

CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES IN TATTOO PARLOR DISCOURSE

By

HEATHER GOODE

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To all friends, family and strangers whose conversations have inspired me, either as  
participant or eavesdropper

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## LIST OF TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Lines of speech are separated in order to reflect phrasal intonation units. Notations were chosen to facilitate an analysis of topicalization and topic development.

A	Artist
C	Client
<u>word</u>	Emphasized word or phrase
...	2-5 second pause
xxx	Unintelligible speech
( )	Approximated transcription
[[ ]]	Parenthetical notes added by researcher

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By

Heather Goode

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Studies on service encounters have shown that service encounter dialogue typically consists of both transactional as well as interactional speech, and that professionals do a great deal of conversational work in order to build a personable rapport with their clients. In contrast to more routine service encounters such as grocery store check-outs and retail enquiries, in which rapport-building activities are relatively limited due to the brevity of the encounter, interactional speech tends to occur with greater distribution and with greater complexity encounters which entail a more extended, personalized service, such that hair dressers and other service-oriented professionals engage more personal topics with their clients in order to build a more personalized rapport. The occurrence of this speech behavior is conditioned by a number of contextual features which are specific to this subgenre. These conditions include the duration and frequency of the encounter, the physical positions of the participants, and the extended silent period resulting from the service being performed. Tattoo parlors are one such setting, where these conditions manifest so as to necessitate certain features in the discourse. In this study, data was collected at a local tattoo parlor using ethnographic observations and interviews in order to assess the

professional practices of a tattooing business, as well as the specific contextual conditions in which artist-client discourse occurs. Subsequently, conversations between artists and clients were recorded and analyzed using Conversation-Analytic methodology to determine whether and to what extent these environmental conditions constrained the discourse. Some of these conditions, such as the extended length of time required to complete the service, are known to occur in other encounters, such as hairdressing, and as a result some features of tattoo parlor discourse resemble that of other encounters which entail an extended service. On the other hand, tattooing services are somewhat unique due to the highly personalized nature of the service and the lack of routinization of tattooing appointments. Such features correlated with discursive features that are different from most other service encounters, which do not have these contextual pressures, or have them to a lesser degree. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature on service encounters by demonstrating how the form and function of interactional speech, as it occurs in service encounters, is specific to the environment of the encounter. Furthermore, this study contributes to a more systematic typology of service encounter discourse by aligning and categorizing discursive features according to the contextual features of a speech setting, rather than the speech setting itself.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

During my first tattooing experience, I found myself reclined in a chair, staring up at a series of nude paintings while the artist inked the tattoo into my skin. When I complained about the pain, burning and numbness, the artist would recite anecdotes about each painting and his complicated relationship with his ex-wife.

From a lay perspective of professional discourse, there is nothing about such an interaction that would be considered to be professional behavior. In my experience, I have found that tattoo parlor discourse has been considered by both tattooing professionals and laypeople to be properly outside the realm of professionalism. Artists and clients use profanity and slang; they talk about topics that in other “professional” contexts would conventionally be considered inappropriate.

From a descriptive standpoint, however, this kind of discourse is highly professional in that it attends to a very specific set of contextual pressures that both the client and artist must deal with in this particular service context. Listening to the artist talk about his ex-wife distracted me from the unyielding pain inflicted by the tattoo gun; it added character to my rapport with the artist, and made the experience feel special and memorable. Like the discourse of any other service encounter, tattoo parlor discourse is constrained by the expectation that the encounter is to result in a transaction. However, the contextual specifics that are present in this particular setting create a set of constraints and parameters for how the interactants go about accomplishing this task. Tattoos are a personal and permanent investment for the client, and artists use specific discursive strategies to understand the client's vision for the tattoo and to explain their own professional limitations. Likewise, tattooing appointments are inherently

uncomfortable in that they can be quite painful, and the client must sit still for a long period of time; thus, artists do at least some discursive work in order to mitigate this discomfort so as to make the experience more pleasant for everyone.

Moreover, generalizations which position tattoo parlor discourse as a deviant type of service discourse only describe a very small portion of the speech behaviors which artists and clients actually display over the course of an entire appointment, and they overlook those speech behaviors which are also known to occur in other service contexts. In some ways, tattoo artists talk to their clients in much the same way that hairdressers do. For example, the relatively long duration of the service and the close proximity of the client and professional are variables which create the opportunity for the client and artist to engage in a much more personalized type of discourse and develop a more cooperative rapport than is typically seen in shorter service encounters, such as a supermarket checkout (McCarthy 2000). On the other hand, tattoo parlor discourse also demonstrates a few features which are characteristic of a wider range of service encounter types. For example, the pattern that interactants will often interrupt or abbreviate small-talk in order to exchange information which is directly related to the transaction has been observed in just about all kinds of service encounters (Toerian and Kitzinger 2007, Kuiper and Flindall 2000), and tattooing appointments are no exception to this norm.

Sociolinguistics and discourse analysis has produced a rich body of literature describing the structure of Public Service Encounters (Aston 1988a), which is generally regarded in the broadest sense as discourse that is purposed toward producing a transaction from which both parties benefit. While most research in this area has

focused on Shop Encounters (Traverso 2001) such as supermarkets (Kuiper and Flindall 2000), corner shops (Placencia 2004), and hotels (Aston 1888a), more recent studies have attended to the subgenre of Close-Contact Service Encounters, which implicate an extended, personalized service, such as haircutting appointments (Toerian and Kitzinger 2007). One of the hypotheses to emerge from this line of research, as proposed by Ventola (1983), is that context plays a crucial role in constraining the discourse; specifically, that the values of contextual variables correlate with the occurrence or absence of features of the discourse. Thus, this hypothesis allows for some basic predictions about the discursive features of unknown speech situations, in this case, the tattoo parlor. For example, the speech behavior of “relational talk,” which involves unstructured conversation, relatively personal topics, and deeper exploration of such topics, is known to occur in Close-Contact Encounters where the extended service allows time for the interactants to discuss topics which are not directly related to the service itself. Because this same contextual variable occurs in the tattoo parlor, the hypothesis predicts that this same speech behavior also occurs in this speech setting.

Therefore, this study will further explore Ventola’s (1983) hypothesis in an environment which, to my knowledge, has yet to systematically described as a service encounter. The objective of this study is to answer the following questions: 1) What are the contextual variables in the discourse of the tattoo parlor, and 2) how do these variables make tattoo parlor discourse similar to, and different from, other types of service encounters which have already been studied? These questions are useful from a theoretical perspective because they explore the role of situational context in constraining the speech behavior. Many of the contextual variables which occur in other

service encounters coalesce in the setting of the tattoo parlor, and therefore this setting offers a rich laboratory for analyzing the behavior and interaction of such variables. Moreover, these questions contribute to the descriptive literature on service encounters by allowing for a more diverse perspective on what counts as service discourse and the variety of speech activities which could possibly occur between a customer and a serviceperson.

## CHAPTER 2 DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study was collected in two parts: ethnography and conversation analysis. The ethnographic phase included a variety of ethnographic methods which were purposed toward assessing the professional practices and norms in a local tattoo parlor, as well as customers' expectations for tattooing services. Ethnographic interviews were conducted on-site with artists and clients at a local tattoo parlor. These interviews were also complemented by informal interviews with tattoo enthusiasts, which generally focused on clients' experiences during the tattooing process, as well as an overview of online customer reviews of the local tattoo parlor participating in this study. This ethnographic information was analyzed for generalizations about the context in which tattoo artists work, particularly with regard to the contextual variables that make the tattoo parlor similar to or different from other service encounters that have been discussed in the literature.

During the second phase of data collection, conversations between tattoo artists and their clients were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Recordings took place during the consultation and tattooing stages of the appointment, and resulted in a total of 8 hours of recorded material. Some of these sessions were dense with conversation, and others consisted mostly of silence with brief pockets of conversation dispersed throughout. Conversations were then selected for transcription according to their relevance to the generalizations derived from the ethnographic analysis. These transcripts were then analyzed using Conversation-Analytic methods, with particular attention to topicalization, turn-taking and conversational achievement. The objective during this phase of data analysis was to assess the speakers' relational as well as

transactional goals in their interactions with each other, and to determine whether these goals have any relationship to the contextual variables found in the ethnographic analysis as well as literature review.

The task of recording the sessions, as well as asking the client for consent, was generally left to the discretion of the artist, and I was not present during the recording process, or was only present briefly to help set up the recorder properly. The reason for this decision was that tattooing appointments are inherently uncomfortable for clients, both physically and psychologically, a factor which is further discussed throughout this paper. Therefore, the artist themselves were considered to be best suited to determine which clients would be good candidates for participating in this study. Because the Institutional Review Board required only verbal consent from this study's participants, the artists were also tasked with asking each client for consent. The clients would then confirm consent through an explicit acknowledgment in each recording, so that I was able to ensure that the informed consent process was carried out properly.

The participants who were recorded for this study consisted of two artists and three clients, resulting in three separate appointments transcribed for analysis. Two of the clients were white males and the ethnicity of the third was unknown, and though their exact ages are also unknown, an estimated range based on my judgment is between 18 and 40 years old. Because the focus of this study was on the situational context of professional discourse, social variables such as race, gender and age were not factored into the analysis, and the artists were not asked to select for these variables in taking the recordings. This is also in accordance with the Conversation-

Analytic perspective employed in this study, which generally does not attribute speaker's discursive decisions to demographic variables.

It is also important to note that among the 3 appointments included in this study, two different tattoo parlors are represented. Two of these appointments, both by the same artist, were collected at Bodytech, which is also the site where most of the ethnographic data was collected. The third appointment was recorded at Anthem, and is not accompanied by extensive ethnographic information, since it was collected during a preliminary stage of this study. More detailed information about each recording is included alongside the transcripts in Appendix B.

Therefore, one of the issues raised through these methods is the extent to which the resulting conclusions can be generalized beyond the participants and the businesses they work with. Chapter 3 explains the professional practices of the tattoo parlor, and this information was derived mostly through the ethnographic work conducted at Bodytech. On the other hand, the components of the tattooing appointment as I describe them identify very closely with my prior experience with tattoos, both in the United States and in Peru, as well as the experience of others I know who have received tattoos elsewhere. While tattoo parlors can vary to some extent in their size and business arrangements, it seems that the process of creating a tattoo as observed at Bodytech is fairly typical in this industry.

On the other hand, this study includes only a small sample of participants, and so the size of the sample is going to severely limit the extent to which the conclusions explain the behavior of other professionals. Furthermore, studies which concern themselves with the ethnic and gender variables of speech may regard this data as

representative of white male artists, not all artists. However, the purpose of this analysis is not to describe how tattoo artists and clients talk, but rather to show what kind of speech behavior is possible, and in some cases, what kind of speech behavior may be necessary, in a particular set of situational conditions. In this sense, these conclusions may be generalizable with regard to the specific conditions – or contextual variables – discussed in the analysis. That is, an analysis of each contextual variable as they occur in this service context may inform studies on other kinds of service encounters in which these variables similarly occur.

The process of collecting data, both ethnographic and linguistic, presented a number of difficulties which deserve discussion for others who wish to continue research on tattoo parlor discourse. Firstly, as explained in Chapter 3, a tattooing appointment consists of 3 stages: greeting, consultation, and inking. Only the inking stage is included in this data; artists began recording after negotiating the tattoo and before the stencil-sketch section - and continued through the inking session, though the artists usually shut off the recorder just before the participants made their final partings. In general, the artists preferred the protocol of asking for consent and turning on the recorder just after negotiating and agreeing on the design of the tattoo, rather than earlier. This preference was due to the fact that carrying out this process at this point in the appointment was the least intrusive to the artists' job and their rapport with the client. Tattooing appointments are uncomfortable, painful, and sometimes very personal for clients, and therefore, artists would not ask the client for consent to being recorded until after they were able to establish a good rapport with the client. For this reason, it was impractical to begin recording as soon as the client walked through the door,

especially since the receptionist or artist who greeted the client often (for legal purposes) had to elicit confidential information from the client such as their name, age, and information about their health. Furthermore, artists reported having trouble recording conversations which were purposed toward negotiating the design and price of the tattoo. Sometimes, these conversations would take place a few days or weeks before the client came in for the tattoo to be inked. Additionally, artists often worked in a fast-paced environment and preferred to wait for a brief lull in their interaction with the client before asking the client for consent. For the artists who participated in this study, the best time to do this was just after agreeing on the design of the tattoo.

Because of these difficulties, the recorded data does not include greetings and partings, and a bulk of the consultation is also omitted. As a result, this study lacks data which may show tattoo parlor discourse to be more similar to that of more ordinary service encounters. That is, greetings, partings, and negotiation are speech activities which occur in a variety of service encounters, and describing how these activities occur in the tattoo parlor would contribute further understanding about the function of these speech behaviors, as well as which speech behaviors are universal in service contexts.

Researchers who wish continue this line of research, in tattoo parlor discourse as well as other Close-Contact Services, should be aware that the recording of conversation may be considered by both clients and professionals to be highly intrusive in any context in which the success of the encounter depends on the management of the clients' emotions, an issue which is further discussed in Chapter 5. Above all else, the artists did not want to damage their rapport with the clients. However, future studies on tattoo parlor discourse would benefit from recording greetings, partings and

negotiation, and researchers may want communicate to the artists that the abovementioned difficulties are to be expected, and work with the artists to plan around these difficulties. Researchers should also be aware that tattooing appointments often take place in acoustically hostile environments: hard, smooth surfaces, tile floors, and loud music, although they meet the sanitary and aesthetic requirements of the tattooing business, also made it exceedingly difficult to take intelligible recordings, and most of the data aside from the 3 appointments included in the analysis had to be discarded as a result. This is a difficulty which will require personal attention from the researcher through trial and error regarding the type of recording device used and its placement relative to the participants.

## CHAPTER 3 TATTOO PARLOR DISCOURSE AS A SERVICE ENCOUNTER

### **Defining the Service Encounter**

One of the benefits of studying the Public Service Encounter (Aston 1988a) is that as a genre it is relatively easy to situate. Service can be conceived of as a situation in which one person “does” something for another in exchange for something else. Just about everyone has some idea of what a service encounter is in the sense that they know what happens during these encounters (exchange of goods or services), where they take place (public establishments), and who participates in this activity (a professional and a customer). In other words, an intuitive idea of what constitutes service *per se* consists of a set of conditions of time, place and social roles which conspire to produce some kind of transaction, one which typically benefits both parties.

Linguistic definitions of service encounters tend to follow these intuitions by focusing on the concrete, contextual properties, rather than linguistic properties, which typify this speech event. A basic definition comes from Merritt (1976), for example, who identifies service encounters as any situation in which a professional (e.g., sales representative, server, attendant) is “officially posted” in some area where a customer's presence prompts some kind of interaction between said parties, and where the exchange of goods and services, typically for money, is carried out through this interaction. This definition was one of the earliest attempts to characterize a situation which is cross-culturally ubiquitous and intuitive. While it may be a bit too limited in its scope (for example, the service-giver need not be “posted” in a concrete location in order to be said to be providing a service), Merritt's definition has endured in this line of research because it says that in order to a service encounter to be considered as such,

there must be a finite set of contextual requisites in place. This is in contrast to saying that a service encounter only occurs when certain types of speech occurs. This latter approach seems to be especially problematic for the study of service encounters in particular because it would have trouble accounting for the pattern that certain speech behaviors are inherently borne out of, and often necessitated by, specific contextual factors, rather than the other way around. For example, certain types of service encounters such a hairdressing appointments, the extended service of cutting hair allows time for the participants to engage in more personalized conversation; it is not the case that these service encounters take more time because the speakers opt for longer conversations.

Other seminal studies in this area tend to follow through on this theme by focusing on the primacy of context in shaping this speech event. For example, Halliday and Hasan (1976) proposed that it is the speaker's transactional motive which constrains this type of discourse, and furthermore included a set of parameters, FIELD, TENOR, and MODE, which assign values to the various contextual variations in which service may occur, such as the type of goods being sold, the relationship between the professional and customer, and the medium of communication. Relying on this framework, Ventola (1983) regarded such aspects as “situational variables” which to a large extent condition the features of the text itself. Crucially, this assumption produced a hypothesis that the present study will explore. That is, “If the values of the situational variables are kept constant, the texts will resemble one another....This means that by looking at the situational variables and the values by which they are realized, as well as the correlation between the situational features, we can assign texts to certain registers or vice versa –

by assigning values to the situational variables we are able to make predictions about the meanings to be expressed in a text and about how the meanings are encoded or realized linguistically” (Ventola 1983 p. 243). One of the key implications of this hypothesis is that it does not claim that the situation *determines* text per se, but that it simply exerts an influence on the text which is assumed to observably evidenced in the text itself. This influence may occur, for example, in the form of differential cultural norms enforced on different speech settings; e.g., haggling is allowed in some settings but not in others. However, more central to Ventola's point is that situational variables influence the nature of service encounter discourse in very real and concrete ways. For example, in relatively brief encounters such as a supermarket checkout, conversation, if it occurs at all, tends to be (but is not necessarily) limited to small-talk and relatively impersonal topics, if for no other reason that the speakers do not have the time to elaborate on the idiosyncrasies of their personal lives. On the other hand, the extended period of (awkward) silence which commonly occurs during a hairdressing appointment tends to provoke more personal topics and deeper topic exploration because the participants have more time to kill. What is empirically sound about Ventola's hypothesis is that rather than addressing causation, it simply predicts a positive correlation between the length of the encounter and degree of topic elaboration.

These approaches differ from each other in some minor respects, such as differing opinions the importance of setting and type of service in determining whether a service encounter is taking place. However, the common principle to be distilled from these similar approaches is that service encounters can be discriminated from other types of speech situations in that they are characterized by the mutual assumption that the goal

of a service encounter is to produce a transaction which will benefit both participants. This holds true even if the transactional goal is not actually met; for example, if the business is out of stock of the item the customer seeks, or the customer simply has some kind of question about the business's services, but does not intend to buy anything; the interaction is still related to a transactional goal in that the interactants can at least determine whether a transaction is possible – either at that moment or some later time. In fact, the non-realization of a concrete transaction is an inherent hazard of some types of service encounters. For example, the PIXI project (Aston 1988a, 1988b, Ciliberti 1988), one of the largest corpora of service encounter dialogues, sampled recorded conversations at a customer service counter where customers had some kind of special request or had trouble finding what they were looking for, and came to the counter seeking help. The vast majority of the encounters in this particular context did not result in the customer walking out of the store with book in hand, but more often walked out with a better idea of where to find it, or a better understanding of why the store did not carry it. Yet with the exception of successful realization of a concrete transaction, by all other empirical measures, these bookshop encounters undoubtedly fit the bill of service encounters. This example illustrates that regardless of their outcome, service encounters should be defined as such according to the a priori assumptions that speakers hold about the purpose of their interaction with each other, namely, a transactional purpose. The server assumes that the customer wants (or may want) a product or service which the enterprise offers; and the customer assumes that the server is capable of (or may be capable of) providing the product or service that the customer is seeks.

## **Close-Contact Service Encounters and the Tattoo Parlor**

The present study concerns itself with the sub-genre of service encounters that is constituted by an extended personalized service, that which most commonly occurs between hairdressers and their clients, but which also describes the work of tailors, dentists, or in this case, tattoo artists. This type of service has been labeled as Close-Contact Service Encounters (McCarthy 2000) in that the client and the serviceperson remain in close proximity of each other for a relatively extended period of time. This lengthening of the encounter is a direct result of the type of services these businesses offer: it simply takes more time to complete a tattoo than it takes to check out groceries. Another feature is that the product being provided tends to be more tailored to the unique preferences and needs of the client; that is, the serviceperson is not handing the client a book or a bag of groceries but rather, the product (haircut, dental cleaning, tattoo) is created by means of a process which constitutes the bulk of the encounter itself. As this study will show, all of these properties which are characteristic of Close-Contact Service Encounters crystallize in the setting of a tattoo shop, and are moreover reflected empirically in the discourse between artist and client.

In the existing literature on service encounters, the vast majority of descriptive studies on this genre do not deal with Close-Contact Service Encounters, which seem to be a relatively recent addition to this line of research. Most studies in this area have focused on the subgenre of Shop Encounters (Traverso 2001), such as open-market shops (Ayoola 2009), bookstores (Aston 1988a, 1988b), grocery stores (Koenraad and Flindall, 2000) and convenience stores (Placencia 2004), to name a few. We can also extend the concept of the Shop Encounters to settings such as a Hotel check-in (Aston 1988a) and call centers (Cheepen 2000), since, for practical purposes, they also share

some essential properties: Shop Encounters tend to be relatively brief, usually lasting less than a few minutes, and they are also highly routine and to some degree formulaic. In Shop Encounters, the greater social distance between the customer and the server tends to result in a relatively impersonal rapport with each other (Aston 1988b). These properties may vary to some extent depending on cultural and contextual factors. However, the objective here is to distinguish between Shop Encounters and other types of service encounters which do not necessarily display these properties – or display them to a considerably lesser degree – but can still be said to count as Service Encounters in the sense that they are motivated by the mutually assumed goal of producing a transaction.

Therefore, one of the key disclaimers about the Service Encounter literature is that generalizations about the fundamental properties of service encounters have been derived mostly from observations on Shop Encounters, and were not necessarily designed to account for the unique properties of other types of transactive exchanges. Notably, most of the theoretical groundwork on Service Encounters was laid out before the advent of online shopping and automated customer service calling centers (Cheepen 2000). In a similar manner, many of the generalizations which are based on Shop Encounters tend to overlook those properties of Close-Contact Service Encounters which make this subgenre so textured. A good illustration of this problem is the common presumption that Service Encounters are routine. For example, Lamoureux (1988) rightfully treated his data on retail stores as “routine yet complicated (p. 94), and Ciliberti (1988) extended the property of routinization to PSE discourse by pointing out that that the roles of server and served are institutionalized through the

discursive formula that one person makes a request for goods or information and the other is obliged to comply. Such generalizations are by no means misguided considering the types of service encounters on which they are based. However, we run into some problems when applying these generalizations to Close-Contact Service Encounters. On one hand, hairdressing appointments are far less routine than trips to the grocery store, yet in another sense they can be considered very routine in the sense that clients often visit the same hairdresser for each encounter. Thus, in comparison to cashiers, for example, hairdressers have been observed to do a bit more conversational work with their clients in order to personalize the encounter and build unique relationships with them (Sharma and Black 2001, Toerian and Kitzinger 2007). Moreover, any assessment of the variable of routinization becomes even more complicated in describing the tattoo parlor. Most clients will get only a few tattoos in their lifetime, and unlike the clients of a salon, most tattoo clients do not stop by their local tattoo artist once a month to get some work done. Among those aficionados who get a new tattoo on a regular basis, it is common to visit different artists in order to sample a variety of styles and artistic personalities. The point here is that, while we do not want to say that some PSEs are routine and others are not, what we can say that is that some PSEs are more routine than others, and a select few are hardly routine at all. Moreover, in any study which considers situational context as a complex system of variables which constrain discourse in specific ways, the researcher may want to include an attentive discussion of the unique behavior and signification of such a variable as it occurs in each context, so as to achieve a more textured view of the speech behaviors which occur in those contexts.

In accordance with our working definition of service as interaction which is motivated by the goal of producing a transaction, the transaction in a tattoo shop consists of the tattoo artist drawing a tattoo on the client's body in exchange for a fee and sometimes, a tip. This process can be rather lengthy, if measured from the time a customer is greeted to the time they walkout with a fresh, bandaged tattoo. However, for typological purposes, this process is in some ways similar to that of a hairdressing appointment in that it consists of 1) a greeting, 2) a consultation and 3) the inking session. 1) When a client walks into a tattoo shop, they are usually greeted by a receptionist, artist, or manager, who assesses the client's needs and then refers them to the appropriate artist, depending on factors such as the artist's schedule and artistic style. 2) Then the artist begins a consultation with the client, which may last about fifteen to thirty minutes. The goal of the consultation is for the client and artist to discuss the design that the client is looking for, and ultimately for the two parties to agree on a draft for the design of the tattoo. However, despite the best efforts of the artist to (ideally) customize the product, consultations, if carried out properly, also require the artist to communicate their own stylistic preferences and limitations. The client may bring in their own photo or a sketch from which the artist designs a custom tattoo, or the client may pick from a stock selection of pre-designed tattoos available in the tattoo parlor. Other clients may start out with something more like a generalized concept and allow the artist some artistic leeway. Once the artist has some idea of what the client wants, he or she produces a draft sketch of what the actual tattoo will look like, so that the client can preview the sketch and give some feedback about size, coloration, texturing, and other aesthetic details. A successful consultation results in an

appointment for the tattooing session, which may occur immediately after the consultation or as many as a few months after the consultation, depending on the artist's availability.

3) The inking session begins<sup>1</sup> as the artist draws an outline of the tattoo with temporary ink and transfers it onto the client's skin so that the client may get an idea of what the tattoo will look like. This is the point in which the client may express some final concerns and expectations for the tattoo before the tattoo becomes permanent. Once the artist and client agree on the details and placement of the tattoo, the artist begins to draw the tattoo onto the client's body, a process which constitutes the bulk of encounter as a whole. As is the case with the particular business (Bodytech) observed in this study, some tattoo shops offer piercing services. These services, for the purposes of this study, demonstrate the same structural properties as tattooing services in that they consist of a consultation and the actual piercing session, and like tattoos, piercings are painful, personal, and sometimes dangerous. On the other hand, piercings are not quite as permanent as tattoos, and piercing services are somewhat faster than tattooing services.

In most respects, tattoo service fits in rather congruently into the subgenre of Close-Contact Service in that many of the contextual pressures which are present in these encounters are also active in shaping the discourse between tattoo artists and their clients. Tattoo work is 'close-contact' in the sense that the artist stays in close contact with the client's body for a relatively extended period of time. Tattoos can take anywhere from 15 minutes to several hours to complete; and more extended body work

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<sup>1</sup> The artists who participated in this study turned on the recorder just before beginning the stencil-sketch.

such as a full arm sleeve, which covers the entire arm from shoulder to wrist, is usually done over the course of several sessions. One could liken this situation to a hair waxing appointment or certain types of medical exams to understand the mild social tension that develops when two people are very close together for an extended period of time, but are not necessarily interacting. On the other hand, many tattoo clients describe the tattooing experience as a psychologically and physiologically intriguing experience, and the absence of interaction during the tattooing process is not necessarily marked; both client and artist have the option of zoning out, much in the way that a client of a hair salon may quietly relax while the hairdresser carries out the haircut. In any case, what we want to capture about this service context is that, like other Close-Contact services, the time it takes to complete the service creates an interactional void in the encounter as a whole, which, as this paper will explore, creates the opportunity for more prolonged conversation, a kind of interaction which typically is not fostered in Shop Encounters.

Another theme which becomes highly saturated in the setting of a tattoo shop is that of personalization, a theme which is also typical of beauty salons. Tattoos often bear a personal significance to the client, sometimes to memorialize a memory of a person, place, or event, or to express some important aspect of the client's interests or belief system. In a well-drawn, well-designed tattoo, these abstract significations are going to be reflected in the composition of the tattoo itself, and so it becomes ever more important that the artist understand the client's conceptualization of the tattoo design. When the tattoo is not loaded with symbolic meaning, as is sometimes the case, the artist is nonetheless at pains to customize the look of the tattoo according to the client's aesthetic preferences. Clients typically walk into the shop with their own idea for the

design of the tattoo; they may already have a photo or a sketch, or they may simply describe, with varying degrees of specificity, a mental visualization. Even if the client opts for a stock design, there is still a potential for adjustments to the design with respect to color and size; even the client's body type, skin color, and choice for the tattoo's location are often going to necessitate aesthetic adjustments. Moreover, the bottom line in all these decisions is that the tattoo is permanent, far more so than a haircut. This means that the tattoo should not only be customized according to what the customer wants at that particular moment (as is the case in a beauty salon), but that the tattoo should be customized to less transitory aspects of the client's preferences: that is, in order to endure the test of time, the tattoo ultimately has to fit in with the client's personality and mode of self-expression.

One of the reasons for differentiating between Shop Encounters and Close-Contact Encounters is that customers seem to have different schemata about the meaning and importance of customer service in these two types of settings. In Shop Encounters which involve the purchase of concrete goods, such as a supermarket or bookstore, customers seem to place far greater importance on the selection and pricing of the store's inventory. This observation is illustrated by the following sample of comments from online reviews of a local grocery store, with each numbered review written by a different reviewer:

1. If I want interesting, cheap local veggies and (I presume) meats, this is a destination shopping place for dinner. I still do most of my shopping at the Publix on Main simply due to location and selection, so Ward's is, for me, that place I go to get the specialty items that they don't carry.
2. What you DON'T go to Wards for is the regular everyday sundries, like paper towels, and shampoo and sliced bread and cream cheese. You will not find the brand you want and it's all very expensive. I understand supporting local businesses, and I do my part, but I refuse to pay 3.99 for four rolls of toilet paper.

3. Support your local grocers & farmers. The produce section is fantastic, with fresh vegetables and fruits that you can't find elsewhere. Also, the meat dept. has fresh cuts of meat and seafood. The wine and beer selection is divine, as is the organic foods section (again, carrying items I can't find elsewhere). They carry plants ranging from ferns to herbs to seeds.

Some of the reviewers also included comments about their shopping experience; however, the themes for these types of comments on the whole tended to focus on the layout of the store as well as the business's community-oriented culture, rather than their experience interacting with the employees:

4. The people who shop at Ward's are so diverse. You have the single mothers who bring their fifteen children in to go grocery shopping for the week, but then there's also that flannel-wearing alternative kid in the bulk foods aisle scooping out raw macadamia nuts. *The place is pretty unorganized and random. I've turned a corner looking for chicken broth and ended up face-to-face with organic soap and candles. The large selection of pig parts can be intimidating but intriguing, and the store has its own distinct smell – kind of like Asian markets do. It's something that I can't put my finger on, but that's the Ward's experience.*

Among these examples, the shopping experience (as opposed to the product) can certainly be said to play a critical role in the customer's level of satisfaction with the business, but the client's satisfaction with the product seems to be a prime determiner of their overall level of satisfaction. By contrast, the customer's 'experience' in Close-Contact Service Encounters can entail a very different set of factors. Most importantly, the customer's interaction with the employees of such businesses (as opposed to the layout of the setting) seems to be a significant factor in the customer's overall experience with the business. This is shown in the following examples of reviews from a local hair salon. Relevant sections are emphasized in bold.

5. *Rudest Staff I have ever spoken to. Very difficult to schedule and appointment. Then I finally got an appointment and unfortunately had to cancel last minute due to a family emergency. The person on the phone rudely told me that they have a 24-hour cancellation policy and they would bill me for my next cancellation. News flash...it's a hair salon...not a surgery suite. I have purchased a LivingSocial deal*

*with them, and have yet to be able to schedule an appointment. They find out that I'm a living social client and treat me like garbage.*

6. *I don't remember the name of the girl who cut my hair, but while she was very sweet and easy to talk to, I feel like she didn't really listen to what I wanted done.... When I first got there, she had me sit down and do a 10 minute consultation. One word: awkward. She asked me robotic questions and had me scaling my hair from 1-10 on dryness, volume and how much I liked it. It was really uncomfortable and felt very forced... most of the questions didn't even relate to what I wanted done. She kept prying on how I would like to color my hair if I ever did, even though I had stressed that I loved my natural color....I left the salon with some uneven strands and spent the next week trimming away at my own hair every time I passed a mirror. Unfortunately I am now going to have to try another salon to try and get what I originally wanted.*
7. *Have been seeing Bryan for 2 years. He gives excellent "dry cuts." Best part is – he listens :-)* Great with color. Highly recommend.

Of course, when it comes to hair salons, the customer's level of satisfaction with the product seems to be firstly determined by the quality of the product (as any victim of a bad haircut would attest). The importance of the product was evident in that the vast majority of reviews about this particular salon exclusively involved comments about the haircut itself. However, what deserves attention here is that in this type of service, we begin to see at least some emergence of server-client interaction as a major factor for determining the customer's overall experience, a factor which does not seem to be active in Shop Encounter to such a degree as seen in Close-Contact Encounte

One of the rather surprising patterns that emerged from customer reviews about the tattoo shop observed in this study was the extent to which the client's experience with the artist mattered to the clients, seemingly far more so than the product itself. This pattern seems rather counterintuitive considering what's at stake in a tattooing service: a tattoo is far more permanent than a haircut, and certainly more so than a bag of groceries. In the online reviews, clients talked a lot about the artist's level of professionalism and respect for the client, as perceived through their interaction with the

artist. These reviews show that some of them pay very little attention to the end product, with some failing to mention it all. Since the tattoo shop observed in this study also offers piercing services, some of the reviews include comments about their piercing experience:

8. I don't normally go through the trouble to review places, but Body Tech was fantastic! I went on a Sunday to get a VCH piercing [a type of female genital piercing] and was hoping for a female piercer to be there (my fault, I should've called ahead). *So Justin was there and he was laughing and joking with me from the moment I stepped in, it was great. The entire experience was better than I could have imagined. He was very thorough at explaining everything to me, and completely put me at ease (even though my legs were shaking!) for my intimate piercing. Overall, it was a great experience and I'm so happy I trusted Body Tech :) Thank you, Justin! Just noticed the person before me said that the male piercer was rude, Justin was very EFFICIENT and gave me the time to ask plenty of questions, which I did.* So please don't let that review dissuade you, and always ask all the questions you want. Don't let anybody rush you.
9. Was somewhat satisfied with my experience. The receptionist was very *friendly, personable and ready to help*. However, *the male piercer that handled me the day I went in was very hasty, and somewhat rude. I felt like he didn't care about making my experience good, he seemed like he wanted to be done with me in seconds*. I wasn't even handed a mirror at the end of my service, and I was not shown that the needles were sanitized. I would not go back to Bodytech for any piercings, but would possibly go back to buy jewelry.
10. Went last weekend for my birthday. Had an older tat touched up, and my wife got her first. *Very clean, professional staff that was great with whole process. Chad did an awesome job with my wife and set her mind at ease being her first time*. I went back this weekend and had Chad put another on my right shoulder. Awesome Job!! Very detailed, multi-color....highly recommend.

So far we have considered a handful of variables which seem to behave differently in Close-Contact Service Encounters, as opposed to Shop Encounters. The length of the encounter, the physical proximity of the server and client, and the degree to which the product (or service) is personalized to the client, all conspire to lend greater weight to the interaction between server and client. Additionally, a cursory look at these customer reviews suggests the emergence of *investment* as another variable which

may forcefully influence the customer's expectations regarding their interaction with the serviceperson. Tattoos are of course a much greater monetary investment than groceries or haircuts. However, they are also a mental and emotional investment in that clients often put a great deal of thought into their concept; for some, they are a physical investment in that tattoos may be excruciatingly painful and take a considerable amount of time to heal. Most importantly, tattoos represent an immense *personal* investment in that they are integrally and permanently connected to the client's sense of identity, and how that identity is perceived by others. With these considerations, the unexpected emphasis on the artist's bedside manner at the cost of emphasis on the product begins to make much more sense. What clients seem to be internalizing in their reviews is that they want to feel like the artist fully understands the weight of their investment, a perception which is ultimately negotiated through talk and interaction.

## CHAPTER 4 HETEROGENEITY OF SPEECH IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

Service encounter discourse is heterogeneous (Traverso 2001) in the sense it consists of a variety of speech activities, some of which are directly relevant to the transaction itself, some of which is entirely peripheral to the task of producing a transaction. While a customer and serviceperson typically exchange information about the product, pricing and return policy, in many contexts they are also likely to talk about the weather and their daily lives.

This dichotomous model of categorizing speech activities was first developed by Brown and Yule (1983), who described the distinction between interactional and transactional speech. On one hand, transactional discourse is the negotiation of needed information, and is characterized by an emphasis on accuracy. Thus, the goal in transactional discourse is to achieve mutual comprehension between the participating parties. Interactional speech, on the other hand, is the negotiation of shared attitudes and interests – talking for the sake of establishing friendly relations – and is characterized by priority on agreement rather than accuracy. Widdowson (1983) later consolidated this transaction/interaction distinction by hypothesizing that all speech is aimed at sharing information – more specifically, “the convergence of speakers’ schematic worlds.” However, for Widdowson, the difference between transactional and interaction speech is that the former works toward the convergence of “cognitive schema,” and the latter works toward mutual affect.

Most of the earlier studies on the procedural aspects of service encounter discourse (Merritt 1976, Ventola 1983) have focused transactional speech, which tends to be the most procedural, formulaic, and ultimately the most universal speech behavior

among service encounters, while interactional speech serves the purpose of subtly breaking with tradition and positioning the participants as real people, rather than “institutional incumbents” (Aston 1988b). This conclusion is evidenced in the observation that the transactional elements of a service encounter tend to be the most formulaic, so as to lend predictability to the flow of the encounter – as if to standardize the method by which transactional information is elicited and expressed. So far we have seen a few examples of efforts to formalize the service encounter into a set of procedures and formulaic expressions (Ventola 1983), and these frameworks have shown that the procedural features tend to promote the transactional side of this coin. In fact, the connection between routine actions and routine formulae is demonstrated explicitly in a study by Kuiper and Flindall (2000), whose data confirmed that “routine actions which require routine speech acts will have those routine speech tasks performed using primarily speech formulae” (p. 188). In other words, those routine (and often obligatory) elements such as openings, requests for payment, and closings will be made to be even more predictable through the use of formulaic expressions which are most closely associated with those stages of the transaction.

For our purposes, transactional speech in the context of a service encounter involves the exchange of information that is necessary to the consummation of the transactive goals of the service encounter. For example, based on observations of service discourse between sales representatives and customers, Lamoureux (1988), concluded that transactional speech is shaped by the overarching rhetorical imperative that “servers and customers strategically [use] conversational procedures to align the servers relative ability to provide aid with customer needs” ( p. 106). These findings

are very similar to those of Mazeland, Marjan, and Huisman (1995), whose analysis of consultations between travel agents and clients showed that these types of conversations are governed by the contextual constraint that the client and professional must “agree upon a description that meets the wishes of the former and the possibilities of the latter” (p. 271). That is, the customer had some kind of conceptualization of the type of vacation they wanted, and the travel agent had to find out their specific requirements in order to meet these needs. More importantly, the travel agents did extensive conversational work to explain their capabilities and limitations in meeting these needs. For example, if a customer had the idea that children's plane and bus tickets were less expensive than adult tickets, the agent sometimes had to explain that this was only true in certain circumstances, and sometimes, this was not true for the client's particular case. Under this lens, Widdowson's (1983) conceptualization of transactional discourse as purposed toward schematic alignment begins to look much more relevant to the genre of Close-Contact Service Encounters: the client and the serviceperson each have different schemata about the outcome of the service, and therefore the goal of consultative discourse is to align the client's and serviceperson's schemata in order to agree on a description of the outcome of the service.

Within the literature on service encounters there are also a handful of studies (Aston 1988b, Traverso 2001) that have explicitly focused on the distribution of interactional speech and how it interacts with transactional protocol. Such studies have typically treated interactional speech as optional in the sense that the absence of interactional speech is not necessarily marked, although nonetheless plays a culturally relevant role. In the context of service encounters, interactional speech has been

observed to occur in a number of different forms, and that each of these realizations served different functions and are “optional” to varying degrees. For example, greetings and partings have traditionally been regarded as interactional because they do not essentially contribute to the goal of producing a transaction, and also because they are markers of politeness and respect. They are associated purely with our dealings with other humans, rather than truth-conditional meaning. However, virtually all the literature on the structure of service encounters (Ventola 1983) has found greetings and partings to be so pervasive in the data that for practical purposes, they are obligatory. In contrast to other types of interactional speech, greetings and partings serve an additional purpose which is strictly structural, by signaling to the interlocutor that the service encounter has begun or finished. Because of this function, one could argue greetings and partings are quite essential to the success of the transaction, despite their interactional status. Likewise, speakers do quite a bit of facework (Goffman 1955) in order to show respect, deference and empathy toward their interlocutor. Service encounters are rich with potentially face-threatening acts and impositions; for example, a request may pose too great an imposition on the server, or the server may be unable to comply with a reasonable request, and these types of queries are inherently face-threatening. In order to mitigate these social hazards, interactional speech may be sprinkled throughout the dialogue in the form of hedging, apologies, praise, and the like. Thus, we can see that although facework is not fundamentally necessary for getting the job done in service encounters, it clearly plays some kind of facilitative role, and ultimately bears some importance to the participants on the cultural level.

In contrast to the structured, culturally required procedures we have seen so far – that is, sequences which constitute transactional conversation – interactional speech may also manifest in the form of unstructured, interactional conversations, involving small talk and the more personal relational talk (McCarthy 2000). Interactional conversation in this sense is characterized as “unscripted talk” (Cheepen 2000, p. 289), during which speakers may bring up whichever topics happen to be culturally acceptable for the given situation. Interactional conversation tends to be relatively independent and tangential to the transactive goal of the encounter. This study also treats interactional conversation as behaving differently from greetings, partings and facework. While the latter categories tend to occur closely alongside the transactional speech (as in, for example, hedging a request before specifying the request itself), interactional conversation tends to occur in isolated patches during parts of the encounter when transactional information is not a priority. For example, at the checkout, interactional conversation is most likely to occur while the cashier is checking the items individually, as this action tends to create an unstructured silent period, during which the participants may either keep to themselves or opt to make casual conversations. In the genre of close-contact service encounters, interactional conversation often is not limited to small-talk, but may include more personal topics. Hair dressers especially (Toerian and Kitzinger 2007, Sharma and Black 2001) have been observed to engage with their clients in topics revolving around the participants' families, careers and daily lives. This speech behavior which is known to occur in such settings has been discussed by McCarthy (2000) as relational talk, in which “important information is exchanged through the medium of sociable chat which vouches for the current situation of the participants

and gives them useful perspectives on their server-client relationship” (p. 98). In part, this study will support McCarthy's discussion by showing some of the concrete conditions which allow for relational talk to occur in the tattoo parlor, conditions which also show up in other close-contact encounters.

Because the occurrence of interactional conversation appears to be motivated by the presence of these (perhaps awkward) silent periods, Cheepen (2000) describes conversation as occurring in the form of “interactional islands” (p. 290), which similarly occurs in other transactional exchanges such as interviews and medical consultations, and is usually initiated by the interactant with greater power over the discourse, e.g., the interviewer, doctor, or, in the case of service encounters, the server. This generalization is very similar to one formulated by Kuiper and Flindall (2000), who described the occurrence of interactional speech as one as an “interactional overlay.” That is, “small talk at the checkout is framed by the rituals of greeting and leave-taking on the one hand (as it often is elsewhere) and the exchange section of the matrix interchange on the other. It fills the otherwise silent interstices with inconsequential speech in the sense that nothing practical generally follows from it” (p. 203). Thus when we say that service encounters consists of both transactional and interactional speech, what we mean is that it consists of a transactional tradition (i.e., procedure), with optional conversation (sometimes) occurring where the protocol allows for it.

In a descriptive framework which relies on a dichotomous system of categorization it is important to note that these two categories are inherently discrete, and that in many cases it is possible for any unit of speech to serve both an interactional and transactional function. However, this study takes the position that, while a dichotomous

model may be oversimplistic for describing some speech events (for example, an unstructured phone conversation), in the context of the service encounter such a model is especially appropriate for describing the distribution of the various speech activities that occur in this genre. This is not to say that in this context there is no such speech which could conceivably serve both transactive and relational goals. However, despite this possible overlap, this study will present evidence that transactional speech and interactional speech occupy distinct niches within this speech event; they occur in complementary distribution, and exhibit distinct discursive features in terms of topicalization, topic development and conversational achievements.

Firstly, in describing the distribution and function of interactional conversation and transactional conversation, as they occur in service encounters, it would be unrealistic to give equal status to these two different speech behaviors in the service encounter context. In the context of service encounters, some speech activities are directly relevant to the transactive success of the encounter, while other speech activities are not. On one hand, transactional speech is instrumental to the success of many types of service encounters, which very often involve the exchange of specific information, without which the business transaction cannot be consummated. However, this notion is debatable when it comes to interactional conversation; as will be demonstrated, there are varying perspectives on whether interactional speech is ultimately instrumental to the transactive success of the encounter.

In the data used in this study, the artist and client would typically talk while the customer was positioned in a chair for tattooing, while the artist carried out the various stages of the service, whether setting up the equipment, drawing and applying the

stencil sketch, or applying the actual tattoo. Talk would usually occur in the form of conversational pockets lasting about a few minutes, but sometimes longer. One of the patterns that showed up was that regardless of whether these conversational units consisted of interactional or transactional speech, they were usually punctuated by some show of agreement, such that agreement can be considered as a conversational achievement. However, the critical difference is that agreement in transactional speech was clearly necessary to the satisfactory continuation of the service itself. This generalization is illustrated in the following excerpt, in which interactional and transactional speech occur discretely alongside each other. Relevant lines are emphasized in bold text.

#### EXCERPT 1

1     A     So what's the reasoning behind the girl on the motorcycle?  
2     C     Um  
3         To be honest I just  
4         ...  
5         I don't know I like it  
6         ...  
7         It's just uuuh  
8         The idea of [[low, rapid speech]]  
9         (You know what I mean?)  
10        xxx  
11        I feel like uuuh  
12        It's hard for me to  
13    A     xxx  
14    C     It's gonna be with me for a long time  
15        ...  
16        I'm all for tattoos that xxx  
17        (And to say that it has no meaning)  
18    A     I know a lot of people are like  
19        what does that tattoo mean it doesn't mean anything  
20        well it does really have to  
21        **check that out**  
22        ...  
23    C     It's pretty good  
24        ...  
25        I thought it I thought it was gonna go a little lower

26 I mean I like the size  
 27 A I mean I can make it lower if you want  
 28 I could make it lower we can bring it down  
 29 C I mean I like the height  
 30 ...  
 31 I guess  
 32 ...  
 33 Well I'm looking for a xxx so I guess we can add stuff onto it  
 34 A Yeah we can always add stuff onto it  
 35 C xxx  
 36 A Like if you want the dragon like you're talking about  
 37 We can xxx bring it around  
 38 I mean if you want I could lower this down  
 39 C No I mean  
 40 The height's good  
 41 Where it starts is good  
 42 ...  
 43 It's alright that's good  
 44 And we'll just add stuff as we go along  
 45 A Alright right on  
 46 Alright well let's let that dry on there and I'll get everything else  
 47 all set up  
 48 Are you sure before I throw this away?  
 49 C Probably because xxx but I kinda wanna look at that a little bit more

Despite the fact that this sequence of conversation is contiguous, we can see the excerpt clearly divided into two distinct topics which have no apparent relation to each other: at first the participants talk about the general significance of the tattoos, but then they conclude that conversation in order to negotiate the placement of the tattoo. At line 1, the artist asks the client about his philosophy on the meaning of his tattoo, a topic which the client expands to the significance of tattoos in general. As the client has some difficulty explaining his answer in lines 2-12, the artist aligns himself with the client's lack of clarity by stating that tattoos do not have to mean anything – implying that the client is not obligated to justify his reasons for getting this particular tattoo. Thus, by line 20, the client and artist seem to be in agreement regarding the topic of the significance of tattoos. On the other hand, in line 21, the artist switches to transactional speech through

the use of a direct comment, after which the participants engage in transactional speech as they negotiate the placement of the tattoo; we see the client making a series of statements about his expectations and preferences, and the artist responding with statements and offers describing his ability to meet those expectations. However, by the end of the excerpt, the participants seem to find a sense of congruity between the client's wishes and the artist's capabilities.

Thus, as far as the data in this study is concerned, the agreement and consensus functions as a conversational achievement in both transactional and interactional forms of talk. Each topical “pocket” builds up to a consensus between the speakers; speakers aggregate new information into the conversation in such a way that each new unit of information complements, explains or supports what the interlocutor previously stated. However, the critical difference is in determining what it is that they are agreeing on. On one hand, we have already discussed that interactional speech is oriented toward the negotiation of shared attitudes; which in this case means attitudes about tattoos. This principle, insofar as it explains the kind of agreement observed in Part 1 of this excerpt, is in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) remarks on the function of politeness. If the purpose of all politeness is for speakers to maintain a consensus about each others' face wants, then all language behavior is motivated by the need to find common ground. While speakers' interests are certainly “culture-specific and ultimately idiosyncratic,” there do exist “well-defined areas of common ground between any two members of society” (p. 64) Between strangers, such an area may be limited to an interest in nice weather, and between friends or intimates these areas will probably be severely more specific and elaborated. The point is that in any kind of interactional speech in which

speakers are trying to establish a friendly rapport with each other, they are likely to capitalize on such areas of common interest, with respect to the kind of relationship they have, or the kind of relationship they want to have. On the other hand, agreement in transactional speech has very little to do with shared attitudes; in this case, the speakers must agree on a description of the placement of the tattoo. Thus, the transactional half of this excerpt demonstrates the observation by Lamoureux (1988) and Mazeland et al. (1995) that the client and server must agree on a description of the service which meets both the client's needs and the server's capabilities. Crucially, the difference between "transactional agreement" and "interactional agreement" is that only the former has any concrete bearing on the successful consummation of the service itself. That is, the service encounter cannot continue without the transactional agreement; in this case, the tattoo artist could not have begun drawing the tattoo onto the client's body if they had not agreed on where the tattoo would be placed. In contrast, interactional agreement does not affect whether the tattoo artist could continue doing what he needs to do.

Another reason to employ the interaction/transaction dichotomy is that, in the data, conversation seems to take a back seat to the more essential aspects of the transaction – that is, conversation is usually secondary to the transactional procedures necessary to carrying out the service. Speakers may truncate or briefly interrupt an interactional conversation in order to attend to some transactional imperative; but not the other way around. Likewise, there are cases wherein speakers may use a transactional topic as a launch pad for some conversational topic, but it would be less likely for a conversation to spur a transactional topic. These observations suggest a distributional motivation for

the markedness of conversation in this context: that is, conversation is more marked than transactional discourse; and that conversely, the absence of transactional discourse is more marked than the absence of conversation. This does not necessarily mean that conversation is entirely “optional” in this context; in fact, the total absence of conversation would make for a somewhat awkward tattooing session, and we have already seen examples of customer reviews which suggest that customers expect servicepeople to be friendly and personable in close-contact encounters. However, what we can say is that, based on the distribution of transactional and conversational speech, transactional conversation is essentially obligatory, while interactional conversation comes with varying degrees of optionality.

The “transactional imperative” which these observations seem to suggest is in part illustrated by the excerpt mentioned above. There is a very quick transition in lines 20-21 from conversational to interactional talk; within the same turn, the artist switches from declaratives to commands, with hardly a pause in between. In this case there is clearly a seam between two different manners of speaking. These same observations are also illustrated in the following example, which is extracted from the same tattooing session as the former, and also happens to consist of two topical “pockets,” the first conversational, the second transactional. Like the first excerpt, the transactional segment begins when the artist switches from statements and other parenthetical comments to imperatives, in order to reposition the client's body.

#### EXCERPT 2

50     A     my phone keeps ringing  
51             who is calling me  
52             ...  
53             I love when a get a text message and it's just like  
54             one word like

55            okay or sure  
56    C        yeah  
57            I hate that kinda thing man  
58            I try to use xxx  
59            (I have a bit of a) crappy phone though that's why  
60    A        Well I have a crappy phone though too y'know  
61            I'm sure it's a lot easier to send texts xxx  
62            ...  
63            **Alright**  
64            Bring your chair really close to here  
65            [[chair moving]]  
66            Aaaaaannn kinda just drop your arm up over the top of this  
67            Annn you're basically gonna kinda sit back  
68            And this is way too high  
69            ...  
70            Okay try that  
71            ...  
72            How's that feel?  
73            Is that uncomfortable?  
74    C        I'm not uncomfortable  
75    A        Okay it's not uncomfortable on your armpit or anything?  
76    C        No I'm good  
77            If you got a good angle  
78    A        I'm good  
79            Cool

As in the first excerpt, here there is clearly an imperative to do transactional agreement: the artist needs to position the client's body in order to begin the tattoo, and does a bit of work through a series of question in lines 70-73 to confirm that the position is acceptable for the client as well. Moreover, the present excerpt suggests that in addition to a transactional imperative, there also exists in this context a relational imperative. When the artist's phone keeps ringing, potentially interrupting his work in addition to alienating the customer, the artist engages the topic of phone etiquette, and the client subsequently participates. Thus, griping about phone problems has an inclusive effect on the discourse as a whole (Boxer 1993); it creates the potential to build empathy, consensus and discursive cooperation. Here, it appears that the impetus

for such relational work was at least in part spurred by the artist's phone ringing, such that a “relational imperative” is either created or reinforced by some of the environmental conditions which are external to the speech itself. Such a hypothesis would entail that there are other such conditions present in the close-contact genre which may help to explain the greater occurrence of such relational work, relative to shop encounters. For example, the long periods of silence, and the invasion of privacy to the client's personal space, create a sense of awkwardness that compels the participants to ameliorate social tension by engaging in relational work. This hypothesis is further supported by McCarthy's (2000) data on driving lessons, which for our purposes he considers to be a close-contact type of encounter precisely because the participants are stuck together in close proximity for an extended period of time. Here he comments on the relational talk which was observed while the student and instructor were stuck in traffic for some time, and the instructor had no specific driving instructions at that moment:

The imperative is to fill an inactive silence, but the participants eschew other possibilities (e.g., such as talking about driving techniques, or the car itself) and opt for a wider conversational topic which enables them to advance their personal knowledge of each other. As in the hairdresser's they seem to be expressing a need to maintain a good, sociable, ongoing relationship, one which must pass the test of several more “captive” encounters within the confines of the small metal box that is the car, from which neither party can escape for 45 minutes, just like the hairdresser's chair. Whether consciously or not, participants seem to know that successful construction of this kind of service genre and achievement of its goals has as much to do with the relational aspects as with getting the task done, and opportunities to consolidate the relational level are grasped by whichever party or parties is in a position to do so. (p. 103)

So far in this section we have looked at evidence that the environmental conditions in which server-client discourse occur create a set of opposing “imperatives,” – that the situation requires the participants to attend to the needs of their relationship as well as

their transactional goals; and that both of these imperatives are imposed on the participant's institutional roles in this situation. The question then is how these imperatives interact with each other, and whether their relationship is conflicting or complementary. One feature which is rather noticeable in the excerpts examined so far is that the speakers employ an entirely different set of speech acts when speaking interactionally (declaratives, complaints, open questions) or transactionally (commands, closed questions) and there may be a very practical reason for this. That is, clearly distinguishing between conversational and transactional talk allows the speakers to attend to each of these needs respectively in such a way as to minimize face loss. In other words, while positioning the client, it is entirely appropriate for the artist to assert his expertise and authority through the use of direct commands because each participant is operating under the stipulation that transactional talk is only relevant to the participants' working relationship, that 'it's okay for me to tell you what to do here, because we're talking about the service here and I know what I'm doing.' On the other hand, such an attitude, as reflected in the use of commands, would be entirely inappropriate and perhaps paternalistic during interactional conversation; and conversely, a lack of authoritativeness in transactional talk might give off the impression of a lack of expertise and confidence on the part of the artist.

The use of distinct speech acts clearly helps to distinguish between interactional conversation and transactional conversation so that they fill complementary functions in constructing the service encounter. However, the overall distribution of conversation and transactional speech suggests the possibility that the relational and transactional imperatives conflict in close-contact service encounters. In the examples shown thus

far, interactional conversation seems to occur when there is nothing transactional going on; the artist is doing something which does not require his complete concentration and he passes the time by chatting with the client. This is not to speculate whether the conversations about the meaning about tattoos and problems with phone etiquette would have continued had they not started talking about the service at hand. Rather, this analysis simply points out that the interactional conversations end with a quick transition to the beginning of a transactional exchange. However, it is also important to note that this transition is not entirely abrupt; the artist does not cut the artist off in the middle of a sentence, but rather, allows the client to finish and rounds the conversation off with some kind of supportive, evaluative comment. There is clearly some kind of balance between small-talk etiquette and the pressure to carry on with the tattooing service.

The specific question raised by this distributional evidence is whether, in close-contact service encounters, transactional discourse is more dominant, more intrusive, relative to interactional conversation. In this and other data to be presented in this study, there is evidence of the “interactional overlay” noted by Kuiper and Flindall (2000), in that interactional conversation emerges during periods of the encounter when the interactants are not otherwise occupied by the material and discursive necessities of the service itself. However, Sharma and Black (2001) found evidence of the contrary in a beauty salon. Using both audio and video recordings of a threading (facial hair removal) session, the threader would frequently pause briefly to allow the client to finish speaking, or to finish a point herself, before continuing with the threading process, which required that the client keep her face still. Thus in this situation, the relational

imperative intruded to some degree on the transactional imperative, especially since this behavior occupied the threader's time and concentration, requiring her to coordinate between the task of threading as well as her conversation with her client.

This is not to say that the relational imperative takes priority over the transactional, but simply that in certain circumstances, the two may conflict to some degree. It may be worth pointing out here that ultimately, servicepeople work under the pressure of time constraints, not only for the sake of their business, but to respect the client's time as well. Such pressure may function to limit the extent to which servicepeople attend to the relational imperative. Furthermore, I would also suggest that if there is a conflict between the relational and transactional imperatives, ultimately it is the latter which has greater bearing on the outcome of service, namely the client's satisfaction with service as a whole. This notion is illustrated in the contrast of the following online customer reviews, which address the efficacy of the transactional discourse of the encounter and the successful negotiation of the final design for the tattoo. Relevant sections have been emphasized in italics.

11. Wow! I had something very specific I wanted to do that most artists would have passed on. Cody happened to be there when I walked in and did not hesitate to take it on. I gave him an idea and he just ran with it and did an amazing job. People kept coming up to look at it while I was in the chair. It was better than anything I could imagine. Cody took his time. *He really cares about his art and wants it to be as good as possible. You can tell he really loves his work and did not shy from giving me his professional opinion when it differed from mine. The result was an amazing piece of art that I will love forever.* What a great experience, and at an unbeatable price! Seriously would recommend him to anyone. Amazing.
12. I'm pretty happy, but... I went in with some examples of what I wanted and asked for a sketch that would tie everything together; came back the next day to find the pieces I brought basically pasted together with just a few modifications. *Personally I didn't think the styles matched but was assured that they would, once it was all shaded in. Now, but a few hours later and I'm thinking...the styles don't match.* But it does look pretty good – I'll need some adjustments, that's all. Just remember – *if you see something you don't like, speak up! It's on YOU forever, not them.* They

are clean and professional, and if you have something generic you want done, then have no fear. If you're a little more picky (like me) be sure you are clear, concise, and don't settle until you're happy with the stencil.

So far we have defined successful transactional discourse as the successful alignment between the customer's needs and the server's capability to meet those needs, or more specifically, the successful agreement on a description of the product. (Mazeland, Marjan, and Huisman 1995). Although a good relational rapport between the participants results in a good review, as was also illustrated in the previous section, a failure in transactional communication seems to produce a bad review. Because these two types of communication have different effects on the outcome of the service encounter, in this specific context they should be described as playing discrete and complementary roles in shaping the discourse as a whole.

## CHAPTER 5 CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES IN TATTOO PARLOR DISCOURSE

### **Introduction**

This section further analyzes the quality and distribution of interactional and transactional conversation as they are conditioned by the contextual variables present in the tattoo parlor:

1. Materials as a structuring factor
2. Expertise and complementarity of roles
3. Investment
4. Routinization and predictability

Some of the contextual variables considered in this section are derived from a literature review. For example, Traverso's (2001) overview of the basic characteristics of Shop Encounters provided a basis for considering materials as a structuring factor as well the complementarity of roles between the server and client. Other cases drew from research on Close-Contact Service Encounters, which suggested the presence of other contextual variables which have not been observed to be salient in Shop Encounters. This section also incorporates research from sociology and marketing. In addition to their relevance to other service encounters, these variables were selected for their relevance to the tattoo parlor based on findings from the ethnographic analysis. There, explanations of each variable include an overview of findings from other studies as well as a discussion of how these findings apply to the professional practices of tattoo parlors.

#### **1. Materials as a Structuring Factor**

According to Traverso (2001), "materials constitute a significant context as well as a pertinent analysis unit" (p. 422, citing Goffman 1987). That is, the nature of the materials or services being exchanged in a service encounter may entail any number of

concrete actions by one or both of the participants, such as retrieving, packaging, processing, or crafting. The particular sequence of physical actions (as opposed to discursive actions) required to carry out the transaction necessarily constrain the discourse in various ways, such that some actions allow for certain types of speech to occur, while others prevent speech altogether. Therefore, such actions as a context for speech are relevant to an analysis of the features of the discourse which occur in service-oriented settings. At the grocery store, for example, the best time for the cashier and customer to make conversation is while the cashier is passing the groceries through the scanner, since this action does not require anyone's undivided attention, and talking at this stage would not distract the cashier from their duties or hold up the other customers who are waiting in line (Kuiper and Flindall 2000). Likewise, it is usually inappropriate for the participants to interact while the cashier is counting coins because interaction at these this could impede the transactive process. Along the same vein, talking is also constrained in various ways in Close-Contact Service Encounters. In a hair salon, speakers are probably not going to talk over the noise of a hair dryer; and at the dentist's office, though it may be perfectly fine to make small talk while the dentist is getting their equipment situated, it can be quite awkward if either party attempts to make small-talk while the patient's mouth is full of drills and clamps. In these types of services, the materials being analyzed involve whatever physical actions the server must do in order to complete the service, as well as the actions taken by the client in order to participate in or facilitate the service.

Along the same lines, the presence of materials (e.g., coins, hair dryer) and physical actions (e.g., processing groceries, cutting hair) as a unit for analysis is equally

pertinent in a tattoo shop. In the following, excerpt, for example, the onset and duration of the buzzing of the tattoo gun is relevant to an analysis of the following conversation:

From EXCERPT 5

[[Talk about MRIs, trace elements in tattoo ink]]

101 A but different inks now you never know  
102 like maybe back in the day  
103 C right  
104 A like one time  
105 C right, right  
106 A they xxx  
107 C I'm thinkin like  
108 maybe when paint had led or like  
109 A cadmium  
110 C yeah that might have been more ferromagnetic  
111 [[Tattoo gun starts buzzing loudly]]

This particular conversation occurred while the artist was preparing his equipment and sanitizing the client's body, however the conversation closes when the tattoo gun starts buzzing – either because the noise (and pain to the client) derailed the participants' concentration away from the conversation, or because the artist waiting until the client finished speaking before beginning the tattoo. Thus in a tattoo parlor, the sequence of actions which frame the discourse between and artist typically include, but are not limited to, sketching a draft, sanitizing and preparing the equipment, applying the stencil sketch, drawing the actual tattoo, and positioning the client's body. Some of these actions allow for interaction and others do not. In the case of the tattoo shop observed in this study, speakers were most likely to make interactional conversation while the artist was preparing his equipment and applying the stencil sketch. On the other hand, the excerpt above suggests that the tattoo gun is prohibitive factor in client-artist interaction; although it is not uncommon for the participants to talk during the tattooing process, in this particular case the buzzing of the tattoo gun creates an

environment which is not as conducive to interaction as the stencil sketch section. Moreover, the nature of the transacted materials not only constrains when the interactants can talk, but what they can talk about. When the exchange of specific information is required to carry on with the service, it is counterproductive for the participants to engage in too much interactional conversation. In the previous section we have already looked at examples in which the participants abide by these constraints. In Excerpt 1, the artist was preparing his equipment and applying the stencil sketch afforded the participants an opportunity to chat about the significance of tattoos in general – that is, until that stage of the service was finished and the artist needed verbal approval from the client in order to transition into the next stage.

Thus, the fact that tattoos take much longer to make, and that they require that the participants remain in very close proximity to each other, means that in terms of simple quantity, there is probably going to be more talk in the tattoo parlor and other Close-Contact Service Encounters than in shop encounters. Moreover, even though interactional conversation is a requirement in neither the grocery store or the tattoo shop, because the nature of the tattooing process creates the potential for an extended silence, a total lack of any conversation whatsoever is going to be more marked a tattoo parlor than in a grocery store. In the data collected for this study, small-talk most commonly occurs after periods of silence. This is especially true for the beginning stages of the appointment, as seen in the samples analyzed so far, when the artist is preparing the equipment and stencil sketch, and neither party is distracted by the noisy and painful application of the tattoo. This was the case in the first two excerpts analyzed

so far – that there was nothing discursively going on before the onset of interactional conversation. This was also the case in another data set.

#### EXCERPT 4

10 C so xxx the next tattoo I wanna get  
11 A did you go to mike colby's cd release thing  
12 the hot graves thing at 7th  
13 at the atlantic  
14 C was that  
15 A I wanna say it was a Saturday  
16 C I think that was the night  
17 yeah I work Saturday nights  
18 at the hospital  
19 um  
20 I can never do anything anymore with my work schedule and  
21 between my work schedule and having a kid and a kid on the way  
22 it's like  
23 plus my band's playing out and it's rare that I'm actually out  
24 my uh  
25 night life's taken a beating  
26 A hm  
28 for sure  
29 C but I wouldn't trade it for the world man  
30 A yeah I think I need to trade mine in  
31 C hehehe  
32 it's starting to work against you  
33 A yeah  
34 and I only go two steps to the bar across the street  
35 so that's what makes it even worse  
36 C how old are you?  
37 A 32  
38 C yeah that's about the age it starts to uh  
39 it's just  
40 that's about the age where you know  
41 hangovers for me used to be  
42 a doobie  
43 A like what?  
44 C A doobie  
45 go back to sleep for an hour  
46 xxx  
47 and I'm fine  
48 that's it  
49 now  
50 its 32 is when it started turning into an all day affair  
51 where about the time the sun's going down

52           that's when I start to feel human again  
53    A        haha  
54            exactly  
55    C        it's like, dammit dude  
56            [[Continued griping about alcohol and hangovers]]

This excerpt was included specifically to underscore its length and the extent to which the participants develop such an everyday topic. As in the other excerpts, here we see the same kind of supportive agreement; the conversation capitalizes on the speakers' common experiences regarding alcohol, nightlife, hangovers and the inconveniences of balancing work and recreation at their particular stage in life. The speakers take advantage of the opportunity to seek out increasingly idiosyncratic areas of common interest and experience, such as coping with hangovers and some of the specific challenges of their particular age bracket. The point though, is that the opportunity, regardless of whether speakers choose to take advantage of it, is unique to specific types of service encounters such as close-contact service encounters, in which the nature of the service itself provides an extended period of time for the participants to develop such topic to the extent seen in this example.

## **2. Expertise and Complementarity of Roles**

According to Traverso (2001), complementarity is the phenomenon wherein “each participant is expected to assume a set of specific tasks that are complementary to those of the interlocutor, and that correspond to the two contractual roles of customer and shopkeeper (i.e., Requesting and paying for the former, and welcoming, proposing, serving, and advising for the latter)” (p. 422). In other words, complementarity is a principle that describes the speakers’ expectations of each other as evidenced in the structure of their conversation. This realization is grounded in the reality that, in service encounters, each participant occupies a complementary arena of expertise relative to

their interlocutor (Marrelli 1988). That is, customers are experts on what they want, and servers are experts on what they are capable of providing. Furthermore, each participant's respective area of expertise endows them with a certain degree of power as well as responsibility for the information that their interlocutor requires of them. This means that a participant's lack of competence in their area of expertise (for example, a sales representative who cannot locate an item, or a customer who cannot adequately describe what they are looking for), often results in a loss of face and credibility. Marrelli (1988) explained that the positional roles of the customer and server are psychologically instituted by mutual assumptions regarding their interlocutor's expertise. Simply put, I would not have any reason to consult you for professional help if I did not believe you were competent enough to provide it. There is also underlying these assumptions a tacit agreement of the customer's and server's obligations to each other: the server is getting paid to assist the customer, and the customer is sincerely interested in buying something.

Marrelli's (1988) observations on power and expertise were based on bookshop encounters and mostly dealt with the transactional speech, such that the server was obliged to fulfill the customer's reasonable request and the customer was responsible for providing the server with the information they needed in order to do so. For Marrelli, interactional speech tended to enter into the equation in the form of politeness and facework, which was integrated into transactional speech in order mitigate face loss when one of the participants failed to meet their responsibilities to their interlocutor. This kind of behavior was also evident in Excerpt 1, when the client had some trouble articulating his approval or disapproval of the placement of the stencil sketch, he used

quite a bit of hedging in the form of discourse markers such as “like,” “I mean,” and “I don't know.” Likewise, the artist's use of “alright, right on” at the end of the exchange functions as an evaluative “phatic token” (Cheepen 2000) to help ameliorate social tension and restore agreement and congruity. More importantly, Excerpt 1 lends insight into the server's expectations regarding the client's responsibilities and contributions to the encounter. The conversation does not begin to noticeably progress until the client provides some concrete information to the artist about where he wants the tattoo to be, such that the client must provide this information to the artist as a prerequisite to achieving agreement. In other words, the artist considers the client to be an expert on what he wants, and that only the client is capable of providing this information. The point here is that the balance of power and expertise in enforcing the rules of transactional discourse works much in the same way as in Shop Encounters in that such a balance holds the participants responsible for providing certain types of information to each other.

Unlike shop encounters, research on close-contact service encounters has suggested that expertise also plays a role in shaping interactional conversation as well. Participants do a great deal of work acknowledge their interlocutor's unique area of expertise and to use this differential as a bases for supportive and mutually beneficial discourse. It is common, for example, for salon clients and hairdressers to discuss the hairdresser's career and training, often in a way that shows enthusiasm, respect and support for the hairdresser's talents (Toerian and Kitzinger 2007). Clients express curiosity about the daily lives of such professionals who possess a very specialized set of skills, and clients often initiate conversations to explore the professional's unique

perspective from the other side of the chair. In this respect, tattoo parlor discourse fits in rather well with this area of research, in that tattooing clients sometimes display this same kind of behavior, as illustrated in the following example:

#### EXCERPT 6

- 1 C how long you been tattooing for?
- 2 A 7 years
- 3 xxx
- 4 a good while
- 5 Not all the seven were here though
- 6 I was in Tampa, did some tattooing
- 7 I kinda went around and tattooed at some friends' parlors

While the Excerpt 6 shows a good demonstration of how the artist's career can serve as a neutral small-talk topic, Excerpt 7, which involves a different client, follows suit, although the client uses the topic in order to show appreciation and support for the artist by praising a previous tattoo he received from this particular artist:

#### EXCERPT 3

- 1 C This is really neat I like how you did that
- 2 the coloring here and there
- 3 the shading and stuff
- 4 it's pretty neat I don't know
- 5 definitely like (xxx)
- 6 one of my favorite spots
- 7 I know that that's not easy stuff
- 8 A tight tight little spot too
- 9 C exactly

What is relevant about these examples is that they demonstrate that shared knowledge is not needed in order to express shared interest. In fact, they are a classic example of expressing positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987) in that the client expresses that his wants are the same as the artist's wants in that he expresses that 'You, the artist, want to take pride in your skill, and I also want that for you.' Considering the context, it is already given that the client and artist share an interest in tattoos, and

so it makes sense to build rapport based on this interest. Moreover, the latter excerpt is a good example of how the client can display knowledge of tattoos without claiming to know more than the artist; by discussing the details of the tattoo, he is demonstrating to the artist that he has thought about the details and appreciates the skill and work that the artist put into them.

On the other hand, the same artist in Excerpt 3 did quite a bit of work to acknowledge the unique area of expertise of both of his clients, and also used the same strategy of expressing knowledge as a way expressing interest, particularly in his use of detailed-oriented questions and other comments. The following example is one example of this strategy.

#### EXCERPT 5

57 C I had a guy, actually I was takin X-rays at the hospital  
58 said he was needing tattoo work and asked me where I got this done  
59 I gave him your name  
60 so I'm trying to spread the word  
61 A oh I appreciate it  
62 have you ever heard the theory of um  
63 MRIs and tattoo  
64 C uhhh  
65 A and red ink  
66 C yeah  
67 uuuuummmmm I just  
68 somebody was just telling me about uuuumm  
69 about the iron  
70 yeah there's some kind of metal in it  
71 I don't know what  
72 I forget what metal  
73 like magnesium or some crazy shit like that  
74 but there's trace elements of metal in there  
75 A right  
76 uuummm yeah IIII  
77 I have never heard of somebody not being able to get an MRI  
78 because of the tattoo  
79 now uuuuhhh  
80 it might depend on where it is how much  
81 is there how much of the ink is present

82 and what part of the body it is  
 83 but I've seen the checklist they give people  
 84 to fill out  
 85 for the MRI you have to fill out a uh  
 86 form uhh like  
 87 it'll ask you questions like  
 88 have you ever worked in a machine factory  
 89 or like anywhere where you coulda gotten metal  
 90 shrapnel in your eye  
 91 like it has all these questions like  
 92 do you xxx do you have you know  
 93 brain clips for for aneurysms or strokes  
 94 they ask you all these questions and i've never seen anything about  
 tattoos  
 95 it's interesting though  
 96 A I've seen em do it on the mythbusters  
 97 they busted it they like  
 98 tattooed xxx  
 99 C ok so that makes sense then so it's not true  
 101 A but different inks now you never know  
 102 like maybe back in the day  
 103 C right  
 104 A like one time  
 105 C right, right  
 106 A they xxx  
 107 C I'm thinkin like  
 108 maybe when paint had led or like  
 109 A cadmium  
 110 C yeah that might have been more ferromagnetic  
 111 [Tattoo gun starts buzzing loudly]

The disparity in expertise between the participants here lends richness to this interactional conversation. Here the speakers share a common interest, but occupy distinct areas of expertise, and so they engage in an almost consultative type of conversation in which they each elicit highly specialized knowledge from the other in order to engage a topic of common interest. The artist first consults the client on his professional experience as an X-ray technician, in order to elicit a unique perspective on the artist's own profession (with regard to the composition of the tattoo ink); likewise, the client elicits information from the artist to which the client can apply his own knowledge

about the magnetic properties of various metals. Because a consensus is built through the contribution of complementary knowledge, the conversation functions to validate each participant's field of knowledge, experience and expertise and allows each to learn about the other's unique perspective. Therefore, this particular conversation shows how the principle of complementary expertise not only pervades throughout the interactional conversation but also provides a foundation for the participants to create a respectful and supportive rapport. The participants not only recognize a gap in their shared knowledge and seek out opportunities to fill this gap; they capitalize on this gap as a means to align themselves with each other's worldview and to build cooperation, consensus and congruency.

### **3. Routinization and Predictability**

Service encounters very often necessitate the meeting of strangers who must work to get very specific information from each other. To use Mazeland, Marjan, and Huisman 's (1995) phrasing, the customer's needs and the server's capacity to meet those needs are going to be, to a large extent, a priori unknown to each other. Because each participant enters the situation with potentially very different schemata, speakers rely on culturally determined procedures and formulas in order to stabilize the transactional process. Traverso (2001) illustrates this feature by pointing to the “basic recurrent sequence” (p. 422) wherein the customer initiates a request and the server accepts or refuses it. In other words, service encounters are grounded in a script which makes the protocol predictable.

Another feature of service encounters which makes them relatively predictable is the use of formulaic expressions as indicators of various parts of the procedure. According to Traverso, the use of these expressions indicates a “symbolic function”

which communicates information on different aspects of the situations. Formulas have been found to be universally important to opening and closing service encounters (Ventola 1983, Ayoola 2009, Traverso 2001), and are also used to indicate the obligatory stages of the transaction, such as the service bid and request for payment (Ventola 1983). The importance of formulas in the genre of service encounters make quite a bit of sense assuming Coulmas's (1979) definition of routine formulae as "expressions whose occurrence is closely bound to specific social situations and highly predictable in a communicative course of events. Their meaning is pragmatically conditioned, and their usage is motivated by the relevant characteristics of such social situations" (p. 240). For example, such expressions as "Can I help you?" and "Have a good day" are conditioned to indicate openings and closings, respectively, through their systematic use in these particular stages of service encounters. Likewise, the growing use of the phrase "Debit or Credit?" to elicit transactional information regarding the form of payment, but has also grown to function as a pragmatic indicator that the participants have arrived at the "exchange of payment" stage of the encounter. Most importantly, because such expressions are used almost exclusively in service encounters, they function to indicate information about the social roles and intentions of the participants; they indicate to the speakers that a service encounter and no other kind of speech event is taking place.

As previously pointed out, the generalization that service encounters are routine – and are functionally designed as such through the use of formulas and scripted sequences – is one which may fall short of explaining some of the key features in Close-Contact Service Encounters. Unlike shop encounters, which by definition are

highly routine for both parties, the Close-Contact Encounter is one which is “utterly routine” for the professional (Toerien & Kitzinger 2007), yet completely out of the ordinary for the client. With the exception of tattoo aficionados and hobbyists, tattoos are special occasion for clients; they are an indulgence in the self in that they require the client's attention to their own body and usually a bit of personal introspection. Yet, tattoo artists carry out this service on a daily basis, sometimes doing very similar tattoos regularly, as is the case for religious imagery and popular stock tattoos.

In terms of Ventola's (1983) hypothesis addressing the relationship between contextual variables and discourse features, routinization can be said as having a negative value in the setting of the tattoo parlor, and a positive value in Shop Encounters. That is, tattooing appointments, in comparison to most other service encounters, are not routine at all. On one hand, Ventola's hypothesis would predict that the lack of routinization in this setting would result in a lack of routine formulae, and that the pressure on the artists to personalize the service would further motivate an avoidance of these formulae.

Along these lines, it was very difficult to find any salient cases of the overt use of routine formulae in the interaction between the artists and the clients. The excerpts discussed so far have presented very little material that could be said to be formulaic. One possible exception to this pattern occurs in the following excerpt, in which the client uses the expression “I'm sure you know what you're doing” in line 21 to show agreement with the artist's opinion.

#### EXCERPT 7

8     A     Alright,  
9             we're gonna do it that way with it  
10            you see how it's dark down there?  
11     C     Yes  
12     A     within the area?

13           It's gonna end up getting done just a little different for effect  
14           as we tattoo  
15    C       well the col-  
16    A       you see how those lines go to like 3 lines  
17           it's gonna get replaced with like a shade xxx  
18           like not  
19           cause the lines are there for the shading of the two  
20           so it's kinda gonna play into that effect  
21    C       uhh  
22    A       ya got me?  
23    C       Yeah well **I'm sure you know what you're doing** bro  
24    A       I appreciate that

Although it is debatable whether the expression in line 21 qualifies as “routine,” it can be said to be formulaic in the sense that it is used in the specific context of deferring to the judgment of a professional and closing a consultative topic. However, on the whole the data collected for this study noticeably lacked such formulae. The saliency of unstructured conversation – both interactional and transaction – presents a challenge to other research which has regarded service encounters as routine and formulaic. That is, service encounter discourse can only be described as such insofar as the specific service encounter being analyzed can be described as a routine type of service.

On the other hand, future studies which manage to collect data on the consultation and especially the greeting portions of tattooing appointments may show that professionals rely on routine formulae to a much greater extent than suggested by the data presented in this study. While the greetings could not be recorded for this study, ethnographic observations showed that the receptionists who greeted clients often used expressions like “How can I help you,” “What’s up,” and “How ya doin,” which may vary in stylistic register but all function as a greeting and an offer of service. Indeed, this section of the appointment would be considered to be a very routine aspect of tattooing services in that the activity of ‘receiving a customer’ occurs in a variety of services:

retail, hairdressing, and hotel check-in desks, to name a few. Thus, these ethnographic observations suggest that Ventola's (1983) hypothesis may be borne out in a more complete corpus of tattoo parlor discourse: stages of the tattooing service which are the most routine will feature speech behavior which also occurs in other routine service encounters.

#### **4. Investment**

The ethnographic overview of the tattoo parlor as a form of service showed that tattoos represent a considerable investment on the part of the client. The concept of investment, which to my knowledge has not been explored in service encounter studies, encompasses a constellation of factors which together describe the degree of risk a client takes in purchasing a service, with the expectation that they are to receive a comparable return on their investment. As previously mentioned, tattoos represent an investment time and money; not only are they more expensive than most other services we purchase on a day-to-day basis, but clients often spend a lot of time planning and thinking about their tattoo designs and may take a long time to finalize their decision. And perhaps most importantly, they are a personal investment in that they are a permanent addition to the client's image.

So far, we have seen examples of customer reviews which strongly suggest that customers are highly invested in the outcome of the transaction and that they are sensitive to the artist's bedside manner; they want the artist to sympathize with their needs so that they are more likely to attend to them. The question then, is whether this expectation – perhaps a cultural norm – is realized as a set of features in the discourse, and if so, whether those features should be described as a speech behavior. For example, one of the customer reviews reported that they were disappointed with their

tattoo because the tattoo did not look the way the customer had expected. The artist and client had agreed on a particular description, and the client was invested in that description, but ultimately did not get a return on that investment. By contrast, the artist in the following excerpt seems to be addressing this exact concern by explaining his reasons for deviating from the description the two had agreed on.

#### EXCERPT 7

8     A     Alright,  
9           we're gonna do it that way with it  
10          you see how it's dark down there?  
11     C     Yes  
12     A     within the area?  
13          It's gonna end up getting done just a little different for effect as we tattoo  
14     C     well the col-  
15     A     you see how those lines go to like 3 lines  
16          it's gonna get replaced with like a shade xxxx  
17          like not. cause the lines are there for the shading of the two  
18          so it's kinda gonna play into that effect  
19     C     uhh  
20     A     ya got me?  
21     C     Yeah...well I'm sure you know what you're doing bro  
22     A     I appreciate that

While investment as a contextual variable tends to be less concrete than others discussed so far, Excerpt 7 suggests that it has at least some effect on the dynamic between the artist and client. Furthermore, there is evidence from other disciplines which suggest that it is active in this service context, and that servicepeople have specific discursive strategies to attend to it.

As a variable, investment affects the client's relationship with the server in that a greater investment requires a greater degree of trust in the server's ability deliver a proper return on the client's investment. Evidence from marketing suggests that there are very concrete incentives for building a friendly rapport with clients, in that good rapport is instrumental to developing in the client a sense of trust in the business. Based

on research from sociology, psychology, and economics, the concept of trust refers to the “perceived credibility and benevolence of a target of trust” (Donney and Cannon 1997, p. 36). This necessarily involves some degree of calculation on the part of the client in the sense that they are calculating whether and to what extent their satisfaction with the product or service will equal their investment in the business.

Furthermore, this same line of research has demonstrated a positive correlation between trust and the client's level of satisfaction with a product or service, and that clients tend to feel more confident about their predictions of the outcome of a transaction when they are dealing with people they like. This calculation occurs along two dimensions: objective credibility, which involves concrete, factual considerations such as the business's credentials and awards, its track record with the individual client, and any referrals the client may have received for that business from others who have worked with the business. Relevant to the study of interactional speech is the dimension of trust which deals with perceived benevolence, that is, “the extent to which one partner is genuinely interested in the other partner's welfare and motivated to seek joint gain” (Donney and Cannon 1997, p. 36) This dimension of trust is closely associated with some important features of interactional speech. For example, one of the factors which calculate into perceived benevolence is perceived similarity, such that the logic is that ‘your needs are the same as my needs. You have a vested interest in looking out for them.’ Similarity in this sense – the sharing of needs and wants – is precisely what is negotiated when we engage in interactional talk – what is referred to as perceived similarity in marketing is what is fostered by shared affect in discourse analysis, to use Widdowson's (1983) terms. So far we have looked at a handful of

examples that show one of the artists demonstrating a sense of likemindedness by showing interest in the same things which the client shows interest in, though he uses a slightly different strategy in the following excerpt:

#### EXCERPT 8

25 C xxx  
26 A drugs and everything like that?  
27 C Yeah xxx O-D  
28 I've done everything,  
29 that was my downfall  
30 for a long time I was envious of people with jobs,  
31 who could drink smoke or whatever they do man  
32 and for me there is no working at a job  
33 there's just robbin, stealin, lyin and cheatin xxxx  
34 so I say you know what  
35 I'm either gonna change my life  
36 ...  
37 cause god has a sense of humor  
38 A huh?  
39 C God has a sense of humor  
40 A oh I'm very aware of it  
41 C I wouldn't I'd be locked up in prison xxx  
42 A haha  
43 C yeah that's definitely a good xxx outcome

So far we have seen that artist-client discourse, both transactional and interactional, overwhelmingly leans toward the production and maintenance of agreement between the two parties. In the other excerpts, the artist typically expressed likemindedness by relating to the client's experiences and interests. Here, the artist relates to neither of these aspects of the client's discourse, but nonetheless expresses agreement with client's worldview, that 'God has a sense of humor.' In this particular case, the client selected the design of the tattoo in order to symbolize his struggle with drug addiction, and engages the artist in conversation by talking about the path of experience which led him to get this tattoo. Crucially, the artist expresses likemindedness by relating to the sentiment expressed in this story, and thus

likemindedness here is not merely a peripheral impression of the artist's personality, but rather a verbal expression that the artist understands the client's motivations for getting the tattoo.

Another factor which may be relevant to a discussion of investment is element of pain and the necessity for pain management. While the concept of trust helps to address the client's psychological investment in the outcome of the tattooing service, another aspect of tattooing is that the client goes through discomfort, and sometimes anxiety, in order to reap the rewards of the tattooing process. Therefore, artists do some conversational work in order to compensate for this problem, as in the following excerpt:

#### EXCERPT 9

40 A it's gonna be a little slow going  
41 just because it's gonna be a different illustrative style tattoo  
42 eeeeeh here we go  
43 [[tattoo gun buzzing]]  
44 not so bad right?  
45 C Na  
46 A just change up the feeling here xxx

Thus at the beginning of the session, the artist coaches the client through the pain management process, checking in with the client with “not so bad right,” thereby showing the client that he is aware that the client may be experiencing some pain or discomfort. This theme shows up again later in the session, after conversation has subsided a bit, the client speaks up about the pain:

#### EXCERPT 10

47 C man I'm starting to get numb  
48 A haha that's good...or bad  
49 C probably bad  
50 A haha don't pass out on me

Although it is only in the second excerpt that the client reaches out to the artist by verbally expressing his discomfort, in both excerpts the artist clearly demonstrates some

cognizance that the client is in a rather precarious and uncomfortable position, and makes an explicit effort to mitigate this discomfort – at the least, by expressing empathy by demonstrating his awareness of what the client is going through. A good frame of reference for this kind of discursive behavior in Close-Contact Service Encounters is hair salons, which have already been described by handful of studies in sociology as well as linguistics. Research in this area has showed through both ethnographic (Sharma & Black 2001) and conversation-analytic (Toerien & Kitzinger 2007) methods that beauticians do a great deal of “emotional work” during their sessions with clients. First coined by Hothschild (1983), a sociologist, to describe the work of flight attendants in interacting with passengers, emotional work refers to the speech behavior that professionals display to make customers feel more comfortable while the service is being carried out. However, it may in a more general sense refer any professional speech behavior which functions to elicit an emotion from the client which is most productive toward the objectives of the respective business. Many professionals work to manage their clients' emotions in a positive way, to make them feel good about the transaction. Other professionals, such as debt collectors, work to elicit negative emotions such as fear and intimidation. Along the same lines, police officers, lawyers and psychologists learn to elicit a myriad of responses from their subjects, each of which may suit a particular objective. This line of research has been fruitful in identifying this type of labor and its meaning in our society, as well as demonstrating how human interaction can be tailored in order to advance the interests of an institution. Within linguistics however, despite a diverse and burgeoning interest in service encounters, the discipline has produced very few analyses of the linguistic manifestations of Emotional

Labor, and those which are available are limited to the speech setting of the beauty salon.

Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as being borne in a context in which the management of a client's emotions is necessary for the survival of the business. In the case of the hair salon, emotional work as a type of discursive behavior arises from the context that the nature of the service creates an inherently uncomfortable situation for the client. In a hair salon, the client is required to sit still for an extended period of time, sometimes in an awkward or cramped position, as is the case when the client's neck is bent backwards during hairwashing. Studies which have sought to describe emotional labor as a speech behavior (Toerian and Kitzinger 2007) have generally regarded any kind of personable, interactional conversation a strategy for making the client feel a little more comfortable. While there is no apparent reason to invalidate this generalization, it is difficult to demonstrate empirically, and results in an oversimplified perspective on the role of relational talk in this particular context.

The pattern that emotional labor occurs in such inherently uncomfortable situations cannot be overstated in its importance to understanding tattoo parlor discourse. Tattoos can be excruciatingly painful at worst and uncomfortable at best. And unlike piercings, the pain of receiving a tattoo can last hours; in my personal experience getting a sizable tattoo, it was the duration the pain, rather than the pain itself, which was the most stressful and exhausting part of process. In an ethnographic interview, one of the artists explained that pain management plays a definitive role in his dealings with his clients. For example, for clients who have difficulty managing pain, he tends omit some of the finer aesthetic details of the tattoo in order to reduce the amount of time the client has to

spend under the tattoo gun. He also discussed how certain parts of the body tend to react to pain differently, and that sensitive areas, such as the ribs, tend to shift and pull away from the tattoo gun, making the tattooing process difficult and lengthy. In such situations where pain management is an issue, the artist feels less satisfied with both the process and the product. Thus, although, the notion that any pleasant, agreeable conversation functions as emotional labor may be too broad as an account of such conversation in this context, such a generalization makes a bit more sense considering the pressures under which the artist is working. If talking helps distract the client from the pain in order to make the session more effective, then pain may indeed be the most important contextual variable to account for the pervasiveness of interactional conversation in this context.

As discussed, the ethnographic analysis showed that the element of pain is clearly present – and relevant – as a contextual variable, and may in the more general sense be related to investment in that it calculates into the degree of risk the client takes in trusting the artist. So far we have seen a few examples showing the explicit effect of pain on client-artist discourse, such that both parties explicitly acknowledge pain and make some effort to manage it. However, it is likely that pain management ultimately has a more global effect on the discourse in such a way that is not directly observable with the methods of this study. I have already mentioned that pain can be managed through sociable, agreeable conversation; and ethnographic interviews suggested that this helps to draw the clients' attention away from the pain enough to endure several hours of it. On the other hand, pain may also be managed through silence, and for some clients it may be the case that they have difficulty conversing coherently while

under the pressure of pain, much in the same way that inexperienced runners have difficulty conversing while running due to the stress that the activity inflicts on the body. However, it was not possible to determine whether pain was a causative factor in instances of either extended silence or extended conversation because pain was usually not inferrable using CA methodology. More extensive ethnographic interviews with clients may have helped to explain the role of pain to some extent; for example, asking clients to reflect on extended silences and whether they were in pain during that portion of the appointment. However, it may also be the case that for some clients, pain has very little to do the decision to talk or refrain from talking. These decisions may be attributable to a number of other factors that are not observable via linguistic and ethnographic analysis, and which the client may not be aware of. The participants' moods, whether they feel comfortable with each other, or even a simple preference for talking or not talking during a tattooing service, are all candidate explanation which make the role of pain very difficult to determine with the methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This paper has shown that many of the same contextual features which influence some of the most everyday service encounters are also present in the tattoo parlor. In both of these cases, for example, speakers lend priority to the exchange of transactional information, reserving interactional conversation for moments during the encounter when the transaction is not an immediate priority. The analysis showed that as a general typological statement, tattoo parlor discourse most closely resembles the discourse of beauty salons in that these settings place very similar contextual pressures on the interaction between the professional and the client: the two parties are “mutually captive” (McCarthy 2000) to each other in that they must stay in close proximity to each other for the duration of the service, which tends to be considerably longer than more routine types of services, such as Shop Encounters. Likewise, the fact that tattoo services are hardly routine at all results in an absence of routinized speech patterns, allowing greater flexibility for the artist to personalize the encounter, a feature which has been observed, albeit to a lesser extent, in hair salons.

On the other hand, this study has also shown evidence that there are contextual variables in the tattoo parlor which do not exist in other service contexts; or, there are variables which exist in other contexts but behave differently in tattoo parlors. Tattoo artists are providing a service which leaves a lasting impression on the client’s public as well as personal self-image; thus the greater influence of this factor in the tattoo parlor results in greater emphasis on trust and emotional labor in this setting, perhaps more so than in others. Thus, this study supports Ventola’s (1982) hypothesis by showing that the contextual characteristics which tattoo parlors have in common with other service

encounters correlates with common textual features, while those contextual features which deviate from findings on other service encounters are those which make the tattoo parlor a unique speech situation.

The scope of these findings is limited by a number of shortcomings in the data. Data collection for this project proved to be exceedingly difficult. The tattoo parlors included in this study were selected in part for their high volume of customer traffic as well as their reputation for cleanliness and professionalism. However, these criteria also resulted in a number of difficulties which ultimately compromised the validity of the data. Because the tattoo artists were very busy with their customers, it was often impractical to take recordings, which reduced the number of recordings available for analysis. Moreover, the hard, flat surfaces that are necessary for keeping a clean workspace in a tattoo parlor resulted in a very poor acoustic environment, in that the buzzing of the tattoo gun, background music and any other peripheral noises severely interfered with the intelligibility of the data.

Another important note about the data, as discussed in Chapter 2, is that it does not include interaction from either the greeting or the consultation stage of the appointment. The reason for this is that during the greeting stage, customers often exchange personal information, such as their name and age, which would have been very complicated to record ethically and was nonetheless not considered to be crucial to the objectives of this study. On the other hand, the absence of the consultations between the clients and artists presents a problem for any generalizations relating specifically to transactional speech. Although an effort was made to compensate for this loss by showing examples of consultative discourse as it occasionally occurs during the

inking session, further research on tattooing service could benefit from lending particular attention to the negotiation of the tattoo design. Consultations generally take place before the client has committed to making a transaction, and research which captures this stage of interaction may show that participants display distinct speech behaviors depending on whether they have already made a contract to carry out the service and payment. Furthermore, research which documents entire tattooing appointment would allow for more a complete typological and anthropological account of tattooing services, as well as a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse variety of speech activities which conspire to produce a transaction.

This study is not intended as an exhaustive account tattoo parlor discourse; as discussed in Chapter 2, the purpose of this analysis is not to explain “how tattoo artists talk;” but rather, its purpose is to describe how these professionals, who work in tattoo parlors, talk under a set of discrete contextual pressures. Rather than contributing to research on tattoo parlors, this study is intended as a contribution to service encounters in general, and especially, Close-Contact Service Encounters (McCarthy 2000). That is, rather than describing tattoo parlors, I have sought to describe the contextual pressures which in various ways constrain the discourse that occurs in this setting. Some of these pressures have been described in previous research; however, I have described in greater detail the specific speech behaviors associated with these pressures. Future studies on other types of service encounters can use these findings to test for such speech behaviors in service encounters which have the same values, or test for their absences in those which do not.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that, within linguistics, tattoo parlors are a surprisingly understudied speech setting. While this analysis has focused on the context of tattoo parlor discourse, a cursory look at the transcriptions shows tattoo parlor conversations to be dynamic, diverse, and sometimes unpredictable. The field of discourse analysis would clearly benefit from lending more attention to the conversations which occur in these settings; speakers build rapport, manage pain, negotiate a transaction, and learn from each other, and the personal character of tattooing services allows speakers the opportunity for personal, sometimes cathartic, conversations, which are rare in most other speech settings. These are topics in discourse analysis which are both interesting and relevant beyond the scope of service encounters.

## APPENDIX A TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The data included in this study consists of 2 tattoo artists and 3 clients.

Transcriptions are separated into individual appointments and are titled according to the concept of the tattoo for each appointment, such that in each appointment the client is a different person. Each transcription is prefaced with an explanation of the ethnographic establishments are used with kind permission from the artists and the managers of the tattoo shops.

Conventions: Lines of speech are separated in order to reflect phrasal intonation units. Notations were chosen to facilitate an analysis of topicalization and topic development.

A	Artist
C	Client
<u>word</u>	Emphasized word or phrase
...	2-5 second pause
xxx	Unintelligible speech
( )	Approximated transcription
[[ ]]	Parenthetical notes added by researcher

## APPENDIX B TRANSCRIPTS

### Transcript 1: Lady on a Motorcycle

Artist: Mike

Tattoo parlor: Anthem

This appointment was recorded for a pilot study and does not include ethnographic interviews from either the client or the artist. These conversations were extracted from the stencil sketch portion of the appointment, when the artist is setting up his equipment, sanitizing the client's skin and applying the stencil sketch. This is before the artist begins inking the tattoo. The entire appointment lasted about 3 hours.

#### EXCERPT 1

1     A     So what's the reasoning behind the girl on the motorcycle?  
2     C     Um  
3         To be honest I just  
4         ...  
5         I don't know I like it  
6         ...  
7         It's just uuuh  
8         The idea of [[low, rapid speech]]  
9         (You know what I mean?)  
10        xxx  
11        I feel like uuuh  
12        It's hard for me to  
13     A     xxx  
14     C     It's gonna be with me for a long time  
15        ...  
16        I'm all for tattoos that xxx  
17        (And to say that it has no meaning)  
18     A     I know a lot of people are like  
19        what does that tattoo mean it doesn't mean anything  
20        well it does really have to  
21        check that out  
22        ...  
23     C     It's pretty good  
24        ...  
25        I thought it I thought it was gonna go a little lower  
26        I mean I like the size  
27     A     I mean I can make it lower if you want

28 I could make it lower we can bring it down  
29 C I mean I like the height  
30 ...  
31 I guess  
32 ...  
33 Well I'm looking for a xxx so I guess we can add stuff onto it  
34 A Yeah we can always add stuff onto it  
35 C xxx  
36 A Like if you want the dragon like you're talking about  
37 We can xxx bring it around  
38 I mean if you want I could lower this down  
39 C No I mean  
40 The height's good  
41 Where it starts is good  
42 ...  
43 It's alright that's good  
44 And we'll just add stuff as we go along  
45 A Alright right on  
46 Alright well let's let that dry on there and I'll get everything else  
47 all set up  
48 Are you sure before I throw this away?  
49 C Probably because xxx but I kinda wanna look at that a little bit more

---

#### EXCERPT 2

50 A my phone keeps ringing  
51 who is calling me  
52 ...  
53 I love when a get a text message and it's just like  
54 one word like  
55 okay or sure  
56 C yeah  
57 I hate that kinda thing man  
58 I try to use xxx  
59 (I have a bit of a) crappy phone though that's why  
60 A Well I have a crappy phone though too y'know  
61 I'm sure it's a lot easier to send texts xxx  
62 ...  
63 Alright  
64 Bring your chair really close to here  
65 [[chair moving]]  
66 Aaaaaannn kinda just drop your arm up over the top of this  
67 Annn you're basically gonna kinda sit back  
68 And this is way too high  
69 ...

70            Okay try that  
71            ...  
72            How's that feel?  
73            Is that uncomfortable?  
74    C        I'm not uncomfortable  
75    A        Okay it's not uncomfortable on your armpit or anything?  
76    C        No I'm good  
77            If you got a good angle  
78    A        I'm good  
79            Cool

Transcript 2: Figure 5 in Gold

Artist: Mark

Tattoo Parlor: Bodytech

This recording comes from an appointment between Mark and a client whom he had already had some experience tattooing. The appointment was a touch-up session, meaning that the client walked with a tattoo he had gotten previously, which had faded or become damaged in the healing process, and Mark was fixing these problems and adjusting some minor aesthetic details. The client was not interviewed by the researcher, however Mark asked the client to explain to the recorder his concept behind the tattoo. The tattoo was an adaptation of a modernist painting by Charles Demuth, depicting red and gold imagery of the number 5, from a poem by William Carlos Williams.

EXCERPT 3

1        C        This is really neat I like how you did that  
2            the coloring here and there  
3            the shading and stuff  
4            it's pretty neat I don't know  
5            definitely like xxx  
6            one of my favorite spots  
7            I know that that's not easy stuff  
8        A        tight tight little spot too  
9        C        exactly

---

EXCERPT 4

10 C so xxx the next tattoo I wanna get  
11 A did you go to mike colby's cd release thing  
12 the hot graves thing at 7th  
13 at the atlantic  
14 C was that  
15 A I wanna say it was a Saturday  
16 C I think that was the night  
17 yeah I work Saturday nights  
18 at the hospital  
19 um  
20 I can never do anything anymore with my work schedule and  
21 between my work schedule and having a kid and a kid on the way  
22 it's like  
23 plus my band's playing out and it's rare that I'm actually out  
24 my uh  
25 night life's taken a beating  
26 A hm  
28 for sure  
29 C but I wouldn't trade it for the world man  
30 A yeah I think I need to trade mine in  
31 C hehehe  
32 it's starting to work against you  
33 A yeah  
34 and I only go two steps to the bar across the street  
35 so that's what makes it even worse  
36 C how old are you?  
37 A 32  
38 C yeah that's about the age it starts to uh  
39 it's just  
40 that's about the age where you know  
41 hangovers for me used to be  
42 a doobie  
43 A like what?  
44 C A doobie  
45 go back to sleep for an hour  
46 xxx  
47 and I'm fine  
48 that's it  
49 now  
50 its 32 is when it started turning into an all day affair  
51 where about the time the sun's going down  
52 that's when I start to feel human again  
53 A haha

54 exactly  
55 C it's like, dammit dude  
56 [[Continued griping about alcohol and hangovers]]

---

#### EXCERPT 5

57 C I had a guy, actually I was takin X-rays at the hospital  
58 said he was needing tattoo work and asked me where I got this done  
59 I gave him your name  
60 so I'm trying to spread the word  
61 A oh I appreciate it  
62 have you ever heard the theory of um  
63 MRIs and tattoo  
64 C uhhh  
65 A and red ink  
66 C yeah  
67 uuuuummmmmm I just  
68 somebody was just telling me about uuuumm  
69 about the iron  
70 yeah there's some kind of metal in it  
71 I don't know what  
72 I forget what metal  
73 like magnesium or some crazy shit like that  
74 but there's trace elements of metal in there  
75 A right  
76 uuummm yeah llll  
77 I have never heard of somebody not being able to get an MRI  
78 because of the tattoo  
79 now uuuuhhh  
80 it might depend on where it is how much  
81 is there how much of the ink is present  
82 and what part of the body it is  
83 but I've seen the checklist they give people  
84 to fill out  
85 for the MRI you have to fill out a uh  
86 form uhh like  
87 it'll ask you questions like  
88 have you ever worked in a machine factory  
89 or like anywhere where you coulda gotten metal  
90 shrapnel in your eye  
91 like it has all these questions like  
92 do you xxx do you have you know  
93 brain clips for for aneurysms or strokes  
94 they ask you all these questions and i've never seen anything about  
tattoos

95           it's interesting though  
96    A       I've seen em do it on the mythbusters  
97           they busted it they like  
98           tattooed xxx  
99    C       ok so that makes sense then so it's not true  
101   A       but different inks now you never know  
102           like maybe back in the day  
103   C       right  
104   A       like one time  
105   C       right, right  
106   A       they xxx  
107   C       I'm thinkin like  
108           maybe when paint had led or like  
109   A       cadmium  
110   C       yeah that might have been more ferromagnetic  
111           [Tattoo gun starts buzzing loudly]

### Transcript 3: Coins

Artist: Mark

Tattoo parlor: Bodytech

This client was briefly interviewed by the researcher after a consultation with Mark and before Mark began applying the stencil sketch. The tattoo was based closely on an illustration he brought in depicting the devil, some coins and other imagery related vice and gambling. For him the tattoo symbolized his ongoing struggle with drug addiction, such that the purpose of the tattoo was to remind him that using drugs meant that he was gambling with his life. Although he'd had a small tattoo many years ago, this was his first extensive and professional tattoo.

### EXCERPT 6

1       C       how long you been tattooing for?  
2       A       7 years  
3           xxx  
4           a good while  
5           Not all the seven were here though  
6           I was in Tampa, did some tattooing  
7           I kinda went around and tattooed at some friends' parlors

---

EXCERPT 7

8 A Alright,  
9 we're gonna do it that way with it  
10 you see how it's dark down there?  
11 C Yes  
12 A within the area?  
13 It's gonna end up getting done just a little different for effect  
14 as we tattoo  
15 C well the col-  
16 A you see how those lines go to like 3 lines  
17 it's gonna get replaced with like a shade xxx  
18 like not  
19 cause the lines are there for the shading of the two  
20 so it's kinda gonna play into that effect  
21 C uhh  
22 A ya got me?  
23 C Yeah well I'm sure you know what you're doing bro  
24 A I appreciate that

---

EXCERPT 8

25 C xxx  
26 A drugs and everything like that?  
27 C Yeah xxx O-D  
28 I've done everything,  
29 that was my downfall  
30 for a long time I was envious of people with jobs,  
31 who could drink smoke or whatever they do man  
32 and for me there is no working at a job  
33 there's just robbin, stealin, lyin and cheatin xxxx  
34 so I say you know what  
35 I'm either gonna change my life  
36 ...  
37 cause god has a sense of humor  
38 A huh?  
39 C God has a sense of humor  
40 A oh I'm very aware of it  
41 C I wouldn't I'd be locked up in prison xxx  
42 A haha  
43 C yeah that's definitely a good xxx outcome

---

EXCERPT 9

40 A it's gonna be a little slow going  
41 just because it's gonna be a different illustrative style tattoo  
42 eeeeeh here we go  
43 [[tattoo gun buzzing]]  
44 not so bad right?  
45 C Na  
46 A just change up the feeling here xxx

---

EXCERPT 10

47 C man I'm starting to get numb  
48 A haha that's good...or bad  
49 C probably bad  
50 A haha don't pass out on me

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Heather Goode was born in 1987 and grew up in Boca Raton, Florida. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Florida, and soon after went on to pursue a Master of Arts in linguistics. She has worked in journalism, editing, and education, and has lived and worked in Chile and Peru. She enjoys eavesdropping.