CONVERSATION OR INTERROGATION?
THE INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS
OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLISH CALL CENTERS[*]

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of globalization, i.e., "a set of far-reaching, transnational, economic, social and cultural changes" (Cameron 2000a: 323), profoundly influences the patterns of language choice and use. One workplace that seems to be particularly influenced by the new, global demands regarding the communication skills of its employees is the call center. It truly embodies the new, global emphasis on the significance of the conscious application of the desirable model of communication regarding service encounters. A relatively new institution, the call center constitutes an interesting example of the so-called institutional context. This 'institutionality' would imply then that the language interactions going on there, should be analyzed against a set of institutional discourse features that underline the asymmetry of interaction between participants. Yet, as Cameron (2000a) suggests, the linguistic performance of call center operators – in accordance with the demands of the new work order – should abandon the rigid guidelines of institutional talk and, rather, ought to be linked to ways of speaking that are symbolically coded as feminine, projecting affection, friendliness, intimacy, etc. This would achieve friendlier, more symmetrical interaction with customers, thus gaining their trust and loyalty. In this paper I explore how call center operators try, though they sometimes fail, to create interactional symmetry in their professional exchanges with customers. In doing so they strive to 'consciously' apply the features of the prescribed style, underlining intimacy and affection, and attempting to approximate an ordinary conversation. Yet this preferred style occasionally foregrounds the institutional features of discourse applied not only by the call center operators but – particularly in the Polish context – also by the customers themselves. The creeping in of this voice of institution, although occasional, lays bare an interactional asymmetry between the operators and customers which contemporary global communication ideology rejects.

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1. Introduction: the call center and customer care ideology

Globalization has a significant impact on the widely defined patterns of language choice and use. Sergio Zyman, acclaimed by *Time* magazine as one of the most influential marketing strategist, emphasizes, in the interview for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (29 November 2001), that nowadays companies should focus a foremost on building a friendly interaction with their customers. He further claims that 'communication with the customer' must become the number one task for all these companies. Zyman concludes that customers ideally should close their transactions not only with the satisfaction of settling business but mainly with a feeling of provided security/safety. Zyman's suggestions regarding the new/global approach to a customer can be best summarized as customer care ideology. A customer, within this approach, is no longer only *served* but also *cared for*. The new customer care framework aims at managing the customer's whole experience (Czerniawska 1998), and thus Zymans's comment on providing the customer with a sense of safety is a very apt one. The necessity of the application of the care philosophy by companies can also be accounted for by reference to Giddens' (1999) concept of the 'runaway world'. What this contemporary world has to offer is a sense of uncertainty, unpredictability and risk. Consequently, winning the customer over in this highly competitive 'runaway world' entails not only providing him/her with top quality products but also, if not mainly, rewarding them with an emotionally-oriented service soothing the inescapable hardships of globalization.

The establishment that seems to be particularly influenced by the ideology of customer care is the call center (henceforth CC). Although CCs are relatively new (the majority of them have existed for less than ten years, cf. Cameron 2000a), Lyne (1998) states that the explosion of CCs can be observed in Europe due to 'teleculture' - an increased willingness to do business by phone. Cameron (2000b: 93) talks about more than 5000 CCs in Britain, while Lyne (1998) predicted 18,000 CCs in Europe by 2002. It is a fast-growing market since more and more companies want to make CC services available to their customers as a very significant aspect of customer care. In short, CC is an institution in which people (CC operators) are employed to either make or take telephone calls. The aspect of either making or taking a telephone call is reflected in the division into 'inbound', where the customer makes the call, and 'outbound', where the company representatives call the potential customers in the hope of selling a particular product.

2. Aims and data

The interactions taking place at the CCs can be analyzed in terms of a focus on global communicative patterns (cf. Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak and Pawelczyk 2004) or as gendered communication (cf. Cameron 2000a). The focus of this paper is on the CC as a communicative ground where the rigid procedures inscribed in the institutional interactions (cf. transactional function of talk) tend to be occasionally subdued or foregrounded by the features of what has been commonly referred to as an ordinary conversation (cf. relational function of talk). The interactions (between the operators and the customers) taking place at the Polish CCs constitute particularly valuable data from two perspectives. Firstly, similarly to most western countries, a call center is a workplace that has emerged in Poland as a response to global economic demands. It is a workplace where strict norms regarding discourse management have been imposed on the employees. Secondly, it *should* provide the kind of customer service that Poles have not been familiar with in the era of communism. This paper will focus on whether/how the former communist institutionality of the service encounters has been gradually replaced by market economy communication patterns in the context of the Polish call centers.

The data for the analysis consist of about seventy interactions recorded at several Polish CCs. These are mainly CCs representing the fields of mobile phone companies and banks where a lot of foreign capital has been involved. These call centers belong to so called inbound category, where the call are initiated by the customers rather than by the operators (the outbound call center). The length of all the interactions amounts to about three hours. The recordings were conducted between January 2002 and November 2002. The data analysis has been informed by the following assumptions:

(1)   Hutchby (1999) claims that: "institutions do not define the kind of talk produced within them but participants with their language choices construct 'institutionality'" (1999: 41).

This assumption should bear relevance to the customers, as the operator's choice of interactional strategies has been limited by a rigid codification of their verbal performance. Consequently, the potential 'institutionality' should be predominately constructed by the Polish customer and not the operator, who is prescribed to 'project emotional states' and thus draw on the conversational features in the exchanges with the customer.

(2)   Tannen (1977) states that "in determining what is meant at any one point in a conversation, we rely on schemata or interpretive frames based on our experience with similar situations, as well as on grammatical and lexical knowledge" (Gumperz 1982: 21).

Again, this assumption should very much apply to the interactional performance of the average Polish customer for whom a CC may still be perceived as an institution with very unequal/asymmetrical power relations.

(3)   Cameron (2000b): "CC transactions are not purely exchanges of information, but are quasi-conversational exchanges" (2000b: 97).

This assertion relates very much to the position of the operators in their exchanges with the customers. On the one hand they need to be in control of

the service encounters ('exchanges of information') - an element of institutionality, but on the other they need to create a friendly and allegedly symmetrical exchange with the customer. Also, as Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen (2000: 174) claim: "business reputedly thrives on 'niceness' and it is ultimately impossible to separate 'customers' relations' from the instrumental goals of selling".

(4)   Cameron (2000b:123): "talk is a 'locally managed' phenomenon, it has rules and procedures but participants apply their knowledge of these to shape interaction as they go along".

This underlines the very 'negotiable' nature of any exchange. In view of this it is not possible to determine in advance the character of every CC interaction. It is jointly the process of negotiation between the operator and the customer that creates the character of the exchange, either as one that is more conversational or more institutional.

3.   *Care* at the CC

Care for the customer on the telephone line has to be conveyed by the operator with his/her careful choice of interactional strategies and not merely by settling the business that is taking place. The alleged choice, however, is severely restricted in the context of call centers. Cameron (2000a, 2000b) pointed out that the CC operators need to adhere to 'customer-oriented' verbal norms. The codified guidelines regarding the verbal performance of the operators are to ensure that every customer is not merely served but 'individually cared for' by means of interpersonal communication. The customer is also positioned, in the Polish training materials,[1] as "a human being with his/her own prejudices, feelings and *emotions* similar to ours". This remark bears particular significance in the context of CC since due to the repetitiveness of the work, the operators may lose a sense of actually talking to a different person every time they need to answer a call. A crucial element of the operator's providing emotionally for the customer is 'doing' emotional labor. Emotional labor as defined by Hochschild (1983) refers to "feeling management, during social interaction within the labor process, as shaped by the requirements of capital accumulation" (Taylor and Tyler 2000: 77). Hochschild proposes two ways of employees' involvement in 'doing' emotional labor. So called 'surface acting' consists in pretending "to feel what we do not [... W]e deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves" (1983: 33). 'Deep acting', on the other hand, involves "deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others [...W]e make feigning easy by mak-

ing it unnecessary" (1983: 330). The training materials[2] evince that operators should aim at so called 'deep acting'. Here are some singled out slogans: "be truly interested in the customer, be full of enthusiasm and authentic in your involvement, your enthusiasm should rub off on the customer". The CC operators are to project warmth, sincerity, excitement, friendliness, helpfulness and confidence in their interactions with the customers (Cameron 2000b: 335). Additionally, the training materials point to the necessity of hearing out the customers, allowing for different personalities as well as understanding of the customers' problems. A CC operator 'doing' emotional labor is required in the interaction with the customer to:

(1)   create rapport/empathy by 'mirroring', i.e. "trying to demonstrate awareness of the interlocutor's mood and reflect it back to him/her" (Cameron 2000a: 335);
(2)   project emotional states;
(3)   use minimal responses as an important element of active listening;
(4)   ask questions which encourage extended talk rather than conducive questions which require a pre-determined answer;
(5)   answer the phone with a smile (Cameron 2000a);
(6)   constructively deal with the customers' negative emotions;
(7)   project the understanding of the customer's emotions so that she/he feels individually approached;
(8)   avoid 'yes, but' statements;
(9)   avoid long, unannounced periods of silence (Polish training materials);
(10)   treat them with courtesy and consideration;
(11)   respond reasonably to their requests and demands;
(12)   show an interest in them;
(13)   take time to find out how they feel;
(14)   accept responsibility, i.e. avoiding blame and helping out when problems occur;
(15)   be aware of how what you do affects them (Cameron 2000b: 61).

What is interesting, the Polish training materials underline that the customer's satisfaction of being 'taken care of' should be of an individual interest to an operator, since "the best motivation for taking a good care of the customer is that it improves your [the operator's] mood/disposition". In short, the aim of the emotional labor is to "make others feel good" (Cameron 2000b: 80). As one of the Polish operators explains: "When they [clients] are annoyed we calm them down, we are using vocal expressiveness because with the client one deals like with a baby" (Polityka 16/2448: 52). The fact that the CC operators are to project positive emotional states as well as be actively involved in hearing out the customer instantly evokes the im-

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[1] The training materials I am referring to have been requested to remain anonymous. They mainly represent the areas of telephone industry.

[2] See also http://www.human.com.pl/zamkniete/telefon.htm.

pression of personal communication that the operators are prescribed to create in their interactions with the customer. From the operator's perspective at least (whether it involves deep acting or surface acting), the CC exchange is to resemble what has been traditionally referred to as an ordinary conversation. The operator is prescribed to create a genuine dialogue with the customer. The above-presented guidelines for verbal performance substantially overlap with the premises of an ordinary conversation. Yet, as Cameron (2000b: 80) maintains: "the customer or client does not have reciprocal obligations to the worker". The customer may then either join the quasi-conversational exchange or reject it and likely rely on the features of so called institutional discourse. Consequently, the nature of CC exchanges is to a great extent a matter of negotiation between the operator and the customer. This status exchange negotiation becomes highly salient in the context of the Polish CC.

4. The Polish CC and the legacy of communism

Consumer culture in Poland is still at an early stage of development. The service encounters, where the CC interactions belong, used to look very different before 1989. The ethos of 'the customer is king' or 'the customer is always right' could not exist due to a major unavailability of numerous products and a limited service sector. The consequence of the economic hardship was that the widely defined servers (shop assistants, for example) were positioned as omnipotent in the service encounters with the customers (cf. Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak and Pawelczyk 2004). The customer was always less powerful and had to adopt a markedly subservient role. Yet, the consequence of the political, economic and social changes following the year 1989, has been a gradual introduction of the 'customer-oriented' approach to all kinds of business and service transactions. This brand new treatment of the customer entails, to a large extent, the adoption of the western/Anglo norms, thus redefining the customer/server power relations (cf. Kiełkiewicz-Janowiak and Pawelczyk 2004). Those norms reflect global tendencies in the service-oriented communication with the customers. This inevitable process affects even the companies that used to be perceived as paragons of the most unfriendly service in Poland as expressed by one of the employees of such a company: "at X, we are currently experiencing the apparently most ambitious organizational *challenge* in the entire X industry, tremendous rebuilding or implementation of the customer-oriented philosophy".

Despite the strenuous effort on the part of the companies to teach both servers and customers a new culture of 'business interaction' such a re-orientation does not happen overnight. Service encounters are still in a process of transition where both servers and customers gradually adopt to new roles and redefined power relations.

Consequently, the interactional exchanges taking place at the Polish CCs seem to constitute a meeting ground of old institutional expectations (the majority of customers) and new conversational discourse of care (operators).

The phenomenon of telephone service is still relatively new in Poland, and still not very trusted by the customers. Actually many companies refrain from setting up a call center to provide for the customers' needs in the belief that Poles are too used to arranging business in face-to-face interactions.[3] The 2003 Telephone Service Research revealed that, by popular belief, the CC service is reserved for the top clients. In terms of numbers there were about 400 call centers and it is estimated that their number will increase by 4-5% annually. In 2004, there are about 600 call centers and it is currently estimated that in two years' time there there their number will reach 1,200 (*Polityka* 16/2448: 51). A CC employs about 45 operators (consultants). The biggest Polish CCs operate in the fields of finance, telecommunications, the motor industry, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and information technology.

The issue of a more conversation-oriented interaction or more institution-focused exchange becomes a particularly salient area for investigation in the context of the Polish CC. As already presented, on the one hand, there is a communist legacy with its anti-customer approach (resembling institutional exchanges) but, on the other, there is a very strong emphasis nowadays on the very individual/emotional customer-oriented service (resembling an ordinary conversation).

Following Drew and Heritage (1992), Cameron states that although in the institutional (professional) exchanges the so-called institutional participant will be in a more powerful position as she/he takes more responsibility for the conduct of the interaction, this pattern does not apply to the exchanges at the CCs. Cameron claims that in the interactions indexed by 'customer care' "service employees remain responsible for the conduct of talk, but customers are positioned as more powerful" (2000b: 79). I would add that it is at least the impression of 'being very important', appreciated, and last but not least, not anonymous that the customer should receive on closing the exchange with the CC operator.[4] I also argue that the discourse of CC operators should rely on the premises of an ordinary conversation in order to 'do emotional labor' for the customer. Yet, it should also entail some elements of institutional discourse as CC operators need to control the conduct of the exchange. The customers, on the other hand, are not guided by prescriptive norms regarding their verbal performance at the CCs. As a result, they may either adopt the more conversational character of the interaction or rely on the transactional discourse. That may be especially the case at the new, Polish CC. Before analyzing the actual dynamics of service interactions at the Polish CC, ordinary conversation needs to be contrasted with the institutional discourse.

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[3] This is an opinion of one of the British trainers working in Poland (p.c.); the same finding has been confirmed by the 2003 Telephone Service Research.

[4] As Cameron (2000b: 62) claims that kind of attitude toward the customer can be refereed to as 'synthetic personalization': "a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en masse as an individual" (Fairclough 1989: 62).

5. Institutional talk and conversation

As Sarangi (2001: 239) maintains, "institutional language is an umbrella term to refer to our everyday experience of officialese, small print, news-speak, etc. as we fill in official forms, read standard circulars from government and public agencies and consult legal and medical records". This view supports the somehow 'common knowledge' definition of institutional talk which is contrasted with ordinary conversation. Although Drew and Heritage (1992: 21) reject the idea of a rigid distinction between these two, numerous perspectives have been offered of what institutional talk is and what features of ordinary conversation it lacks. Agar (1985) defines institutional language as non-natural, non-conversational, fixed, patterned and rule-governed behavior. The dichotomy between an ordinary conversation and institutional interaction becomes substantiated if the first one is considered as a normative institution. An ordinary conversation is accepted to be premised on a standard of 'equal participation'. The 'equal participation' status of an ordinary conversation enables conversational partners to pursue intimacy in it. On the other hand, the 'equal participation' standard is departed from in talk in institutional settings. Rather than by intimacy, institutional talk tends to be characterized by neutrality and cautiousness. Harris (2003:28) states that institutional contexts have a built-in asymmetry. The rules of conversation reject the relationship between status and role, which institutional interaction frequently involves. A majority of institutional encounters are ordered into an order of phrases. This is not the case with conversations. As Gumperz (1982) maintains, the conversational exchanges tend to be produced with a very little amount of conscious reflection and "alternate with rhythmic synchronization to avoid awkward pauses" (1982: 2).

There is no standard framework for the organization of conversation while the institutional exchanges proceed in accordance with a task-related framework. 9-1-1 calls in the USA constitute the best example of this aspect of institutionality. Every aspect of the exchange is oriented toward the earliest possible completion of the task. Consequently, closing an exchange in the institutional context should not pose any difficulties to the interlocutors. In an ordinary conversation, however, closing a call poses numerous difficulties. It is a most delicate matter, since "over-hasty and over-slow terminations can carry unwelcome inferences about the social relationship between the participants" (Levinson 1983: 316). In other words, the interlocutors in an ordinary conversation are not guided by a task-completion framework that would indicate when to close a call but rather they are engaged in a kind of social, equal participation event. Closing a call in an ordinary conversation requires complex interactional work in order not to lose the intimacy that has been pursued earlier in that conversation.

As already mentioned, Drew and Heritage (1992) point at institutional talk as being a goal-oriented one, in which both lay and professional participants orient their conduct to institutional tasks and functions, be it a medical consultation or a job interview. Next, institutional talk may entail some constraints on the contributions made. Drew and Heritage also pinpoint the special character of inference in the institutional context. Here, they present the example of professionals withholding expressions of surprise, sympathy or agreement in institutional interactions as a difference between a conversation and an institutional talk. The lack of such expression in an ordinary conversation would be regarded as disaffiliative (Drew and Heritage 1992: 24). On the other hand, as Heritage and Sefi (1992) showed, the conversational remarks lose their harmless overtone and may be interpreted as quite threatening in an institutional context. Information exchanges in institutional settings are characterized by asymmetrical interactional routines.

The institutional character of the interaction is mainly evinced in its form, most specifically in its turn-taking system. Turn-taking organizations are a fundamental and generic aspect of the organization of interaction. They are organizations whose features are implemented recurrently over the course of interactional events (Drew and Heritage 1992). Sacks et al. (1974: 12) proposed the normative organization of turn-taking in a conversation. This is "a basic set of rules governing turn construction, providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap". Sacks et al. (1974) outlined three rules for the organization of turn taking in a conversation. In the "current speaker selects" technique, the selected party takes the next turn and no other interlocutors have such a right. If the first rule cannot be fulfilled, self-selection may take place. If these two rules fail to be fulfilled, the current speaker may continue unless another self-selects (Sacks et al. 1974: 12). Although the rules are to be applied to a conversation, the remark on minimizing gap and overlap in the conversational exchanges turns out to be a very apt characteristic of a prototypical 'turn' in an institutional setting. The task completion requirement imposed on an institutional turn demands very exact timing, while an overlap would imply a degree of intimacy and possibly an affection that the task-related insitutionality rejects. Although Sacks et al. proposed the 'one at a time' rule for conversational exchanges devoid of gaps and overlaps, Edelsky (1981) proves that an overlap may actually play a very significant function in a conversational turn-taking framework, and may even become an inherent feature of a certain conversational style. She makes an important distinction between the single (or singly-developed) floor and the collaborative (or collaboratively-developed) floor. In the singly-developed floor, one speaker speaks at a time, while the main characteristic of a collaboratively-developed floor is that all participants may potentially speak simultaneously. The development of the collaborative floor entails then an overlapping speech where many interlocutors contribute to the talk at the same time. I would venture to claim that what Edelsky (1981) refers to as a singly-developed floor is a predominant organization of talk in an institutional setting while an ordinary conversation, with its interpersonal aspect, tends to be characterized by a collaborative floor. This collaborative aspect actually underlines the friendliness and involvement and affection of conversational partners.

Drew and Heritage (1992) underline that the analysis of turn design addresses two phenomena. One is the selection of an activity that a turn is designed to perform and, secondly, the details of the verbal construction through which the turn's activity is accomplished. The fact that the participants' talk in an institutional setting is carried out within the limits of a specialized turn-taking system constitutes another difference from an ordinary conversation. An example of this difference is constituted by the specific reductions of the range of options and opportunities. In the formal institutional interactions, e.g. formal classroom interactions, news interviews, departure from the rigid procedure of 'who gets to talk', is subject to overt sanctions. However, in some less formal forms of institutional interactions such as, for example, medical, psychiatric, and social service ones, the emerging asymmetries are not the products of a turn-taking procedure. Yet the talk in these settings can be labeled 'institutional' since it involves either a task-achievement or role-based activity. Still, due to a 'relaxed' turn-taking procedure it may resemble a conversational mode. To sum up, a turn in the instiutional setting is very meaningful in the sense that it has a very specific task to perform or complete. Consequently, it may be concluded that a turn in the institutional discourse is information/task-oriented while in a conversation a turn *may* be information-free i.e. it may convey empathy or affection only (phatic communion function).

Turn taking constituted in a question-answer adjacency pair has been considered a distinct parameter of institutional discourse (Sarangi 2001). Drew and Heritage (1992) claim that the distinctiveness of talk on the one hand in news rooms and courtroom examinations (institutional setting), and on the other in conversations, is also highlighted by different patterns of question-answer sequences in each setting.

Thornborrow (2001) discusses the function of questions as a powerful resource in talk: "particularly where the participants who are doing the questioning also have institutionally inscribed identities which affect the asymmetrical distribution of the speaker's rights and obligations in the talk" (119). The 'institutionally inscribed status' guarantees the questioner extensive power in controlling all the aspects of the exchanges. Consequently being the answerer circumscribes the 'talking opportunities'. The predominant question-answer pattern of interaction offers a very limited opportunity for a lay person (non-professional) to take the initiative, while professionals with their control of the discussion may even prevent particular issues from the agenda (cf. Tannen and Wallat 1987). Asking questions gives control over not only the topic but also over what aspects of an issue will be dealt with. As a result, the privilege of asking questions puts an interlocutor in the position of control over the direction of the talk, its progression and its outcomes. According to Frankel (1990: 239) initiatory utterances produced by patients (the lower-status participant in an exchange with a doctor) constituted fewer than one percent of all utterances. In their analysis of the major dimensions of interactional conduct, questions constitute a foci of research into institutional talk. The question-answer sequence (thus a rigid turn-taking procedure) is not the only form of interactional asymmetry in institutional discourse.

The right to interrupt is another mode of control (Sarangi 2001). As Sarangi maintains, interruptions are often applied in institutional exchanges in order to change the topic of the discussion. Similarly to the controlling function of questions, the right to interrupt belongs to the interlocutor, who holds (the more) powerful interactional role. This powerful interactional role in the institutional exchanges is the consequence of a higher status of an interlocutor. The interruption characterizes so called 'unequal encounters' (e.g. job interviews, medical consultations). This is not to say that interruptions are excluded from an ordinary conversation. What differs an ordinary conversation from an institutional discourse in this respect is that a conversation is characterized by an equal participation of its interlocutors and thus every party involved has an equal right to interrupt. In view of symmetrical conversation vs. asymmetrical institutional exchange I would venture to claim that so called interruption predominately becomes an element of high involvement style and thus an overlap in the context of a conversation. An interruption, then, as an index of asymmetry can mostly be found in institutional exchanges.[5]

Another important or even indispensable feature of an ordinary conversation but a characteristic that institutional talk frequently lacks, are backchannel cues or minimal responses, expressions such as: *mm, hm, yes, really, did you* (Boden 1994). The lack of backchannel cues indexes the asymmetrical nature of the interaction (Sarangi 2001). Backchannel cues, although referentially meaningless, have great interactional import by indicating one's attention to and ratification of the speaker's talk. This active listenership constitutes a significant marker of symmetry in an ordinary conversation. Backchannel cues let the interlocutors signal their interest in the conversation and consequently are often referred to as markers of active listening. Since the minimal responses create an interactional symmetry, their use in the institutional context would blur the clearly delineated powerful/powerless statuses of the interlocutors. The heavy reliance on minimal responses in the institutional setting would also indicate a certain level of intimacy that that institution rejects but which ordinary conversations require. Lexical choice constitutes another area of potential differences between a conversation and institutional talk. It has been widely acknowledged that there is more so called 'technical vocabulary' in the institutional setting. Drew and Heritage (1992) state that these particular lexical choices can include specific claims to specialized knowledge and institutional identities. The manifestation of an insitutional identity also entails the use of the self-referring 'we' in

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[5] As Schiffrin (1994: 109) maintains, "the turn taking structure during which one person's utterance is simultaneous with another's can be labelled in two quite different ways: it can be labeled as 'interruption' (with negative connotations) or 'overlap' (with neutral or even positive connotations). Which label it receives (i.e. which meta-message is conveyed) depends on how that turn-taking structure is contextualized by speech activity, participant and so on".

order to invoke 'the voice of institution' rather than a personal identity. Thus a representative of an institution in the professional setting would avail himself/herself of the first person plural pronoun (rather than the first person singular pronoun 'I' used in an ordinary conversation) to underline the fact of acting on somebody's behalf. The institutional 'we' as opposed to the conversational 'I' starkly contrast in any exchanges contributing to the interactional asymmetry. I would also claim that a very significant feature of institutional discourse is a certain degree of predictability which an ordinary conversation, premised on spontaneity, should lack. The interlocutors have clear expectations regarding the institutional interactions. It tends to be socially predetermined whose (interactional) position will be more powerful.

To conclude, the exchanges set in the institutional settings (exchanges between the representatives of institutions and lay participants) tend to be premised on asymmetry, while ordinary conversations are based on an 'equal participation' status i.e. symmetry. The asymmetry manifests itself not only in the employment of discrepant interactional strategies in these two settings but also in the "differential distribution of knowledge, rights to knowledge, access to conversational resources and to participation in the interaction" between the participants (Drew and Heritage 1992: 49).

6. Data analysis

The interactions between the operators and the customer at the Polish CCs are a particularly interesting site of conversational vs. institutional dynamics due to the emerging philosophy of customer care, orienting the service encounters more to the conversational exchanges, and the still visible communist legacy, indexing the exchanges as more institutional. In the collected data three major forms of institution vs. conversation dynamics have emerged:

(1)   The operator tends to apply the prescribed features of emotional labor (conversation) yet the customer tends to reject this mode of exchange.
(2)   The operator tends to rely on the institutional mode of exchange and the customer accepts it. This site of interactional dynamics closely resembles the pre-1989 service encounters dynamics, where 'the server was king'.
(3)   The customers rather than the operator try to introduce the elements of an ordinary conversation into the exchange.

It is crucial to point out that in the context of a call center there are no purely institutional (asymmetrical in terms of power relations)or purely conversational (symmetrical in terms of power relations) exchanges. The recorded interactions can be best

characterized as dominated by either the characteristics of an ordinary conversation or by the features of institutional discourse.[6]

6.1. Rejection of emotional labor (cf. Dynamics 1)

Extract 1: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry. Alicja Olejnik.[7] W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Yyy, dzień dobry. Proszę pani, ja jestem klientką *państwa* banku i posiadam kartę
3. Maestro, i mam takie pytanie: wkrótce wyjeżdżam za granicę i chciałabym się
4. dowiedzieć czy tą kartą mogę dokonywać transakcji bezgotówkowych, za granicą?
5. O: Hm, no tak, wie pani, to zależy przede wszystkim od tego czy dany punkt
6. akceptuje takie karty.
7. C: Rozumiem=
8. O: =zależy od terminala jaki dany punkt posiada. Jeżeli jest to maestro to świadczy o
9. tym znaczek, nalepka na szybie, albo będzie to nalepka maestro albo cirrus. Te dwie
10. nalepki będą świadczyć o tym że ta karta jest akceptowana. Jeżeli chodzi o konkretny
11. kraj to trudno nam cokolwiek w tym momencie powiedzieć. Ale karta maestro jest
12. karta dość popularną więc nie powinno być problemu.
13. C: Dziękuję rozumiem.
....

14. C: A czy w przypadku transakcji bezgotówkowych naliczacie państwo ⌐prowizje?
15. O: ∟nie żadnych
16. prowizji nie ma.
....

17. O: Czy mogę jeszcze w czymś Pani pomóc?
18. C: Nie, do widzenia.
19. O: Dziękuje i do widzenia.

Extract 1: English translation

1. O: Good morning. Alicja Olejnik. How can I help you?
2. C: Good morning, mhm, I am a client of *your* bank and I own a Maestro card and
3. have the following question: I am going abroad very soon and I would like to
4. find out if I can make cash-free transactions with this card abroad?
5. O: Hmm, yes, you know it depends first of all on whether a particular business
6. accepts such cards.
7. C: I see=
8. O: =It depends on the credit card terminal that a particular business has. If it has

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[6] Cf. Coupland and Ylänne-McEwen's (2004) relational talk that is embedded within transactional discourse.

[7] The names of the operators have been changed.

9. maestro there is a logo sticker on the window. It will either be a logo sticker with
10. maestro or cirrus. These two stickers mean that this card is accepted there. As far as
11. a particular country is concerned it is difficult for us to say, but the maestro card is
12. very popular so there should be no problem.
13. C: Thank you, I understand
....

14. C: And in the case of case of cash-free transactions, do you charge ⌈ interest?
15. O: ⌊ no there is
16. no interest.
....

17. O: Is there anything else I can help you with today?
18. C: No, goodbye.
19. O: Thank you and goodbye.

This exchange is one of very few examples of an interaction management in which
the operator is trying to introduce some of the elements of the prescribed 'emotional'
requirements in order to meet the CC standard. The basic welcoming format of the
call is an opening greeting sequence, followed by a question ('how can I help you').
What is interesting, and what I claim constitutes the legacy of the old system is that
all the customers in the sample (regardless of their ages) start the exchange very
formally. In the case of the customer from Extract 1, it is evinced in the use of the
form *państwa banku* ('*your* bank'). With this phrase the customer addresses the op-
erator's institutional identity. The form *państwo/a* is used in Polish also to refer to a
person's professional identity. The customer in the introductory statement relies on
formal register (*posiadać kartę* 'own a card', *dokonywać transakcji* 'conduct a
transaction'). Yet, the operator, regardless of the customer's initial attempt of fram-
ing the interaction as institutional (asymmetrical), introduces aspects of emotional
labor. In one of the first utterances, the operator uses the marker of a high involve-
ment style – *wie pani* 'you know' – which is referentially meaningless but indicates
a significant involvement of the operator in this exchange. Again, in Polish, the jux-
taposition of the verb *wie* with the polite address from *pani* signifies a strong identi-
fication with the customers. Applying this marker of high involvement, the operator
foregrounds her personal rather than institutional personality. Also, the operator
times her turn skillfully so there is no awkward pauses but 'rhythmic synchroniza-
tion' (Gumperz 1982: 2). Another element of interaction management indicating the
high involvement style of the operator is the use of overlap (see Note 5). The opera-
tor, although the stated problem turns out not to be that difficult, took great *care* to
explain it to the customer. The element of *care* on the part of the operator can also
be noticed in her detailed description of the banking procedure in which the poten-
tially difficult banking terms are left out, and assuring the customer that no problems
should follow. As a result it can be claimed that the operator is trying to frame the
interaction as very friendly and customer-oriented, thus more relational. There is
only one element in the exchange indicating that the operator speaks with the voice
of institution, that is the use of 'situated we': *trudno nam powiedzieć* ('it's difficult
for *us* to say'). The situated use of 'we' makes relevant the operator's participatory
status, her institutional identity. As already stated, the customer starts the exchange
very formally and continues with this mode throughout the exchange. It cannot be
claimed that the customer overtly rejects the conversational framing of the interac-
tion, but it can be noticed that she does not join in with any additional comments,
neither does she undertake any interactional work in the form of, for example,
minimal responses. The 'situational' or 'institutional 'we' when referring to the op-
erator is used by the customer not only in the first introductory statement but also in
the question referring to charging interest. She uses the Polish address form *pań-
stwo*, thus referring not to the operator as an individual but as a representative of the
institution. The operator closes the exchange with a quasi-phatic token (line 18)
which can also be framed as an encouragement for further exchange (cf. Levinson
1983: 316). The customer, however, definitely closes the exchange. To sum up, in
extract one it can be observed that the operator tends to rely on the conversational
mode in the exchange while the customer ignores it by not responding accordingly.

Extract 2: Polish original

1. O: Bank X, Roman Kowalski, w czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry, ja mam takie pytanie, ponieważ jestem klientem *państwa* banku i
3. posiadam kartę Visa electron i wkrótce wybieram się zagranicę, chciałabym się
4. dowiedzieć jaki sposób czy w ogóle mogę dokonywać transakcji bezgotówkowych przy
   pomocy tej karty za granicą.
5. O: Oczywiście, tylko jedną rzecz muszę sprawdzić, proszę numer karty...
....

6. O: OK., już Pani tłumaczę, przede wszystkim , hm, to jest taka sytuacja, że limit
7. płatniczy ma Pani dość niski.
8. C: Hm.
9. O: To znaczy to jest jedynie sto złotych na jeden dzień. Nie wiem czy to było Pani
10. tłumaczone? Momencik.

(operator tłumaczy szczegółowo procedury bankowe)

11. C: Hm, rozumiem.
....

12. C: Czy mogę wystąpić jeszcze przed wyjazdem o wydanie innej karty?
13. O: Oczywiście ale radziłbym też dodatkowo zabrać trochę gotówki ze sobą, chociaż
14. tak jak mówiłem bez żadnych problemów powinna się Pani posługiwać kartą za granicą.
15. C: Rozumiem, a czy za dokonywanie właśnie tego typu transakcji za granicą

16. pobieracie *państwo* prowizję?
17. O: Nie, nie ma prowizji, z bankomatu jest 2,5 procent kwoty, jaką pani pobiera i nie
18. mniej niż dziesięć złotych.

Extract 2: English translation

1. O: X Bank. Roman Kowalski. How can I help you?
2. C: Good morning, I have the following question. Since I am a customer of your
3. bank and I own a Visa electron and I am going abroad shortly, I would like to
4. find out how, and if at all, I can make cash-free transactions with this card abroad.
5. O: Sure, I just need to check one thing. Can I have the card number...
....

6. O: OK, I'll explain it to you, first of all, hmm, the situation is that your limit
7. is quite low.
8. C: Hmm.
9. O: It means that you are able to withdraw only 100 PLN a day. I don't know if this
10. was explained to you? just one second.

(the operator explains the bank procedures in detail)

11. C: Hmm , I understand.
....

12. C: Can I apply for a new card still before I leave?
13. O: Sure, but I would advise you to take some cash with you, although as I said you
14. should not have any problems in using this card abroad.
15. C: I understand. And do *you* charge any commission on such transactions conducted
16. abroad?
17. O: No, there is no commission, on ATM withdrawals there is 2.5% of the amount
18. you are withdrawing but no less than 10 PLN.

The second exchange also illustrates the operator's attempts to introduce some elements of conversational mode into the exchange. Similarly to the first extract, the customer is also interested in using their credit card abroad. Needless to say, the customer's introductory statement contains the lexical items indexing formality such as: *dokonywać transakcji* 'conduct a transaction', *przy pomocy tej karty* 'with the help of this card'. What is also interesting, the customer (as most customers in the sample) heavily relies on pre-questioning frames in asking questions: *ja mam takie pytanie* 'I have the following question'; *chciałbym się dowiedzieć* 'I would like to find out'. These frames devoid an utterance of the spontaneity that characterizes an ordinary conversation, but contribute to neutrality and cautiousness, a feature of institutional exchange. The operator, on the other hand, is striving to frame the interaction as close as possible to a chat. First of all, he uses a number of spontaneous interjec-

tions. Also, the operator prepares the customer to inform her about the low limit instead of instantly breaking the information: *już to Pani tłumaczę* 'I'll explain it to you'; *to jest taka sytuacja że* 'the situation is that'. Next the operator "drops" the institutional front (cf. Goffman 1959, 1967) by using the first person pronoun I: *radziłbym* 'I would advise', again a characteristic of an ordinary conversation. The use of the verb *radzić* 'advise' is also a reflection of a personal framing of the exchange. Yet the operator's strenuous effort to frame the exchange as conversational rather than institutional is rejected by the customer, as reflected in the customer's reliance on the rigid task-related framework: every turn has a task to perform, as well as in the highly repetitive nature of the customer's answers e.g. *rozumiem* 'I understand'.

Extract 3: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry, Magdalena Nowik. W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry. Proszę pani, ja jestem abonentem w państwa sieci i w tej chwili
3. kończy mi się umowa i chciałabym się dowiedzieć jakie są zasady przedłużania
4. umowy?
5. O: Hm, prosiłabym pani numer telefonu, zaraz sprawdzę jakie *mamy* dla Pani
6. propozycje.

(C podaje dane osobowe)

7. O: Dziękuję bardzo za potwierdzenie danych, jeszcze *chwileczkę*. Proszę panią
8. podpisując aneks na 24 miesiące zostaje pani oczywiście przy tym numerze telefonu=
9. C: =hm=
10. O: ma pani możliwość zakupienia telefonu z aktualnej promocji prywatnej.
11. No i *proponowałabym* z tego skorzystać, ponieważ ta taryfa którą ma pani w chwili
12. obecnej jest *zdecydowanie mało korzystna*.
13. C: Dziękuję, zastanowię się. A czy jest możliwość uzyskania bezpłatnych minut
14. jeżeli przedłużę umowę?
15. O: *Wie Pani*, raczej nie gdyż otrzymuje pani od nas tej chwili już telefon w cenie
16. promocyjnej.
17. C: Aha, to dziękuję.
18. O: Życzę miłego dnia i do usłyszenia.

Extract 3: English translation

1. O: Good morning Magdalena Nowik. How can I help you?
2. C: Good morning. I am a client of your net and currently my contract is expiring
3. and I would like to find out what are the regulations regarding the contract
4. extension?
5. O: Mm, Can I ask you for your telephone number, I'll check what offers
6. we have for you.

(C gives personal data)

7. O: Thank you very much for the data verification, just one moment please. Madam,
8. signing a contract extension for the next 24 months, you are keeping, obviously, the same number=
9. C: =Mhm =
10. O: You have the opportunity to buy a telephone in the current promotion.
11. And I would suggest taking advantage of it since the plan you have now is
12. definitely not very cost-efficient.
13. C: Thank you. I'll think about it. Is there a possibility of receiving free minutes if I
14. extend the contract?
15. O: You know, not really, as you will be getting a phone at the promotional
16. price already.
17. C: Aha, so, thank you.
18. O: Have a nice day and talk to you again soon.

In Extract 3, the customer is interested in extending a contract with the mobile phone company. The formal style of the 'reason-for-calling' statement is manifested here not only by the pre-questioning forms: *chciałabym się dowiedzieć* 'I would like to find out' but also by the use of the first person pronoun *ja jestem* 'I am'. Polish is a pro-DROP language and consequently the use of the first person pronoun by the customer is very marked (cf. Jaworski and Galasiński 1998: 537). The operator frames her response in a similar fashion, that is adopting a non-conversational style. It becomes explicit in lines 5 and 6 when she says: *zaraz sprawdzę jakie mamy dla pani propozycje* 'I'll check what we can offer you', thus employing the verb *mieć* 'to have' in the first person plural, indicating the institutional identity of the operator. However, in the remaining part of the exchange, its institutionality gets extensively subdued by the features of the conversational style the operator strives to introduce. In line 10, the operator informs the customer about the possibility of purchasing a telephone in a promotional offer. Although this statement is still institutional in character, the comment that follows it (line 11) is very personal: *proponowałabym* 'I would suggest'. Furthermore, in the same sentence, the operator justifies why the customer should change the rate plan (line 12): *jest zdecydowanie mało korzystna* 'it is definitely not very cost-efficient'. With this statement, the operator is trying to invoke the discourse of conversation, identifying with the customer. The customer, however, remains indifferent to the personal aspect which manifests itself in the question: *a czy jest możliwość* 'is there a possibility'. The use of existential construction is very neutral (the feature of institutional discourse), as it does not contain the subject. Despite the non-conversational response, the operator continued the use of conversational features. In line 15, she uses the element of a high involvement style – *wie pani* 'you know' – as a mitigating device to the following negative answer. Moreover, the mitigation is also highlighted with the phrase *raczej nie* 'not really', even though the operator realizes that there is no chance to meet the customer's request. The exchange closes with the operator's formulaic *życzę miłego dnia* 'have a nice day' which aims at projecting friendliness.

6.2. Acceptance of institutionally-premised interaction (cf. Dynamics 2)

In this section of data analysis, I will comment on two extracts only, as the interactional pattern emerging from them constitutes a dominating schemata of the operator-customer exchanges at the Polish call centers.

Extract 4: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry. Jacek Nowiński. W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry, dzwonię z następującym pytaniem. Jestem klientem X GSM i moja
3. umowa z tą siecią właśnie się skończyła i chciałbym zakupić telefon w państwa sieci
4. i nie wiem jakie dokumenty powinienem przedłożyć aby zostać abonentem.
5. O: Rozumiem że to będzie pierwszy aparat u nas w sieci?
6. C: W państwa sieci tak.
7. O: Proszę pana trzeba będzie przedłożyć takie dokumenty jak dowód osobisty
8. i również drugi dokument ze zdjęciem. Czy jest pan obecnie zatrudniony?
9. C: Nie, nie, nie.
10. O: Nie pracuje pan, w takim razie będzie pan musiał przedstawić legitymacje studencką.
11. C: Aha, rozumiem, i to wystarczy?
12. O: Tak dokładnie to wystarczy.
13. C: Mam jeszcze jedno pytanie, czy mogę podpisać umowę jedynie na rok?
14. O: Tak, istnieje taka możliwość ale wtedy cena telefonu będzie wyższa.
15. C: Hm, OK, dziękuje i do widzenia.
16. O: Dziękuje, do widzenia.

Extract 4: English translation

1. O: Good afternoon Jacek Nowiński. How can I help you?
2. C: Good afternoon. I am calling with the following question. I am a client of X GSM
3. and my contract has just expired and I would like to buy a phone in your net and
4. I don't know what documents I should submit to become a client of your company?
5. O: I understand that this will be the first phone in our network?
6. C: In yours, yes.
7. O: It will be necessary to submit such documents as personal identity document and
8. also a second document with a photo. Are you currently employed?
9. C: No, no, no
10. O: You don't work so you will need to present your student ID.
11. C: Aha, I understand. Will that be enough?
12. O: Yes, exactly that will do.
13. C: I have one more question, can I sign the contract just for a year?
14. O: Yes, there is such a possibility but then the price of the phone is higher.
15. C: Mhm, OK, thank you and goodbye.
16. O: Thank you, goodbye.

The welcoming format of the operator does not differ from others in the sample (greeting, the name, *how can I help you*). Similarly, the customer, as the others in

the sample, relies on a very formal register in stating the reason for making the call. It is evident in the choice of the following lexical items: *państwa* (the formal address form), *jakie dokumenty powinienem przedłożyć* 'what documents I should submit', *aby* 'in order to'. It needs to be underlined that the customer is a person in his twenties, which even augments the level of formality. According to the prescribed format of the exchange, the operator should take over the interactional burden in order to make the exchange more relaxed, thus resembling more a conversational exchange. Yet, the first utterance of the operator strongly indicates the interactional role assumed by the operator in this specific exchange. The operator does not make an effort to make an interactional redefinition of the exchange. Rather, he reassures the customer about the institutional frame of the interaction, drawing on the lexical choices employed by the customer e.g. *przedłożyć* 'submit'. Additionally, the question-answer framework dominates, with no reference to the 'personal I', cf. Extract 3, line 11. Although, undeniably, the operator needs to answer the customer's questions, he should also adhere to the verbal requirements, i.e. create the impression of a conversational exchange. Johnstone (1991) noticed that "conversation is always a kind of personal expression, a form of verbal art, less self-conscious than story telling or joking but nevertheless a performance in its own right" (Chambers 1995:3). The institutionality in this particular exchange is also indexed by the absence of conversational features. One of such features are minimal responses facilitating the conversational flow, yet missing in the operator's verbal repertoire. Also, the institutionality of this exchange is evident by a lack of questions, which "encourage extended talk by the addressee" (Cameron 2000a: 336). This kind of questions facilities extended talk, which in turn is recommended by the training manuals.

Extract 5: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry bank X. W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry. Chciałabym się dowiedzieć o możliwości sprawdzania salda na
3. moim rachunku bankowym przez internet?
4. O: (1.0) Chyba nie rozumiem pytania.
5. C: No, czy mogę sprawdzać moje saldo przez internet?
6. O: Ah, rozumiem, tak, może pani jeżeli ma pani hasło.
7. C: Chyba nie rozumiem ⁄⁄
8. O: ⁄⁄musi Pani podpisać umowę na ta usługę
9. C: Hm...
10. O: Musi pani podpisać umowę na każdą usługę, nawet jeżeli chce być pani
11. informowana o saldzie przez smsy.
12. C: A więc jest taka możliwość? Żeby być informowanym poprzez smsy?
13. O: Tak, należy po prostu podpisać umowę w jednym z oddziałów.
14. C: Aha, a czy musze spełniać jakieś konkretne wymagania żeby starać się o tą usługę?
15. O: Nie, nie.
16. C: Aha, *więc* dziękuję i do widzenia.
17. O: Do widzenia.

Extract 5: English translation

1. O: Good morning X Bank. How can I help you?
2. C: Good morning. I would like to find out about the possibility of checking my account
3. balance via the Internet?
4. O: (1.0) I don't think I really understand your question.
5. C: Well, can I check the balance via the Internet?
6. O: Oh, I see. Yes you can if you have the password.
7. C: I don't think I understand ⁄⁄
8. O: ⁄⁄ you need to sign a contract for this service.
9. C: Hmm...
10. O: You need to sign for any kind of service, even if you want to be informed about
11. your balance by short text messages.
12. C: So there is such a possibility? To be informed by the short text messages?
13. O: Yes, you just need to sign the documents in one of our branches.
14. C: Aha, do I need to meet any special requirements to apply for this service?
15. O: No, no.
16. C: Aha, *well* thank you, goodbye.
17. O: Goodbye.

Extract 5 constitutes an interesting example of an exchange in which it is the customer who prompts the operator to continue the exchange. Nevertheless it is still structured by the question-answer format. The initial problem stated by the customer is not utterly clear to the operator. It can even be claimed that the question confuses the operator as she awaits a moment (1.0) to inform the customer about the clumsiness of the question. Further, in the exchange the operator does not make any effort to 'guide' the customer through the terms and procedures. Such an attempt would definitely remove the element of neutrality that characterizes institutional exchanges. The operator acts seemingly aggressively as she interrupts the customer, line 8. This interruption is interactionally unjustified as it does not bring any explanation to the customer's problem. It further confuses the customer (line 9). This interjection does not really make the operator fully account for the issue line. Interestingly, the interactional burden of the remaining part of the exchange is taken by the customer who initiates the queries while the operator offers mere responses. Yet this exchange also illustrates the newly emerging, yet still minor, dynamics of interaction at the Polish CC, where the customer attempts to get actively involved in the construction of the status of the exchange, taking on the operator's interactional duties. As Jacoby and Ochs (1995: 91) claim, "the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity [...] however [co-constructed] does not necessarily entail affiliative or supportive interactions". Consequently, any exchange is cooperatively constructed. Yet in the Polish context this acceptance of interactional burden by the customer tends to index the operator's inability to address the emotional needs of a customer.

6.3. Conversation-oriented customers (cf. Dynamics 3)

Extract 6: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry. Kamila Sowińska. W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry (2.0) halo?
3. O: Tak, słucham pana cały czas.
4. C: Dzień dobry.
5. O: Dzień dobry.
6. C: No ja chciałbym się dowiedzieć o następującą rzecz, to chodzi o kartę Visa. Nie
7. wiem czy powinienem założyć konto (2.0) yy, halo?
8. O: No ja pana cały czas słucham.

·················

9. C: I chodzi o taką rzecz, ta karta może być używana wszędzie, tak, na całym świecie, halo?
10. O: Tak, słucham pana.

Extract 6: English translation

1. O: Good afternoon. Kamila Sowińska. How can I help you?
2. C: Good afternoon (2.0) Hello?
3. O: Yes, I'm listening to you.
4. C: Good afternoon.
5. O: Good afternoon.
6. C: Well, I would like to find out about the following thing, it's about the Visa card. I
7. don't know whether I should set an account (2.0) erm hello?
8. O: Well I'm listening to you all the time.

·················

9. C: And the thing is that this card can be used everywhere, yes, all over the world, hello?
10. O: Yes, I'm listening to you.

This extract can be labeled a transitional one, as the customer is trying to aim at an exchange based on the premises of a conversation. In Extract 6, the negotiation on the part of the customer takes the form of a protest against not applying the minimal responses by the operator. The minimal responses, used supportively, are an interactional device highly recommended by trainers as the elements of active listening. As Cameron (2000b: 96) claims, "extended silence in telephone interactions is problematic, callers need periodic reassurance that the channel remains open". Minimal responses also contribute to the feeling of intimacy, a characteristic of a conversation. The frequent use of minimal responses is particularly important in the context of telephone exchanges, as they also indicate that both parties follow what is being discussed. The customer in exchange six literally demands the use of minimal responses. What is interesting, he is waiting for the operator to use an approving minimal response before stating the problem. The operator repairs it by assuring the customer that she is listening to him. Surprisingly, the customer repeats the greeting, assuming the exchange predominately is based on the premises of a conversation. Since minimal responses are prescribed for the operator, one would expect the operator to carefully monitor her supportive use of this interactional device in the remaining course of the interaction. Yet, in line 7 the customer, in view of the absence of minimal response(s), is again looking for a confirmation that he is listened to. What is interesting is that the customer waits for the minimal response to be skillfully inserted (2.0). The operator again confirms her presence, but fails the third time in line 9. Overall the interaction is very unnatural, does not progress smoothly and thus fails to meet the standards of a regular conversation.

What needs to be underlined however, is the customer's active involvement in the dynamics of the exchange. Unlike in the previous interaction (Extract 4), the customer does not accept the status of the exchange imposed by the operator but tries to negotiate with her.

Extract 7: Polish original

1. O: Dzień dobry Anna Młynarz. W czym mogę pomóc?
2. C: Dzień dobry. Jestem studentką i również pracuję na pół etatu i chciałabym kupić małe
3. mieszkanie. Czy mogłaby mi pani *poradzić*, co mam zrobić, żeby starać się o kredyt?
4. O: Więc jaką ilość pieniędzy otrzymuje pani miesięcznie?
5. C: 1000 PLN, Czy mogłaby pani przeliczyć⫻
6. O: ⫻właśnie to robię.
7. O: Hm. Nie wiem, oczywiście może się pani starać, jest jakaś szansa, ale *scoring*
8. pokazuje że, to znaczy pani nie wie co to jest *scoring* ale istnieje niewielka szansa.
9. Czy ma pani konto w naszym banku?
10. C: Niestety nie.
11. O: A może w jakimś innym banku?
12. C: Yyy, nie, nie mam.
13. A więc nie ma takiej możliwości, to jest przeszkoda nie do pokonania, jeżeli nie ma
14. pani konta, musi pani posiadać konto bankowe przez przynajmniej trzy miesiące. (2.0)
15. C: A więc rozumiem ze musze założyć konto bankowe (1.0) i może potem starać się...
16. O: Tak.
17. C: Hm, OK, dziękuje do widzenia.
18. O: Do widzenia.

Extract 7: English translation

1. O: Good morning Anna Młynarz. How can I help you?
2. C: Good morning. I am a student and I also work part-time and I'd like to buy a small
3. apartment. Could you *advise* me what I should do to apply for a loan?
4. O: well, what amount of money do you receive monthly?
5. C: 1000 PLN. I was wondering whether you could calculate⫻
6. O: ⫻I'm doing it right now.

7. O: Hmm, I don't know. Of course you can apply, there is some chance, but the *scoring*
8. shows that, I mean you don't know what a *scoring* is, but there is a very small chance.
9. Do you have an account in our bank?
10. C: Unfortunately not.
11. O: Maybe in some other bank?
12. C: Erm, no I don't have one.
13. O: Then there is no such possibility, it's an insurmountable obstacle if you don't
14. have a bank account. You need to have a bank account for at least 3 months. (2.0)
15. C: So I understand I need to set up an account (1.0) and maybe then apply...
16. O: Yes.
17. C: Hmm, OK, thank you, goodbye.
18. O: Goodbye.

The customer, in line 3, is trying to introduce a conversational frame. The choice of the lexical item *advise* signifies the expected status of the exchange by the customer. Yet the operator does not respond to the initial conversational footing. She, as prescribed, should ask some questions facilitating an extended talk in order to build a genuine dialogue. Instead, the operator relies on a so-called conducive question that requires a pre-determined answer. Also, in line 6, the customer's mitigated question is stopped by the operator's blunt interruption: *właśnie to robię* 'I'm doing it right now'. This contributes to an interactional asymmetry that characterizes institutional discourse. Furthermore, the operator introduces very professional terminology that the customer may not be familiar with, again building unequal power relations. Consequently, the initial attempt undertaken by the customer is rejected by the operator who proposes and carries out an institutionally-indexed interaction.

7. Conclusion

The call center is an example of a global workplace where strict guidelines upon verbal performance are imposed on its employees, i.e. the CC operators. These norms, to a great extent, coincide with the premises of an ordinary conversation. CC operators, in their interactions with the customers, are to project warmth, friendliness, empathy, and thus do emotional labor. The aspect of *care* takes the form of the interactional strategies and features commonly linked to conversation. At the same time, however, the operators need to be very efficient in settling problems, drawing on the interactional strategies that index institutionality. These conflicting dynamics, i.e. whether this kind of service encounter should resemble more a conversation or constitute institutional discourse (resembling interrogation), have been discussed on the examples of exchanges recorded at selected Polish CCs. For a majority of Poles, any service encounters have been associated with very unequal power relations where 'the customer was not king'. This perspective adds an additional aspect to the interactional dynamics at Polish CCs. A CC with a prescribed customer care ideology may potentially challenge the long-standing tradition of serving the customer in the Polish context, and thus redefine the interactional inequality between the server and the customer. Yet, the conducted analysis indicates that the legacy of the unequal service encounters still exists. Three major interactional dynamics that have emerged evince that the Polish CC is a workplace in the process of defining the status of the interaction between the operator and the customer. The third pattern clearly points out that the Polish customers are beginning to actively orient CC exchanges to a more conversation-premised interactions. Additionally, the conducted analysis proved that "talk is a locally managed phenomenon" (cf. Cameron 2000b: 123). Both operators and customers with their choices of interactional strategies contribute to the institutional or conversational character of the exchange. These characters are not predetermined but rather interactionally achieved.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
(based on those devised by Sacks et al. 1974)

O	an operator (the actual names of the operators have been changed)
C	a customer
//	double slashes indicate point of interruption
(( ))	used for descriptions, not utterances
?,.	punctuation for intonation
noooo	repeated letter for extra vowel length
[ ]	simultaneous speech
x	something was spoken but unintelligible
=	"latched" speech, one speaker follows the previous one without break, no interval between the end of a prior turn and the start of the next piece of talk. There is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first, without overlapping it, the utterances are linked together with equal signs (Schiffrin 1994: 425)
(pause)	pause
....	a part of the exchange has been removed

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