

Rhetoric on sale. Discourse strategies in supermarket interactions¹.

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This article tries to describe, in conversational and rhetorical terms, what happens in ordinary interactions which take place in Italian supermarkets. We show how some conversational routines can be conceived as hidden rhetoric. In doing so, we follow some french scholars, such as Anscombe and Ducrot, who reinvent the relationship between information and rhetoric, giving the latter a more extensive meaning. The research, via natural data, shows how the way by which something is said and its use in a given context produces the meaning.

In my particular field of research, psychology of communication, it was seen as revolutionary the reevaluation, made by some scholars during the '50s, of the recipient's role into communicative process. During that time, all the studies about feedback arose, underlining some limits of the mathematical model for communication, stated by Shannon and Weaver who tried to conceptualize what happens when a message passes from a source to a recipient. According to them it makes no difference if source and recipient are human beings or machines, since what happens is a real and simple transmission of information. This latter word is worth at of attention; it has always meant something about the content level, the core of the problem. Talking about the content, in 1884 in *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* Frege states that only in a context of a particular proposition some words have a meaning; and in my opinion, it represents the first step

¹ A very special Thank goes to Professor Rafael Jiménez for his friendship and his precious advices to this paper.

words have a meaning; and in my opinion, it represents the first step to pragmatics, many years before the so called revolution made by the interactionism. But Frege was interested primarily in guaranting an absolute rigor to mathematics proofs and his efforts is to create a tool which is able to give this rigor; so, in fregean philosophy language has a functional interest.

We have to wait until the philosophers of ordinary language, such as Austin and Grice, to discover that language can do something else, until the exaggerated position of the social constructionism, in according to which we can state that language creates the world.

Without arriving exactly to this conclusion, this research tries to show the functional meaning of some discursive strategies in supermarket interactions.

1. Some methodological outlines

Since I suppose that the readers of *Tópicos* are much more used to approach written data, instead of spoken, and to assume rhetoric as a point of view, instead of conversation analysis, I am going to spend some words about the reason why I have adopted this methodology.

The last decades have seen a lot of discussions among different scholars about the methods by which we can investigate ordinary language. Clearly, linked to this issue there is that about human understanding. From the XVII century, the relationship between human understanding and reality has become dramatic; is it possible to know the world like it is? It is the cartesian question from which all the major philosophic currents of our century take the origin. The problem seems to find a sort of solution with Kant, but it reemerges deeply with the neoempirism and the contemporary epistemology. How do we know the world? How can we know in a scientific and objective way the human being, as part of this world? And how can we know something about the communicative processes, considered as the maximum expression of human being?

Experimental psychology tried to give an answer, being an innovative approach to human sciences and, in particular, for what concerns studies in communication, it represented an alternative to linguistics, trying to make this discipline scientific through validation experiments in labs.

Conversation Analysis wants to put itself quite distant from both these approaches to human communication, experimental psychology and linguistics. To the former, it disputes the fact to extrapolate real context and put them into a lab, and to the latter the study of abstract phrases, living only in the researcher's mind and not in the reality. Trying to match what is good in these two currents, it studies in a qualitative way, which recalls linguistic methodology, what really occurs in natural contexts, wanting to be scientifically and empirically based; the conversationalist, in other words, has not to invent the reality, it has just to observe it from the social actor's point of view, putting in a corner its potential prejudices and its point of view, and lets reality emerge as it is, without putting it in that Procuste's bed which is the lab, a bed of death. The lab, for a conversationalist, is the reality itself and if it is true that there is always the observer's paradox, it is also true that it is mitigated by the assumption to take into account only the social actor's point of view.

1.1 What Conversation Analysis actually is

The theoretical and methodological approach that came to be called conversation analysis developed in the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the same period that has seen, in Europe, as we have already remarked, the explosion of the Cambridge-Oxford philosophy. We could say that the pioneers of Conversation Analysis, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, Sudnow, etc., pick up the heritage of the Cambridge-Oxford approach, linking it with the arising microsociology of Harold Garfinkel, the so-called Ethnomethodology. From the former they inherit the willing to pass from the study of a logic language to the study of the ordinary language and from the latter the idea of investigating it in its natural setting, assuming as a reference not the analyst's point of view but

the social actor's one. They made a sort of revolution, promoting a new way of investigating reality, a way which states that our knowledge about social reality is empirically based and derived from the fine observation of what really happens, refusing not only the idea of a metalanguage which is able to describe the ordinary language as social action but also every *a-priori* system by which approaching reality, typical of the traditional linguistics.

Social interaction and ordinary language had long been phenomena of interest to scholars of social life (as Bale's Interaction Process Analysis or Psychological Ecology of Barker demonstrate) but in the early 1960s the problem was how to study interaction and analyse it using the scientific methods in order to make results reproducible. Conversation Analysis seemed to respond to this cultural anxiety. It represents the effort to study social life *in situ*, examining the most routinized, everyday, naturally, occurring activities in their fine details and to demonstrate that social actions are meaningful for those who produce them and that they show a natural organization that can be analysed. Its basic interest is in finding the rules, the structures that produce that order.

Working at the audiotape recordings from the Suicide Prevention Center in Los Angeles, Harvey Sacks discovered some recurrent phenomena, among which the "asking for a name without asking" is worth of our attention. Sacks noticed the callers often do not give their names; this forces the answerer to obtain them "strategically". He examined sequences between the caller and the answerer such as the following:

(1)

Answerer: This is Mr. Smith may I help you

Caller: yes, this is Mr. Lewis

(2)

Answerer: This is Mr. Smith may I help you

Caller: I can't hear you

Answerer: This is Mr. Smith

Caller: Smith

In the first example the caller provided the name without being asked for it explicitly, whereas in the latter it seems there is a refusal to give the name, although the caller is not asked directly to do so. Sacks states that what the speaker does in its turn is related to what prior speaker has done in the immediate prior turn; this creates exchanges in shape of units, examinable as phenomena in their own right to verify how they are organized and to learn what they accomplished.

The utterance "This is Mr. Smith may I help you" provides a "slot" for the caller to give its name: because the answerer has also identified him/herself with a particular form of address, including title and last name, this form is offered to the caller. The example 2 shows the possibility to refuse this offered form, focusing most on the matter of achieving clarity or understanding.

"When Sacks noticed that these callers (like that one in example 2), later in the call, may refuse to provide a name when directly asked for, and that a direct asking could also lead to requests by the caller for an account (or reasons) for the requests, he was able to argue that the first opening exchange of "This is Mr. Smith may I help you" also was a way of asking for a name without having to provide an account (or reasons) for the asking. Thus an utterance could be found to work in a number of ways. The work that the utterance accomplishes is not limited to one and only one meaning. The closed examination of actual sequences, with attention to the contexts of their occurrence, was found to be particularly informative. Sacks was encouraged to believe that naturally occurring social activities are subjectable to formal description and that such description can permit us to see non-trivial ways that actual activities in their details are simple"².

² G. PSATHAS: *Conversation Analysis. The study of talk-in-interaction*, London: Sage 1994, p. 14.

Thus, the description of social action is transformed into the description of sets of formal procedures which members employ.

What has always been fascinating to me in CA is the assumption made by Sacks, according to which, everything that happens in a conversation has a particular meaning; the question "Why that now?", introduces a belief that gives meaning to every single move during conversation. And this is the reason why we have decided to approach our corpus of data by CA, agreeing deeply that also what some linguists call "scoria linguistica" has a peculiar meaning, because nothing happens by accident, as our corpus of data shows.

We will assume the criteria developed by Sacks to analyse what happens in a shop from a rhetorical and conversationalist point of view.

2. Business transaction between Encounter-type and Talk-type

Donaldson (1979) tried to distinguish what we call "conversation" from two other categories of talk: "business transaction" and "discussion". According to her, "business transaction" includes an authority and another dependent person, and produces ritual verbal procedure, language more predicatable and formulaic, behaving in an official manner and merely exchange of information; it is a talk about nothing. On the other hand, "discussion" has an important outcome and both speakers are considered as authorities; it is a talk about something. "Conversation", finally, represents outward manifestations of dropped social status and has its main interest just in chatting and not in getting information; it is a talk about something.

As this regard, it could be interesting to recall what Brown has done, distinguishing between transactional and interactional speech. According to her, in fact, while transactional speech is concerned with conveying information, interactional speech may "just fill the

time of day"³. But with a rigid distinction between these two aspects we have some problems as concerning our corpus of data, because the encounters it describes do not seem to be just business transactions, producing frequently a sort of mixture of types. This inadequacy of Donaldson's category system depends on the fact that Donaldson is trying to distinguish between activities as different type of *talk* rather than as different types of encounters, as we do. To sum up, there appears to be no simple one-to-one correspondence between social encounters and talk-type. But this assumption could sound strange for someone used to explain exceptions referring to *markedness theory* and to the concept of preference, derived from CA. According to these two last theoretical points of view, deeply linked to each other, we can consider as ordinary, *unmarked*, or preferred, all what naturally occurs in conversation, or, let me say, all what a social actor waits for, and as *marked*, or as a strange element which requires an explanation, all the exceptions to what social actors wait for. The irrationality is only apparent, if we consider that everything happening in a conversation has a meaning, a particular meaning which receives its consistency from the given context and from the use of the words to which it is linked. So, for example, when in a little shop, we have a customer confiding in his/her clerk, this could mean that there is a deep relation among them, that the customer is an abitual one, or the exact opposite, that is to say it is a chance customer who has decided to open him/herself to a perfect unknown person (as happens curiously travelling by train, when we talk to someone we actually do not know). So, we could sum up saying that there are different types of encounters, different social actors, and different types of talk, and they influence one another, making an echo to Wittgenstein's words who states that meaning is given by context and use. We have already spent some words on describing the different types of encounter, referring to Donaldson's work; in the following section we will discuss the different types of social actors.

³ G. BROWN & G. YULE: *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge University Press 1983.

2.1 Types of customers

The social actors involved in a supermarket encounter are clerks and customers.

Anywhere, clerk is usually a middle-class person and, especially in turistic supermarkets, like the shops we have analysed, has always the typical behavior of submission to the other, because like a popular Italian proverb says: "the customer is always right". The clerk, for each shop, is a constant, while we have an huge variety of customers, especially if we consider that the shops we have analysed sell foods, and if it is true that not all the people can be customer of a stockbroker, it is also true that every kind of person goes to a supermarket: someone rich, someone poor, man, women...

About customers, we could divide them among chance customers, regular customers, and familiar customers. Someone could not understand this distinction because, actually, it makes no difference if the person who goes to a supermarket, to buy something, is rich, or poor or whatever; right, but we have chosen small supermarkets, where customers is followed step by step by the clerk, generating a real social encounter⁴ and so do not have in mind megastore where customer is practically alone in its doing shopping. A first difference that marks this typology of customers is given by the *index of fidelity*, which represents the type of attendance, which moves from the chance and only visit to the sporadic, to the weekly, to the daily. Moving from the status of chance customer to that of regular or familiar one involves a reciprocal recognition, while it is quite difficult to mark the passage from a status of regular customer to the status of familiar customer, even if surely the familiar customer has a deeper fidelity; another difference between these two types of customer could be searched in the *relational index*, which gives, with the former, to an interaction based on the commercial exchange which institutes a shared knowledge and reciprocal waitings and,

⁴ It is not a case if Goffman (*Interaction Ritual: essays in face to face behaviour*, 1967) considers business as an occasion of social encounter, as we will see later.

with the latter, to an interaction that can be also intimate, touching personal aspects of interagents (*index of communicability*). There is also an *index of availability*, which determines, or better pre-determines feature, time and degree of discursive interaction.

3. Social Rituals and their rhetorical meaning

Generally we think about rituals as some visible and conventional acts by which someone expresses respect toward someone else or toward something (and this is true, in particular, for religious contexts).

Paul Watzlawick and Palo Alto School consider rituals, among which greeting is considered the most stereotyped example, as very simple interactions made by fossilized communicative links, whose importance lays at a symbolic level, and not at a content one. At this regard, the Palo Alto School is debtor to Durkheim and to his distinction between positive and negative rituals. The formers express an effort to approach the interlocutor and have the purpose to institute, confirm, and support (and this is the reason why they are called supporting rituals) the relationship between two parts, while the latter concern the right to be alone and the "Goffmanian reserves of the self", and express themselves through staying apart, avoiding, interdicting, etc.

According to Goffman, there exist three occasions of contact between social actors, or, in other words, three occasions for supporting rituals: business, chance, shared participation to social appointments. Everyone gives sense and basis to the interaction, that is to say conventionalized acts with relative implications.

Business transaction, in short terms, consists of an opening and closing sequence. The gap between the two is given by the authentic commercial interchange, starting with the request of some food or service by the customer. The opening sequence consists of greetings, which can or cannot be preceded by a sort of contacting procedure, which has the important function to open the communicative channel and to put the interagents in contact. It is

realized by politeness formula, such as "scuSI ", "sorRY ", or strategies of catching the attention, such as coughing or raising up a finger.

In ordinary interactions contacting procedure is different from greeting sequence because the latter is autosufficient (greeting/greeting is a meaningful interaction), while the former needs, at least, the latter to be meaningful (two contacting procedures alone take to nothing). These two procedures merge thanks to hat happens in business transactions, because also greeting/greeting in a commercial context has no sense alone and needs something else to be meaningful, needs that the interaction goes on woth a sort of requirement by the customer.

3.1 Greetings

The opening of a social encounter represents the starting point of a bigger access among participants and it is marked by particular rituals called greetings. Greeting has always been considered as a supporting ritual because, even if it opens the interaction and so it is projected forward, is retroreferent to the pre-existing relation among participants (also because it is rare, out of some interactions, such as commercial and service exchange to greet someone we do not know). Talking about supermarket interactions, this retroreference is valid only for regular and familiar customer, because for the chance customer greeting is, clearly, only projected forward, being a tool for opening the interaction.

Greeting, in commercial interactions, has also another important function, that is to say it is used for attenuating the request of the customer; it is a rhetorical strategy which legitimates the customer to make a request, because actually, in our society, requiring is something very strong, not always allowed; but without any requiring there is not commercial exchange and so these rituals make requests polite and acceptable.

Ex. 1

Customer: buonasera

Clerk: buonasera

Customer: avete del lievito per pizza?

Clerk: certo che no! è in buste da cinque, va bene?

Customer: sì, cos'è il Bertolini? ((while the clerk is looking for the yeast))

(...)

Customer: good evening

Clerk: good evening

Customer: do you have some yeast for pizza?

Clerk: clearly, we don't! it is in pack of five, o.k.?

Customer: yes, what is that? Bertolini? ((while the clerk is looking for the yeast))

(...)

Ex. 2

Customer: buongiorno

Clerk: giorno

Clerk: dica

Customer: come è quell'insalata? è di oggi?

Clerk: sì, è freschissima, vede? ((bringing the salad near the customer))

(...)

Customer: good morning

Clerk: morning

Clerk: tell me

Customer: how is it that salad? is it arrived today?

Clerk: yes, it is super fresh, you see? ((bringing the salad near the customer))

(...)

Ex. 3

Customer: avrebbe mica del vino? in fresco ((entrando nel negozio))

Clerk: sì, qualcosa ci deve essere, diamo un'occhiata ((muovendo verso il banco frigo))

(...)

Customer: would you have some? cold wine ((moving into the shop))

Clerk: yes, something should be left, let's have a look ((going toward the fridge))

(...)

We can underline that most of the moves are symmetrical, so that in the example 1, the first greeting, "good evening", shapes the second, "good evening" as it happens in example 2 where to the first "good morning" it follows "morning". This rule we refer to as symmetry rule is valid also for the last example, where to the lack of greeting it follows directly the answer to the request.

This last example could seem to violate the rule according to which it is necessary to introduce an element that makes the request soft, such as some greeting; but if we analyse in details, we can note that even if it is true that the customer explicit immediately his request, he uses a conditional verb, which originates a polite and soft behaviour in order to make the request "allowed".

Sometimes it can happen that it is the clerk to elicit the sequence of requesting, questioning the customer about his/her requiring, and, anyway, the move of requesting, as we will see is always a move by both interactants, cooperating each other, as to quote Grice⁵.

3.2 Closing sequences

In ordinary interaction we are used to conclude the communicative process through some leave-takings, which mark the end of the contact period between interactants; for this reason, leave-taking has no a particular content meaning, but it assumes a symbolic meaning by which we communicate to our interlocutors that we have spent happy moments with them and that we regret to go. On the contrary,

⁵ H. P. GRICE: *Logic and Conversation in Cole*, P. e. J. L. MORGAN: "Syntax and Semantics", vol. 3, *Speech Acts*, pp.41-56. London: Academy Press 1975.

closing an interaction by simply going away without any leave-takings is a sign that something has gone wrong.

Opening greetings refer to the period passed without seeing each other, while closing sequence is projected toward the unexpected loss of possibilities to meet each other in the immediate next time. According to Goffman, as much longer the separation has been as more expansive the greeting, and as much longer the separation will be as more expansive the leave-taking.

There are three different types of closing rituals: acknowledges, leave-takings and wishes. Rhetorically speaking, from the clerk's point of view, every move is a way to thank the customer, because, finally, it is him/herself to have an income from the situation, even if the customer receives service and food in exchange. From the customer's point of view thanks are a sign of politeness, sometimes present, sometimes absent; but note that very often the familiar customer receives some particular service, such as the reservation of fresh bread (which could be no more available) or some gift, such as aromatic herbs, to which it can react only through thanking, like in the following example.

Ex. 4

(...)

Clerk: ti ho messo il prezzemolo, s[ai?

Customer:

[grazie

(...)

Clerk: I have put the parsley, you kn[ow?

Customer:

[thanks

We have noted an interesting detail: the clerk thanks the customer in the exact moment in which he/she receives money from the latter, marking that in our society it is impossible to take money from someone else's hand without saying anything; another time a rhetorical strategy to make this delicate move soft and allowed.

4. Requiring

As we have already underlined the commercial interaction has its focus in requesting the food/service by the customer, or in the eliciting the request by the clerk and in the following moves, consisting in words and facts.

In order to better understand the requiring sequence we are forced to talk about *adjacency pairs and insertions*.

Returning to our examination of the first example, it is quite easy to find out that, as we have already marked, what speakers do in their next turns is related to what prior speakers have done in the immediate prior turn, generating exchanges such as greeting-return greeting, which could be seen as a single unit, called by Sacks *adjacency pair*.

As units, adjacency pairs are organized in two turns; speaker change occurs such that one speaker produces the first turn and a second speaker produces the next; what happens in the first part of utterances is relevant to what happens in the second. The rule of operation of such adjacency pairs is that if the first pair part is recognized by the speakers, then "on its completion the speaker should stop and next speaker should start and produce the second pair part from the pair of which the first is a recognized member"⁶.

Ex. 5

(...)

Customer: due cornetti

Clerk: con crema o cioccolato?

Customer: uhe:m, uno e uno.

Clerk: eccoti. ((giving the customer two croissants))

⁶ H. SACKS, E. SCHEGLOFF, G. JEFFERSON: "A simplest Systematics for the organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation", *Language*, 50 (1974), 4, p. 730.

(...)

Customer: two croissants

Clerk: with chocolate or creme?

Customer: he:m, one and one.

Clerk: here, you are. ((giving the customer two croissants))

In this example, we have a back-request produced by the clerk in order to disambiguate the first request by the customer. This inserted question is a way to open the factive answer by the clerk, who wants to serve the customer, anyway, but who needs some information more in order to be sure to give the customer what he/she really wants.

It could be useful to recall what Psathas has said, commenting the development of CA and explaining the importance of discoveries such as *adjacency pairs* or *insertions*.

“The significance of these discoveries should not be underestimated. For the first time in the study of social interaction, sequential structures of actions were discovered in naturally occurring situations. A new unit of interaction had been identified, one that was genuinely interactional because it involved two persons, one speaking first and the other next, in close temporal order, in immediate turns. Adjacency pairs were of importance in this early work because their discovery demonstrated that members were attuned to the production of ordered sequences. This was not an analyst’s construction. The meaning of the social action could not be understood without considering the sequence; that is, a first part was a first in relation to what happened in immediate next turn. To understand the meaning of what persons were doing required attention to the sequences of their actions...”⁷.

⁷ PSATHAS: *Concersion Analysis. The study of talk-in-interaction*, 1994, p. 20.

Note that the clerk very rarely gives his/her agreement to the customer's request without saying nothing, just with the simple executing the service act; more often it happens that he/she says something, such as "yes, of course" or "yes, why not", or "here, you are", like in our example 4; in my opinion this could be seen, especially the first two cases, as violation to Grice's maxims⁸, generating an implicature, in according to which the clerk answers not only to the explicit voice of the customer but also to a second implicit voice which slips the doubt about the quality of the shop or of the service, producing something we can call enunciative splitting. It is interesting also the explicit enunciative splitting by the customer who could say "some white bread *but* fresh", or "two kilos of apples *but* big", etc. This adversative connector, "but", is to be intended not as an internal contradiction but as a sort of opposition to a clerk's splitting who has not taken into account all the needs of the first locutor; and being a sort of second request in advance represents a rhetorical strategy by which the customer is sure to reach his/her aim.

When it is the clerk to elicit the request, we have something like "please", or "tell me", which underline the role of listener the clerk gives him/herself; and this procedure expresses the importance of the sequence of requesting, we have considered as the core of the commercial interaction, because, especially in small shops where customers are used to be served, nothing happens until the explicitation of the request.

There are different rhetorical strategies the customer can use to make a request; first of all he/she could produce a sort of question about the existence of the product, like in the example 1, where the customer produces a question about the existence of the yeast as a preliminary strategy to the request. The customer could produce also an interrogative-negative question about the existence of the product, like "Don't you have some bread?", where the negative value of the

⁸ See H. P. GRICE: *Logic and Conversation in Cole*, P. e. J. L. MORGAN: *Syntax and Semantics*, London Academy Press, vol. 3, *Speech Acts*, pp. 41-56.

question is given by the morfeme "not", which underlines, a part from some discursive orientations of "not p", for which, you may see Ducrot⁹, some fear not to find what he/she is looking for; fear which is confirmed by the clerk's answer, who, as we have already seen, adds something like "of course" or "why not", which answer to the second negative insinuation by the customer and puts him/herself into the sphere of the *ethos* strategies, by which he/she tries to defend and confirm its positive image of well-supplied shop.

It is curious that to the question about the existence of the product, sometimes the clerk answers producing a question like "how much?", which at the same time presumes the existence of the product and the willing by the customer to buy it; sometimes, the clerk puts the answer to this question into the customer's mouth, producing something like "one kilo?"; interesting rhetorical procedure, by which the clerk lets the customer know the minimum amount of a decent request.

Another type of requiring is the question about the prize, an interesting rhetorical strategy by which the customer forbids the back-question by the clerk who would say "how much?", leaving for him/herself the right to decide if it can effort the prize and so producing an insertion to which it can follow a real request or a going away. Note that asking for the prize presumes the belief that the shop is supplied with the product it is looking for.

Ex. 6

Customer 2: ne avete ancora di squaquerone ((a particular soft and fresh cheese))

Clerk: sì, sicuro ((serving the prior customer))

Clerk: eccoti. ((giving the customer 1 a pack of walnuts))

Customer 1: grazie, buona giornata.

Clerk: ((talking to customer 2)) è proprio freschissimo oggi, lo squaquerone ((showing it to the customer)). glielo do intero?

(...)

⁹ O. DUCROT: *Dire et en pas dire – Principes de sémantiquelinguistique Hermann.*

Customer 2: do you still have squaquerone ((a particular soft and fresh cheese))

Clerk: yes, sure ((serving the prior customer))

Clerk: here, you are. ((giving the customer 1 a pack of walnuts))

Customer 1: thank you, have a nice day.

Clerk: ((talking to customer 2)) it is really super fresh today, the squaquerone ((showing it to the customer)). Do I give you entire?

(...)

In this example the customer produces a very particular rhetorical preliminar strategy by which, in the meddle of his/her move, which arrives before its real legitimation, it reveals to the clerk what it is looking for; this procedure, on one hand, is a way to signal its own presence, and, on the other, a way to obtaining the right information about the product, because clearly, nobody wants to wait for something that does not exist. This anticipated request is produced, usually, exploiting the point of possible completion in the prior speaker's turn, following the canonical rules for taking the conversational turn, expressed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson¹⁰. It is interesting to see the reaction of the clerk, who becomes a voices' recoverer, taking back some information of the anticipated request and producing a very particular version of the elicitation of request. This example underlines very well the importance given to the customer's words, if it is true that the clerk has to keep in memory what the customer has asked for.

5. Paying

The payment of the bill is a sequence deeply ritualized; the clerk says the amount, gives the food and the ticket, while the customer prepares the money, receives the food, gives the money, receives the eventual rest and takes the ticket. The operation which originates the payment is the receiving of food from the hands of the clerk, who generally says at the same moment "something else?", or "is it all?";

¹⁰ H. SACKS, E. SCHEGLOFF, G. JEFFERSON: "A simplest Systematics..."

note that these questions finish only thanks some move by the customer, such as "that's all", or a simple answer "no".

To sum up, we can see as follows the ideal (but does it exist something "ideal" which empirical researches?) commercial exchange:

-Opening sequence:

-Approaching strategies:

-Customer: greeting ("good morning")

-Clerk: (symmetrical) greeting ("good morning")

Commercial Transaction:

(Clerk: elicitation of requesting ("tell me"))

Customer: requesting ("I would like five sandwiches")

(Customer: attenuation ("please"))

Customer: agreement and producing a service ("yes, immediately")

Customer: possible new requesting ("and do you have fresh salad?")

Clerk: possible (new) elicitation of requesting ("something else?")

Customer: requesting ("two red apples")

Customer: agreement and producing a service ("here, you are")

Customer: possible new requesting...("and some...")

Paying the bill:

(Customer: requesting the bill ("how much?"))

Clerk: saying the amount ("one dollar")

Customer: giving money

Clerk: giving food, taking money

Closing Sequence:

Clerk: acknowledgements ("thank you")

Customer: thanking ("thank you")

Customer (or Clerk) leave-taking ("good-bye")

Clerk (or Customer): back-leave-taking ("good-bye")

Customer (or Clerk): wishes ("have a nice day")

Clerk (or Customer): back-wishes ("you too")

Conclusion

We have tried to show, in conversationalist terms, how both clerks and customers in commercial interaction use rhetorical strategies to reach their aims.

The corpus of data analysed confirm some recent discoveries by Anscombe and Ducrot¹¹, who reinvent the relationship between information and rhetoric, as each move in some context has a particular meaning, and, assuming that human beings are rational, we can hypothesize that our actors choose not by accident some particular rhetorical strategies in order to reach their aims and this is confirmed by the fact that to these discourse strategies we have some particular responses by the interlocutor, meaning that both interagents conceive them as functional to something very precise.

In our approach, rhetoric is not simply a question of variation; even if it is possible to tell the same stories in one hundred different ways; to us there will be one hundred different stories.

The idea which seems to me fascinating about this mixture between rhetorical studies and conversation analysis is that usually rhetoric focuses its attention on the figure of the source, trying to describe the effects of some actions, while conversation analysis has its unit of research in the interactional play between source and recipient, underlining how rhetoric is pervasive, and, making an echo to Burke¹², how every thing we do is done in some way in a rhetorical manner.

¹¹ J. C. ANSCOMBRE & O. DUCROT: *L'argumentation dans la langue*, Mardaga: Liège 1983.

¹² B. BIESECKER: *Addressing Postmodernity: Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric and a theory of social change. Studies on Rhetoric and Communication*, University of Alabama Press 1997.

Transcription Notation

(rosa)	Uncertain transcription
(xxx)	Not audible
((alzando le mani))	No verbal moves
[Represents points of overlapping
:	Colons represent lengthening of the preceding sound; the more colons, the greater the lengthening
<i>Rosa</i>	Stress
Ros-	A hyphen represents the cut-off of the preceding sound.

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