



Between tradition and modernity: The bargaining genre in women's clothing stores in Jordan

Muhammad A. Badarneh^{*}, Kawakib Al-Momani, Fathi Migdadi

*Department of English Language and Linguistics, Jordan University of Science and Technology,
P.O. Box 3030, Irbid 22110, Jordan*

Received 17 October 2015; received in revised form 12 June 2016; accepted 13 June 2016
Available online 28 June 2016

Abstract

This article investigates bargaining exchanges between salesmen and female customers in modern urban women's clothing stores in northern Jordan. Thirty-five audio-recorded interactions of bargaining exchanges were analyzed, informed by a theoretical view of genre as culturally conventionalized discursive ways of achieving communicative ends within a community. In addition to identifying their generic structure, the analysis reveals that these encounters are discursively characterized by three features: 'stylized' or 'mock' conflict talk, sociability talk, and flirtation talk. The latter discursive aspect suggests how this traditional genre has evolved in a modern setting, which locates this genre somewhere between tradition and modernity and shows how members of a community play an active role in shaping, interpreting, and developing a genre over time. The bargaining encounters involve participants' particular manipulations of interactional resources: the salesmen used extensive bargaining strategies to gain bargaining power and finalize the sales transaction, such as displaying exaggerated hospitality and generosity and praising the goods' quality, while women customers used counter-strategies such as justifying why they deserve a lowered price and downplaying or criticizing the design or quality of the goods. The study relates these interactions to increased female agency and participation in public discourse in Jordanian society.

© 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Bargaining; Service encounters; Genre; Gender; Mock conflict talk; Flirtation

1. Introduction

Service encounters have been a major area of investigation in discourse studies, as attested by the two most recent volumes on the subject (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya, 2015 and studies therein). This interest mainly stems from the ubiquity of service encounters in social interaction and the transactional and relational vendor–customer talk these encounters involve, which is essential for accomplishing the goals of both parties. The present study explores a particular discursive aspect of service encounters, namely, marketplace bargaining, which is a traditional social practice that forms "one characteristic of market service encounters in which the buyer begins the process of reducing the price of the product after it has been presented" (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015:143). Specifically, this article investigates bargaining exchanges between salesmen and female customers in modern urban women's clothing stores in two major cities in northern Jordan. Drawing from a dataset of naturally occurring audio-recorded encounters among native speakers of Jordanian Arabic, four cross-gender encounters resulting in customer purchase are presented in detail. The analysis provides English translation and notes the role and connotations of Arabic formulaic expressions and the sociocultural values communicated by them in Jordanian bargaining encounters. We focus on the discursive,

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mbadam@just.edu.jo (M.A. Badarneh), kmomani@just.edu.jo (K. Al-Momani), fmgdadi@just.edu.jo (F. Migdadi).

sociocultural aspects of these encounters, viewing bargaining as a genre (Bakhtin, 1986; Orr, 2007) and as a social practice that constitutes a site of multiplicity and “hybridity” (Bakhtin, 1981) of conversational exchange. Importantly, on a broader sociocultural level, the study also demonstrates the increasingly robust discursive agency of females in these public settings and presents these encounters as illustrative of ongoing social transformation in Jordanian society.

The broader genre of service encounters to which the bargaining exchanges examined here belong is defined by Merritt (1976b:321) as “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.” Service encounters are typically goal-oriented interactions that display a routine structure of fairly regular and socially shared patterns (Lamoureux, 1988; Ventola, 1987, 2005). Generally speaking, service encounters involve strangers, that is, customers seeking satisfaction of needs and servers managing their obligations to provide assistance (Lamoureux, 1988:93). The bargaining exchanges under study are embedded in the typical structural elements of service encounters, which consist of “greetings, allocation of server attention, bids for service, service, resolutions of the service, payment and change-making, the handing-over of goods, closings, and good-byes” (Lamoureux, 1988:93). As Lamoureux observes, in some service encounters, these elements are displayed in a linear way, while other service encounters skip, expand, or repeat these elements (1988:93), which is mainly because service encounters is “a genre with unique discourse-forming strategies and dynamic variation possibilities” (Félix-Brasdefer, 2015:25).

2. Defining marketplace bargaining

Marketplace bargaining is a routinized and ritualized activity in shopping contexts which do not involve fixed-price conditions and thus allow buyers to bargain for a better deal with the vendor. Bargaining discourse is relatively informal, the most colloquial and most dialogic of marketplace genres, and demonstrates the agonistic aspect of marketplace exchange (Kapchan, 1996). Within the highly interactive setting of bargaining, social actors (i.e. vendors and customers) bring judgments and values to bear in determining what the merchandise is worth to them (Hermann, 2004). Furthermore, as French (2001) explains, marketplace bargaining is a process that “follows tacit rules and implicit regulations established by convention” and often involves a “series of paired offers and rejections” (2001:161, 164). It is goal-oriented and involves making choices about how to build a relationship with the other party that might result in a successful sale, so the agreed price will ultimately depend on given contexts, circumstances and social actors in each encounter. Bargaining is a means of agreeing, or failing to reach agreement, on price between vendor and customer, but at the same time it is interactionally a complex linguistic activity, by which vendor and customer negotiate a delicate socio-economic relationship (Wagner, 2015:656). Therefore, this social practice can be seen as an inherently persuasive form of discourse situated within the general study of dialogic interaction and persuasive communication across different genres and social practices (Halmari and Virtanen, 2005).

Marketplace bargaining as a traditional practice enacts particular socio-cultural norms and expectations. Not bargaining aggressively is considered an act of naivety (Hendon et al., 1996). In traditional Arab culture, as certainly in other such cultures, bargaining and the give-and-take it involves are associated with the socio-cultural values of being skillful, experienced, and resourceful (Kapchan, 1996). In addition to its intrinsic and inherent dickering and arguing, marketplace bargaining is a highly structured behavioral system that is marked with such features as verbal threats, counter-threats, and disclaimers of interest (Hendon et al., 1996:121). Accordingly, bargaining interactions, like those examined in this study, can potentially involve an aspect of conflict talk (Grimshaw, 1990) whose interactional architecture may involve varying degrees of disagreement, argument, or dispute, but where these aggressive exchanges employ formulaic routines and figurative speech that does not threaten good relations, they might be seen as “mock conflict talk.”

Thus, while explicit bargaining can be a potentially challenging activity between the vendor and the customer, it is not considered as a risk for interaction (Traverso, 2001), but rather as a legitimate means of serving the interests of both the vendor and customer. Bargaining exchanges can in fact be both “transactional” and “interactional” since customers seek to obtain the merchandise at the best possible price and, at the same time, seek to establish and maintain positive social relations with the vendor (Arent, 2000). Seeking to establish and maintain positive social relations between customer and vendor is typical of service encounters in general, an aspect which Merritt (1976a), following Goffman, refers to as “maintaining ritual equilibrium.”

3. The present study

In the literature on marketplace bargaining, this genre has been approached from a variety of perspectives, such as social and cultural behavior (Khuri, 1968; Sherry, 1990; Chakrani, 2007), structure (Mitchell, 1975), cross-cultural communication (Arent, 1998, 2000; Pang et al., 2015), gender (Kapchan, 1996; Kharraki, 2001; Kuntjara, 2005), formal characteristics and generic patterning (Orr, 2007), ethnicity and identity (Seligmann, 1993; French, 2001), bargaining styles

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7297857>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7297857>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)