to them and are not explained adequately by the company representatives. This, paired with customer perceptions of consumer power and customer rights, leads to angry reactions. Furthermore, customers tend to be frustrated when their transactional goals are thwarted, especially when what prompted them to enter the conflict talk in the first place was a sure expectation of reaching those goals.

Anger can be communicated in the locution, but more often is apparent in extralinguistic features such as intonation, prosody, and body language. These make its interpretation much harder for the interlocutors, as processing these factors happen subliminally to a large extent. Consequently, a person's anger is often simply interpreted as rudeness and lack of concern for the other's face wants. This is understandable, as rudeness is indeed often rooted in an angry emotional state, and expressed very similarly. Clearly, speakers tend to be too egocentric to interpret other-motivation and the other's emotional state correctly when participating in (aggravated) conflict discourse.

Chapter 9: Conclusion and Outlook

This study's aim has been to take a close look at the inner mechanisms at work in complaints in conflictual service encounters, combining insights from Cognitive Pragmatics and Interactional Sociolinguistics. This chapter will review the main insights gained from my research (sections 9.1 to 9.5), and discuss avenues for future research, which might focus on complaints and conflictual service encounters from a cross-cultural perspective (section 9.6).

9.1. Complaints in Conflictual Service Encounters

A qualitative analysis of examples of conflictual service encounter discourse from three data sources, and a combination of data elicitation methods, has yielded a very complete impression of the mechanisms of conflict talk in service encounters. With regard to my first research question Most of all I have been able to show that complaints are one of many discursive strategies employed by interlocutors in conflict episodes, often initiating the discourse or embedded in other turns. For this reason, as complaints in service encounters rarely stand alone, but stretch over a number of turns and are surrounded by other speech events that are part of a conflict episode, stretching from problem-statement to solution, a discursive approach to the analysis of complaints seemed called for.

In an attempt to find a workable definition of service encounter complaints, I have described the main components of complaint discourse in conflictual service encounters and have suggested the following brief definition, which captures the most important aspects of the concept:

> *Complaints in service encounters are initiators or sub-strategies of problem-solving interactions in which customers and company representatives negotiate a conflict.*

The following research questions have been asked in order to gain an understanding of the structure and mechanisms of conflict management and complaining in service encounters:

1. What are the mechanisms of conflict management in service encounters?
2. What do typical complaint sequences in service encounters look like?

3. On which conceptual level and for what reason does a conflictual speech event take a particular direction (towards solution or aggravation of conflict)?

With regard to the first two research questions, a close sequential analysis of complaint and conflict sequences has shown that, although there is indeed no stable lexical form in which complaints appear, there are prototypical complaint strategies, which recur in service encounter frames, and are recognisable as complaints for the interlocutors. These strategies include first of all the *expression of negative emotions*, but also the use of strategies such as *blaming*, and *demanding to speak to a manager*, which could be regarded as core complaint strategies. Nonetheless, the fact remains that it is difficult to distinguish complaints from other strategies within conflict discourse.

With regard to the third research question, it has transpired that the adaptation of House's (2003) discourse and production model (compare chapter 5.2) provides a useful conceptual template for the analysis of conflict management and complaints in service encounters. For any individual interaction analysed, it has served as a guideline to the elements of the discourse, and has made it possible to visualise on which level participant expectations and interpretations were at variance.

9.2. (Im)Politeness

In conflictual service encounters, people's expectations with regard to politeness norms and appropriate behaviour seem to be at variance with the influence the institutional context, as well as the participants' emotional involvement have on the interaction. At the outset, I have asked the following research questions with regard to (im)politeness considerations in conflictual service encounters:

1. What factors influence the evaluation of utterances as polite or impolite?
2. Is there a difference between norms and expectations for speech behaviour in conflictual service encounters, and people's actual behaviour?
3. In what ways are (im)politeness strategies used strategically in conflict management and complaining in service encounters?

With respect to the first two research questions, insights from the role plays and from participants' comments have shown that interlocutors are highly aware of the

social and relational aspect of conflictual service encounters. In the role plays this translated into a need to heighten the relational workload, and to use preventative face saving measures to a large degree. This observation is completely in line with traditional theories of politeness, which classify conflict talk and complaints as being inherently face threatening, and consequently necessitating a high amount of face work mainly in order to keep the interpersonal relationship stable.

Evidence from the naturally occurring data contradicted these evaluations and predictions, however. Face-saving measures could be observed here to a much lower degree, with the interpersonal relationship of no or little concern for the participants, who seemed to be engrossed in pursuing their transactional goals. This disregard for the other's face does not, however, imply that (im)politeness considerations are absent from conflictual service encounter discourse. Actual speaker behaviour in this context seems to contradict any kind of politeness theory so far considered. Often the main tenet of theories of politeness includes a belief that the speaker (more or less consciously) uses particular strategies geared at conveying concern for the hearer's face wants, which can be summed up as a focus on the *production* of relational work. From what I observed in my data, interlocutors tend to be fairly self-absorbed and use other-oriented face work mostly strategically, if at all. A real concern with (im)politeness issues becomes apparent only in the *perception* of impoliteness and rudeness. Or, to put it more simply – speakers tend to regard their own behaviour as perfectly adequate or appropriate, whereas they would judge similar behaviour in others as rude. Customers and company representatives alike seem to be imprisoned in patterns of expectation and behaviour prescribed by their respective roles. Bringing expectations to conflictual service encounters which are at variance, they fail to interpret the other's motivations correctly, thus leading to many misunderstandings and misinterpretations of behaviour. In many instances, impoliteness in these encounters is not intended, but interpreted as impolite by the hearer, mainly on the basis of very narrow, self-centred assumptions.

As far as my third research question in the realm of (im)politeness considerations is concerned, it is interesting to note that people appear to be highly aware of the existence of politeness and that, in conflictual service encounter interactions, they can be observed to use, intentionally and unintentionally, both politeness and rudeness as tools for attaining transactional as well as interactional

goals. This is certainly an area that deserves more attention in the future, as in my corpus it was often difficult to ascertain at what point language users were using rudeness tactically, being fully aware of what they were doing, and when they were being rude unintentionally, based on their emotional setup at that given moment.

9.3. Power

Asymmetrical power relationships dominate service encounter discourse. For this reason, I found it important to investigate the following two questions that revolve round the power relationships between interlocutors in conflictual service encounters:

1. How does power become apparent in confrontation episodes in service encounters?
2. What influence does the institutional context have on the perception and interplay of power relationships in service encounters?

Again, we can observe that a discrepancy between participant expectations tends to aggravate the conflict. With the institutional context clearly assigning to the company representative more power than to the customer, this is different in the perception of most customers, who expect to receive the service (or goods) they paid for and believe that in the case of a problem they are entitled to voice their discontent, be treated with respect and understanding, and have the problem solved to their satisfaction or otherwise receive some compensation. While many companies might agree with this view, sadly, in reality, customers often find their complaints dealt with in a far less satisfactory manner, as is also often the case in the scenarios in my corpus. In such instances, when companies are unwilling or unable to solve the problem in the customer's favour, the conflict discourse ends without solution or with a solution which is highly negative for the customer.

In order to avoid such an outcome, customers employ various discourse strategies designed to swing the power balance in their favour and ultimately to persuade and induce the company representative to concede to the customer's wishes after all. Instruments at the customer's disposal are for instance the use of confrontational behaviour, including rudeness, threats, raising one's voice, which are all highly confrontational and in themselves just as likely to aggravate the conflict instead of solving it. Conversely, customers might just as well opt for non-

confrontational behaviour designed to evoke the company representative's empathy and understanding. From the analysis of my data, it remains fairly inconclusive which of the two strategic options is likely to be more successful, as these kinds of negotiations are firmly rooted in the situational context.

9.4. Emotion

(Negative) Emotions are of central importance when we try to gain insight into the mechanisms at work in conflictual service encounter discourse. They are present from the beginning in this context, due to the inherent problem and the possible repercussions it might have for the customer, and can get aggravated during the conflict episode. Anger and frustration are the most common emotions in conflictual service encounters, and they are often verbalised, but mostly translate into non-verbal signals which are often neglected in other research on conflict and complaints. In the first chapter, I have posited the following research questions with regard to emotions in conflictual service encounter interactions:

1. What is the role of (negative) emotions in conflictual service encounters?
2. How are (negative) emotions expressed, and what effect does this have on the interlocutors and the course of the interaction?

Previous research on complaints has tended to take the impact of emotions into account, but only for the complainer, without assessing the complainee. Naturally, conflict discourse, as any other kind of communication, involves more than one person, and these exchanges are by their vary nature highly emotionally charged for all participants, although the complainer is (at least initially) certainly much more emotionally charged than the complainee. The display of strong negative emotions, however, does not go unmarked and usually affects the person it is addressed to. For company representatives the challenge consists of interpreting negative emotions in customers for what they are, and not, as it often happens, as confrontational strategies designed to attack the service provider's face. With regard to the first research question, is has been shown that (negative) emotions take a central role in conflictual service encounters, and are multi-faceted, as they can be caused by the problem at hand, but can also occur in the course of the interaction; they can occur on an interpersonal level, because of (im)politeness

considerations and opposing expectations of the outcome of the interaction (thwarted goals), or on the level of interactional style (perceived impoliteness).

When considering the second research question, especially in the context of emotions, the choice of data elicitation methods has proved advantageous, as the multimodal character of most of the corpus allowed for an analysis that went beyond the utterance level. This has facilitated an analysis of expressions of emotions that went beyond the verbal level (body language, gestures, etc.). Consequently, it has transpired that emotions are often expressed involuntarily, in a raised voice, in rapid movements or exaggerated gestures. Most interestingly, interlocutors are at best only dimly aware of what such expressions of negative emotions entail. They usually have no insights into why utterances, perceived by them as acceptable, are interpreted as impolite by their interlocutors, when delivered in a raised voice or accompanied by threatening body language. This discrepancy clearly shows the connection between the expression of emotions and (im)politeness considerations. Much more research in this area is needed, however, in order to find out more conclusively how aware or unaware speakers are of their emotional state and of how they express it, as well as on the interpretation process in the hearer's mind.

9.5. Data Elicitaton Methods

In this dissertation I have opted for a mixed-method approach, combining data from three different sources. Only fairly recently have linguists begun to tap into a relatively new (and not undisputed) source for spontaneous discourse, as found in the new TV format of docusoaps. Especially for research into conflict discourse, this seems to be an excellent way of collecting fairly large amounts of comparable data, with the added advantage of multimodality allowing the researcher to include visually observable extralinguistic features in the analysis. I have asked the following research questions:

1. What are the differences and similarities of complaint behaviour observed in data from the three different corpora (TV data, telephone conversations, role plays)?
2. How similar are the elicited data to naturally occurring discourse?

3. What are the advantages and shortcomings of data from fly-on- the-wall documentaries?

My analysis was to a large extent based on data from the docusoaps 'Airline' and (to a much lesser extent) 'Airport', from which I have chosen suitable conflict episodes for analysis. The second set of data was derived from ethnographic research at the train company 'Eurostar' and consisted of telephone recordings of customer complaints. Although it seems at first glance a bit unorthodox to combine face-to-face interactions and telephone conversations in one corpus and one research approach, the situational contexts and problems in the two data sets were very similar, with the data complementing each other in the sense that the companies the complaints were addressed to had different approaches to customer care.

On the basis of real-life scenarios from these two data sets, I conducted role plays in order to be able to test speaker's expectations on a more conceptual level. At the same time I wanted to validate the use of role plays as a data elicitation method in research on natural speech production. It turns out that, first of all, the role play scenarios need to be as close to actual occurrences in real-life as possible, in order for participants to imagine what they would do in such situations. Almost as important are clear instructions which enable participants to act in alignment with their assigned roles, while leaving them the freedom to choose from a repertoire of discourse strategies stored in their own minds.

With regard to the second research question, I have found that role play behaviour is indeed different from naturally occurring discourse in many respects, mainly because of the absence of actual emotional involvement. Role plays prove invaluable, however, for gaining insight into people's expectations about specific discourse frames, and they produce prototypical speech behaviour. On the whole, the role plays have been especially useful for the evaluation of (im)politeness considerations, as there appears to be a clear discrepancy between people's expectations of politeness norms in conflictual service encounters, and the actual behaviour observed. These insights ultimately may help in redefining our views of traditional politeness theories and adapting them accordingly.

For my third research question I can unreservedly say that docusoaps are an invaluable new resource for linguists who wish to gain insights into actual speech behaviour, especially in the realm of conflict discourse, where naturally occurring

data are notoriously hard to obtain. Especially the multi-modal character of TV data is invaluable for examining extralinguistic factors, such as the expression of emotions, which in turn clearly have a big influence on perceptions of (im)politeness. A slight drawback of docusoaps lies in the fact that the material has usually been edited; also conversations are sometimes cut out or inaudible because of explanatory voice-overs. The way forward for researchers, therefore, seems to be to contact the producers of docusoaps in order to obtain the raw, unedited material used.

9.6. Implications for Future Research

The above-mentioned mixed-method approach has been very useful in this project, but naturally it can be applied to other studies not focussed on conflict talk. Especially docusoaps include an array of topics and situational contexts and consequently can be a useful source for any kind of speech event. Complementing naturally-occurring discourse with role play data based on situations found from actual real-life situations has made the two comparable and has added valuable information which goes further than a mere analysis of naturally occurring data. Therefore, this is an approach which can be recommended, especially for research on (im)politeness.

Generally speaking, this study has raised a few questions with regard to face work and (im)politeness which should be pursued further. Especially the observation that language user's perceptions of relational work seems to correspond to traditional politeness theories, whereas actual speech behaviour in conflictual service encounters often shows exactly the opposite behaviour and concerns, provides food for thought. On the one hand this is testament to the fact that linguists in their theory building rely to a large extent on their intuitions as language users, but tend to neglect testing their theories as to their relationship with actual speech behaviour. On the other hand this finding particularly emphasises the need to explore in more detail the relationship between emotion and (im)politeness considerations.

The focus of my interest in this dissertation has been on complaints in conflictual service encounters in native English. The corpus used here is only one part of a larger database which includes similar interactions with native speakers of

a variety of other languages who communicate in English. Future research into the cross-cultural aspects of conflictual service encounters are therefore possible, especially with regard to the question whether, and to what extent, (im)politeness considerations are influenced by transfer from the speakers' different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This line of research obviously harbours great potential for an interdisciplinary approach to research into service encounters, both from the perspectives of marketing and linguistics research. It should be clear by now that the inner mechanisms of conflictual service encounters cannot be understood by merely discussing the use of discursive strategies, without taking the production and interpretation process into account. Prescriptive manuals for adequate responses to customer complaints generally do not surpass the level of giving advice for the use of certain strategies in response to particular customer behaviours (for example: "thank the customer for his complaint"). What these manuals usually do not include are hints (such as "Do not thank the customer for his complaint in an ironic tone of voice", or, on a more serious note: "Don't interpret the customer's anger and tone at voice as directed at you personally"). Naturally, such a manual cannot exist, for one thing because it would be too detailed and could never encompass or predict all salient aspects relevant for adequate responses to customer complaints, but more importantly it does not exist because authors of such manuals tend not to know enough about these aspects of complaint events. The undercurrents and interpretations which were uncovered in this dissertation, through paying attention to the use of linguistic and extralinguistc features in actual real-life discourse, regrettably remain largely unexplored.

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