

Dr. Sara Orthaber (University of Maribor)

Title

(Im)politeness at a customer service centre: a cross-media comparison

Abstract

In this talk, I provide an insight into manifestations of (im)politeness in customers' requesting and complaining behaviour in authentic Slovenian institutional interactions. Specifically, I examine (im)politeness in technologically mediated interactions between representatives of a state-owned company and customers, in which customers request information or complain about a service received. First, I highlight the normative behaviour in requesting information via telephone and email and then look at deviant cases where, following interactional trouble of some sort, the exchanges become unexpectedly inappropriate and thus open to evaluations of impoliteness. Evaluations of impoliteness are further explored in customer complaints to the same company. I demonstrate that the way complaints are articulated and responded to varies across media. On the telephone, face-threatening behaviour is targeted at the institutional agent and the customers appeal to the agent's sense of fairness. On public social media pages, Facebook and Twitter, the customers distort the image the company aims to project. I argue that the customers' flaming behaviour differs from that identified in complaint calls because of the public nature of social media. In other words, aggressive behaviour and humour are devised for different audiences as separate communicative goals, whereby the verbally aggressive behaviour is aimed at the company whereas other followers are meant to enjoy its humorous potential with the objective of providing support through likes and affiliative comments. Overall, I illustrate that complaints are managed in a rather non-accountable manner on both media and reveal the discrepancy between the infrastructural services and the pseudo-modern image, the company aims to project.

Kurzbiografie

Sara Orthaber is based at the Department of Translation Studies, University of Maribor, where she currently teaches courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. She has published scholarly papers in international peer-reviewed journals on pragmatics (*Journal of Pragmatics*, *Pragmatics & Society*, *Internet Pragmatics*) as well as in international edited collections.