In reference to the role of openings to service encounters

G. Aston
University of Bologna

1. Introduction
Discourse analysis has traditionally tended to treat the openings and closings of encounters as independent structural units which parenthesise the real conversational business. Goffman's "supportive interchanges" (1971), Sinclair & Coulthard's "boundary exchanges" (1975), Schegloff & Sacks' "pre-closing" and "closing" sequences (1973) all testify to a view of openings and closings as ritual bracketings to (other) activity, of which they organise the form rather than determining the discursive content. Roulet's modular model (1991, 1995) similarly treats openings and closings as separate exchanges which lack discursive links (of an illocutionary and/or interactive nature) with the central exchanges of the transaction. He sees any coherence with the latter as deriving from purely praxeological concerns relating to the "referential" component - "les organisations des champs (en particulier des lieux et des objets) touchés par ces activités" (1995: 12). This paper examines ways in which encounters in a context which Roulet himself considers, that of bookshops, are opened. It argues that the schemata through which openings are linked to the rest of the transaction may not simply be ones relating to the setting and its objects (an issue I refer to as referential alignment), but also to the actions requested of the participants by virtue of their roles within that setting (what I refer to as role alignment); and that in consequence, openings may have an interactive link with what follows, determining the preference structure of the subsequent exchange. This interactive function is realised by procedures which appear culture-specific, the degree to which openings constrain the development of the discourse being considerably greater in English, for example, than in Italian.
It is widely recognised that openings and closings may be sensitive to features of the given macrocontext (participant statuses, familiarity, default roles and goals, politeness conventions in the culture, etc.: Irvine 1974; Bardovi-Harlig et al 1991), but they have not generally been seen as influenced by more locally projected or emergent features of the interaction. In previous work on conversational closings (Aston 1992, 1995), I argued that the latter are also sensitive as to whether the interaction has developed in such a way as to problematise the participants’ alignments to a shared frame of reference and set of roles: in such cases, there is a need for participants to ratify alignment in closing, and much of the variability of closings in the PIXI bookshop encounter data (Gavioli & Mansfield 1990) seems accountable for in terms of these local concerns. The current paper examines conversational openings in the same data, to see whether variability in the openings of what are, in macrocontextual terms, similar types of encounter, can be related to differences in the trajectories of the subsequent discourse. In this preliminary study, I make no pretence to systematically account for all the openings in the corpora, but examine the main apparent regularities and discuss some deviant examples.

The PIXI corpora are very small by contemporary standards (150 encounters in English; 180 in Italian). What distinguishes them is their homogeneity, which means that they provide a relevant number of instances of certain activities, enabling recurrent patterns to be highlighted. The encounters are for the most part routine, appearing as non-problematic, non-memorable events, without occasions of marked conflict or discrimination. In this respect they constitute an appropriate site for examining the means whereby members recurrently “accomplish the ordinary” - standard procedures of successfully dealing with everyday situations. These situations fall within Merritt’s definition of a service encounter:

[an instance of] face-to-face interaction between a server who is “officially posted” in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer’s presumed desire for some service and the server’s obligation to provide that service.

(Merrit 1976: 321)

In both the English and Italian data, similar participants meet with similar goals in similar surroundings - multidepartmental self-service
bookshops in large university towns, with separate information and cash desks.1

2. Opening service encounters

2.1 Limits of the data

All the data to be discussed is transcribed from audiotape. For a study of openings, the lack of video recording means that little or no information is available as to how talk begins: we do not generally know what the participants were doing previously, whether, how and when they established eye-contact, and so on. Unlike telephone conversations (the focus of most work on openings: Schegloff 1968, 1979, Godard 1977, Zimmerman 1992a, b; Hopper 1994), face-to-face interaction does not just have a phone-ring summons as its initial shared context. Complex non-verbal negotiation may take place to establish shared attention and a shared context (Kendon 1990, 1992). This negotiation would seem a key factor in determining who initiates the talk, as for example when a customer waits for a busy assistant to announce their availability.

The opening utterances of an interaction must clearly display awareness of the this initial context. However, all but the first is also responsive to features of previous talk; conversely, all opening utterances potentially constrain - at some level - what follows. For these reasons, I shall ignore the issue of who talks first, and instead examine whether different patterns of opening prospect different developments of the encounter. The fact that openings follow a limited number of recurrent patterns (summarised in table 1 in the appendix) suggests that participants use routine, culturally-shared procedures for this purpose.

1 The data also have the advantage of being relatively transparent to the analyst-interpretor: the participants have little shared knowledge which is not available to the analyst, since they interact as strangers in a public setting, and deal with issues concerning books and bookshops with which the analyst can be familiar.
2.2. Establishing role alignment

The form of service encounter closings, I have argued (Aston 1992, 1995), relates to the extent to which the default role expectations for service encounters indicated by Merritt are satisfied - in particular, the assistant's obligation to meet the customer's requirements. Alignment to these roles is rarely problematic if the assistant can provide the customer with the book or information requested, so that her response to the customer's request may directly conclude the encounter. On the other hand, if the assistant is unable to satisfy the customer's requirements - as when the requested book is not immediately available - role alignment is problematic, and the assistant's remedial suggestions or excuses require a further move of acceptance by the customer prior to closing - typically in the form okay + thanks.

At the opening of a service encounter, the setting provides default expectations as to the roles of the participants. Zimmerman (1992b), examining calls to emergency assistance services, notes how the dedicated emergency number assigns default roles of requester and provider of help to caller and answerer, and shows how alignment to these roles is confirmed by the standard opening procedure, consisting in a categorical identification by the answerer ("Nine one emergency") and a caller acknowledgment and request or report. Goffman has argued that similar expectations apply in face-to-face service encounters:

You can tell the [cinema] ticket seller that you are dying to see the show, and while this might be judged as a little oversociable, it is perhaps forgivably so. But if you chose the moment of contact with a ticket seller to tell her directly about having to take the car in tomorrow to get a new muffler, that would be considered grounds for imputing strangeness [...] (Goffman 1983: 41)

To get round to informal personal conversation, the participants would have to negotiate a different role alignment from the default one. Conversely, Goffman notes, such a negotiatory strategy would be out of place were no deviation from the default projected:

If you treat the transaction as one that requires you first to initiate a state of talk before saying how many [tickets you want] (as with "Excuse me, Miss, could I have ..."), then the seller may well look to her own behavior and your tone of voice for evidence that a sarcastic reminder of her duties is intended, and [...] if she fails to find any such evidence, she may think your head needs tightening. (Goffman 1983: 35)
In other words, both Goffman and Zimmerman see the use of a particular opening procedure as allowing participants to establish their alignment to the roles requested for a particular activity-type. I now turn to see whether there is evidence of a similar function of openings in the PIXI data.

2.3. Local roles and generic roles

Within the range summarised by Merritt's labels of service-seeking and provision, alignment in bookshop encounters arguably involves establishing which specific roles are relevant. In the data, it seems that a bookshop assistant may be cast:

a) in the role of a generic expert concerning the shop (someone who knows which departments deal with which subjects, where those departments are located, opening hours, rules of payment, etc.);

b) in the role of person locally responsible for this section or department (someone who knows "their" books, whether they are available, which shelf they should be on, etc.).

Which of these two roles is assumed seems reflected in, for example, pronoun use: assistants demonstrate their assumption of a local role by such responses as "I don't have it, but they may keep it in psychology in the basement", whereas in generic role they may adopt a collective we to identify with the shop as a whole. Compare the generic:

(1) Lod b-32
   Cw Can you tell me if you have books on teaching the deaf?
   AZ + Er we keep books: like that in education and psychology in the basement.
   Cw =Thanks.
   AZ (3yll) right.

with the (exaggeratedly) local role assumed in:

(2) Lod d-04
   AJ (Can I help you?)
   Cm I have a strange feeling you don't accept Barclaycard.
   AJ I don't - well.
   Cm =No.
   AJ I- The firm does, I don't. You pay "(the lady who's) just over there.
   Cm 'Ah!"
The assumption of local or generic role may not simply be a matter
of assistant preference. Customers’ requests appear to prospect one or other
role for their interlocutor. We find, for instance, that encounters opened
with *Do you have/Have you got* are treated as implying a local role, appea­
ing to the assistant-as-responsible-for-this-department:

(3) Lod c-27b
Cw [overlaps talk between AJ and acquaintance] *Do you* have any books
on careers.
AJ + N- not here, but if you go to the education department on the ground
floor, *'No.'*
Cw *'(On the) ground' floor.*

Encounters opened with *Where* or simply a category term instead
appear to imply a generic role, appealing to the assistant-as-expert-on-the-
shop:

(4) Lod d-07
Cm Where is French?
AJ + Pardon?
Cm French?
AJ =In the next department along.

(5) Lod c-28b
Cw Where's history, please?
AJ Three rooms that way.
Cw =Thank you.
AJ =(*1syll*).

Which of these roles is aligned to is important from a discourse point
of view, insofar as different response-types are called for. Following re­
quests appealing to generic role, direction to another department may be a
"preferred" response, being typically provided immediately, without initial
delay components, as in (5) above (Levinson 1983). Following a request
appealing to local role, on the other hand, direction to another department
is "dispreferred", failing to satisfy the expectation that the assistant should
satisfy the request in this department. Such directions are typically prece­
ded by delay components and a *no*, i.e. in dispreferred format:

(6) Lod c-19
*interrupts talk between AP and an acquaintance*
Cw *'You've got "Style in fiction".*
AP *'Er: well at first glance, we haven't, no. Um: + but they also keep it in
the: + er literature department 'on the ground' floor.*
Cw *'Oh do they.*
In their design of the request-response exchange, in other words, it thus seems possible for participants to demonstrate their alignment to local or generic roles.

It would appear that the relevance of one of these role alignments may also be established through elements in the encounter opening which precede the request. For instance, an opening customer *Excuse me* appears to prospect generic alignment - even when the request itself employs a form otherwise typical of local alignment, such as *do you have*:

(7) Lod b-04

[interrupts talk between As]

*Cm* Excuse me, do you have a- + a section of Portuguese: + "language."  
*AJ* 'Yeah. Ask' in the next department which: - language?  
*Cm* (Yes.)  
*AJ* Yeah. Ask in the next department.

Prefacing with a customer greeting, on the other hand, appears to prospect local roles:

(8) Lod b-33

*Cm* Hello: I'm looking for this book, "Demosthenes and Isthanes", Penguin.  
*AZ* + Er: + (Let me see if we stock 'it or -?"

Such patterns are not invariably followed, but where they are not, deviations can be seen as referring to them. Thus the reciprocal greeting which opens the following example can be seen as deviating from the greeting + local request pattern in (8), and consequently cancelling those expectations. In fact it would appear to prospect generic roles (judging from the response, which is provided in preferred turn-format):

(9) Lod d-01

*Cm* Good morning.  
*AP* =Hallo.  
*Cm* I'm looking for "Modern English in action", + "by Henry Christ."  
*AP* 'You want the next: desk' on the left.  
*Cm* On the 'left'?  
*AP* "(If you ask' on the next desk (there).  
*Cm* =Hm?

In encounters opened by customers, it would appear that the customer can generally prospect a particular role alignment by selecting an appropriate preface and following this by the request. Where instead the assistant opens the encounter, that opening may constrain the customer by itself proposing a particular alignment. Thus openings with assistant *Yes ap"
The main other type of assistant opening, *Can I help you,* also appears to prospect alignment to local roles. Unlike *Yes,* however, it calls for a customer acknowledgement prior to the request:  

(12) Lod a-04a
AJ *Can I help you.*
Cw *Yes, have you got Robert Burchfield's "The English language"?*
AP *No.*
Cw *Or have you sold out.*
AP *Yes, it's reprinting already, and it's due out on: the sixteenth of February, I think.*
Cw *Yes. Everybody's sold out.*

(13) Lod d-03
AJ *Can I help you.*
Cw *Yes, I'm - I was looking for a book on er- I've- I've got er + Barthes' "Mythologies" from the French "department,*
AJ *"(Er) I'm sorry, I can't hear you.*
Cw *Er Barthes. This: 'man,*
AJ *"Yeah." Yeah.*
Cw *Erm: have you got any more books by him in this department?*
AJ *Yes! + The top pile over *there.*
Cw *"Oh thank* you.*

Failure to provide this acknowledgement seems to be a means for the customer to cancel this expectation, proposing a different alignment. Thus

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2 The choice between *Yes* and *Can I help you?* as assistant opening moves seems to be in part a matter of personal style: one of the three assistants in the data never uses the latter form.
in the first example below, the customer anticipates the *Yes* response to overlap the assistant's opening, while in the second he acknowledges the latter not with *Yes* but with *Sorry*. In both cases, the subsequent request is treated as generic, with a direction to another department being provided in preferred format:

(14)  Lod c-28a  
AJ  Can I `help you?'  
Cm  `Yes:.' I'm looking for a book: (01) on furniture making.  
AJ  Furniture making? Ask three rooms that way, in the art department.

(15)  Lod c-13  
[interrupts talk between As]  
AJ  Can I help you.  
Cm  =Sorry, can you tell me where - archaeology is?  
AJ  Three rooms that way.  
Cm  (2syll).

Given the negotiated, co-produced nature of talk, we can, following Goffman, thus argue that the fluent production of a routine opening pattern provides a means of establishing a particular alignment, whereas disfluency and deviation provide means of cancelling such expectations and making alternative alignments potentially relevant.

If this view of the role of prefacings is correct, it would suggest that the link between openings and what follows needs to be considered as much closer than generally assumed. This linkage should, I would argue, be at least in part attributed to the discursive component in Roulet's model. The latter component specifies exchange structure constraints; for instance that a request can only be interactively satisfied by a preferred response, completing the exchange. But in this data, opening prefacings frequently appear to determine what is to count as a preferred response, by prospecting a particular role alignment. In this respect, openings - be they single prefacing moves or paired exchanges - have a preparatory function, interactively linked to the exchange which follows as "pre-sequences" in conversational analytic terms (Levinson 1983).

2.4. Referential alignment

The link between openings and what follows concerns Roulet's referential component insofar as openings also serve to establish alignment to a parti-
cular frame of reference. Looking at encounter closings in the data, Aston (1992, 1995) found that assistant directions which are formulated in terms relative to the local setting, such as “Ask three rooms that way”, require no acknowledgement by the customer, and argued that this is because the references in question can be presumed interpretable given the shared setting. Where, on the other hand, assistants' directions are formulated in absolute, geographical terms (Schegloff 1972), such as “Try the literature department”, customers provide acknowledgements which implicitly confirm their understanding of the references involved, ratifying their alignment to the wider frame of reference invoked.

In the context of encounter openings, referential alignment mainly concerns the interpretability of references in customers’ requests. These are usually to particular books or subject categories. There are references which can be presumed to be mutually accessible - for instance, to famous books and institutionalised categories. References to obscure books and peculiar categories, on the other hand, may not invoke this default frame of reference: there is a difference between asking for *Hamlet* or the poetry section and asking for a minor novel or model-theoretic semantics. Customers appear to orient to this presumable accessibility in the way they formulate requests, using definite expressions for supposedly “given” referents, and indefinite or deictic ones for ones which are not presumed so (Gavioli 1993). Thus the requests in the following examples presuppose accessibility:

(16)  Lod d-05
Cw  Erm: where would be “Roget’s thesaurus”?
AJ  There just behind you, where it says reference.
Cw  Ah yes.

(17)  Lod c-27a
[interrupts talk between As and an acquaintance]
AP  “Yeah.”
Cw  “Could you tell me: er when you’ll be getting in: Kant’s “Critique, of: practical + reason”.
AP  “Practical reason”.
Cw  =Yeah. (02) “???
AP  “Erm: I thought we had it act- no. No, we’ve got the “Critique of judgment”, haven’t we. Erm: I’ll have a look.

where the following do not:
In discussing the use of prefaces in relation to role alignment, I noted that alignment to local or generic roles might be prospected either by the form of an unprefaced request, or by the use of particular prefacing techniques. When we look to see just where prefacing is used, we find that regardless of the role alignment prospected, requests using definite referring expressions tend to be unprefaced, while those using indefinite or deictic formulations are prefaced. Thus in the case of excuse me, we find that as well as prospecting generic roles, they also precede indefinite formulations of the referent:

We instead find no prefacing prior to those requests which prospect the same role alignment, but presuppose accessibility by definite formulations of the referent:

Examples which fail to follow these patterns appear to orient to them. For instance:
After prefacing with excuse me, the customer here initially formulates her request with a definite rather than an indefinite reference (which floor's shorthand), which obtains no response. She then self-corrects, reformulating her request in indefinite terms (books on), as prospected by the original preface.

Turning to requests prospecting local roles, we again find that requests using definite formulations, such as (16) above, are unprefaced, while those with indefinite or deictic ones are prefaced. Thus (18) and (19) above are prefaced by the customer. Where a preface is instead provided by the assistant, requests which are subsequently provided smoothly use indefinite formulations, whereas where the assistant preface is overlapped (as in (17) above), or the Yes acknowledgement of Can I help you is omitted, as in the next examples, we find definite formulations:3

3 An exception is example (12) above, where a Yes response is provided prior to a definite request for Robert Burchfield's "The English Language". This encounter deviates from routine patterns in a number of ways, most strikingly in the assistant's provision of a dispreferred No in preferred format in the response, and the customer's subsequent reformulation of the request in such a way as to retrospectively attribute that response with preferred status ("or have you sold out?"). There are a handful of other encounters where the customer seems to invite a negative answer of this kind, using prefaced definite references to make marked presuppositions of the "when did you stop beating your wife?" variety. Cf.:

Lod c-33
[interrupts talk between As]
AJ [gasps, laughs] Can I help you?
Cw You don't have Jon Elster, "Ulysses and the sirens:"?
AJ =I'm sorry ser-
Cw =Jon Elster.
While the data examined so far concern references to specific books, we also find the same patterns with requests for subject categories or series. References to institutionalised categories can be presumed accessible by default:

(26) Lod d-08
CW Erm: - is this EFL? No.
AJ =No, it's (just 'through there).'
CW "(??)."

Requests for less familiar categories instead tend to be provided with indefinite formulations of the reference, and with prefacing of some kind:

(27) Lod e-02a
CW Excuse me? Can I ask you -
[03] electric buzz
CW Do you have a metaphysical section?
AJ Metaphysics?
CW Yes.
AJ -We keep metaphysics in with philosophy, but 'there's no section of-
section as such.
CW 'Oh so it's mixed in.'

(28) Lod e-20b
CWN Can you help me. Where can I find: er: books about: chess.
AZ Chess.
CWN =Yes.
AZ =Er: ++ Leisure probably, on the first floor. 'The game'?
CWN 'First.' Yeah.

The data would thus seem to suggest that a function of prefaches is to prefigure a reference as not presumably accessible. Unlike differences in prospected role alignment, this does not imply a difference in the structure of the subsequent exchange, with different preferred responses to the re-
quest, and its logic would thus seem to appertain to the praxeology of Roulet's referential component.

There is however one exception to this pattern which should be noted. References may be inaccessible not only by virtue of the referent's unfamiliarity, but also because the reference itself identifies the referent inadequately - when, for example, a customer is unsure of the details of a book. In such cases, the reference has to be negotiated. This typically involves an extended request turn, in which the customer provides as much information as possible about the book in question. The preferred response to such a request is, in the first place, one of recognition by the assistant:

(29) Lod d-02a
Cm Uh!
AP Yes.
Cm I'm looking for this book by Esther De Waal, on St Benedict, "Seeking god". + That's the er: + publisher. ++ It's called "Seeking god" and it's by Esther De Waal.
AP ++ Yes. Erm: + Fine, I don't think we have it, but: er-

(30) Lod a-03
Cm Um + 'Sorry to' (really). + A few weeks ago I ordered some books and I ++ a girl gave me 'em. Is it Sandie? + Would Sandie sound - she was on that + counter there. [inbreath]
AJ "Yes."
AJ ==Sabrina.
Cm "Mm." I see. + "Yes."
Cm "Is she:" round now, "anywhere?"

(31) Lod b-01/a
Cm Thank you. I'm looking for a book that- that is: either just published or about to be published, called I think "The secret cult". I don't know its publisher or authors. Have you: heard of it?
AJ No I 'haven't:'. Do you know anything - what- what secret cult, for "instance?"
C1m "No:"
C1m "It's about: a - a- a modern religious group in London.
AJ + It may be worth try- I know this sounds silly (2syll), but it may actually be worth trying the: erm: social sciences anthropology section up 'stairs.'

Such extended requests are routinely preceded by reciprocal prefaces from both customer and assistant (where a Can I help you pair is involved, with a marked second part), matching a regularity widely noted in conversational analysis. Sacks (1974) argues that exchanges such as "Did you
hear the one about X/No" serve to negotiate a long turn for a storyteller; Zimmerman (1992b) finds that turns with extended emergency reports are prefaced by an exchange in which the caller identifies themself or the source of the call, and the answerer indicates recognition. In the PIXI data, following such reciprocal prefacing, negotiation of the referent of the request becomes the business of the next exchange, with postponement of the response to that request till after referential alignment has been established. This process would seem to imply a shift in role alignment, as the assistant is cast not simply in the position of the expert obliged to satisfy the customer’s request for service, but also in that of a collaborator who helps the customer to formulate the request.\textsuperscript{4}

2.5. Summary

I have suggested that the way in which bookshop encounters are opened is sensitive to the following features:

a) the prospected accessibility of references in the request. Requests with references which can be presumed accessible by default are routinely unprefaced, whereas those not so presumed are prefaced.

b) the roles prospected for the encounter. Different prefices are used prior to requests calling for generic roles (Excuse me or Sorry) and calling

\textsuperscript{4} Reciprocal prefacing of this kind would seem, understandably, to be particularly common in encounters with non-native customers, in which we frequently find an initial Excuse me/Yes exchange occurring prior to the request. This distinctive opening pattern (which never occurs with native-speaker customers) again appears to project a role for the assistant of negotiating referential alignment:

Lodb-05

Cmn Excuse me.
AJ Yeah.
Cmn I'm looking for + this book "Residual and: infancy registration, + regressions".
AJ What kind of - what's - what "kind of book is it?"
Cmn \"(Of-\)
Cmn \"It's er.\" + economic book, (I think).
AJ =A: -
Cmn Economic.
AJ Upstairs then.
Cmn =Upstairs. Thanks very much.
for local roles (customer *Hello*, assistant *Yes*, or a *Can I help you?* *Yes* exchange).

c) the presumed need to negotiate references. Such requests, which also require a different role alignment, are preceded by reciprocal prefacing.

Insofar as different role alignments imply different preferred response-types to the customer's request, the form of openings has consequences for exchange structure in the subsequent encounter: as such, prefacing acts seem to fall under the sway of Roulet's discourse component. Prospected differences in referential alignment, on the other hand, are without such implications, and the coherence of openings in this respect would appear to depend solely on the referential component.

None of this is to say that the patterns I have suggested are routine are blindly followed or consistently present in the data. The evidence consists in the fact that they occur with a certain frequency, with relatively straightforward contexts; and that deviant examples can be seen as orientating to these routines as norms. A customer may find her assessments of referential and role alignment to be at odds with the assistant's, or simply change her mind, but this is reflected in the development of the discourse, typically through use of additional prefacing components prior to adoption of a different alignment from that initially prospected.

3. Cross-cultural differences: openings in the Italian data

It may be the case that the nature of the links between opening prefacing and what follows varies cross-culturally, and that the relationships outlined in 2.5 above are in part peculiar to the English data. In the case of closings, while similar concerns of referential and role alignment appear relevant in both English and Italian, they are dealt with in rather different ways (Aston 1992, 1995). Unlike English, Italian appears to adopt a two-part closing sequence where it is necessary to ratify role alignment, typically realised as *Okay grazie / Prego*. The need to ratify alignment reciprocally arguably derives from the way Italian organises remedial work following dispreferred assistant responses. In English, this remedial work is typically initiated by the assistant, who volunteers what she judges to be the best remedy in the circumstances, which the customer may or may not accept, acceptance
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typically closing the encounter. In Italian, the terms of remedy are typically set by the customer, who interrupts the assistant to highlight what she sees as the nature of the trouble. This may prevent the assistant from offering her version of the best remedy in the circumstances, entailing that as well as the customer's acceptance of the elicited remedy, the assistant's ratification of its acceptability is called for.

In encounter openings, there are again quantitative differences between the two sets of data. The most striking feature of these is the frequency with which reciprocal prefaces occur in Italian - whether customer or assistant-initiated (cf Table 2 in appendix). Many of these exchanges are followed by further prefaces, as in the following, in a pattern which is absent from the English data:

(32) Bof a-04
AF Buongiorno. (Good morning.)
Cw Buongiorno. (Good morning.)
AF Mi dica. (Yes.)
Cw Avete "Storia della linguistica" del Robins? ++ Il Mulino, mi sembra. (Have you got "History of linguistics" by Robins? Mulino Press, I think.)
AF No lo deve chiedere sotto allora, eh? (No, you have to ask for it downstairs in that case, right?)

I suggested that reciprocal prefaces in the English data prospect negotiation of referents, opening up a state of talk which allows a longer request turn for the request. In the Italian data, the greater proportion of reciprocal openings seems only partly matched by a greater proportion of requests requiring a long turn to specify the referent adequately (as in the last example) or to allow the assistant to negotiate it (as in the next):

(33) Bof f-03a
Cw Buonasera. (Good evening.)
AA =Sera. (Evening.)
Cw =Sto cercando una grammatica francese tradotta: in italiano, cioè va in mano a un francese che vuole apprendere l'italiano. (I'm looking for a French grammar translated into Italian for a French person who wants to learn Italian.)
AA =Però lei vuole una grammatica italiana? (So you want an Italian grammar?)
Cw Italiano, sì: "lo". (Italian, yes.)
AA "Che è un'altra roba. No. (Which is another matter. No.)
Cw Sì, tra 'dotta: + (Yes, translated -)
AA "Ho sò lo; + forse: - + no, nemmeno. + Niente, non ho 'niente per francese." (I've only got perhaps no, not even. Nothing, I've nothing for French.)
We also find reciprocal prefacing prior to such straightforward definite local requests as:

\[(34)\]  
\[\text{Bof b-02} \]
\[\text{Cw Buonasera. (Good evening.)} \]
\[\text{AA ++ Salve. (Hello.)} \]
\[\text{Cw Ha questo libro? (Do you have this book?)} \]

Overall, the Italian data seem characterised by a greater variability in openings, where these are less directly correlated with the referential and role alignment to be assumed. One explanation may lie in the tendency for participants to adopt reparatory rather than preparatory strategies to establish alignment in Italian. Contrastive studies of the PIXI data have noted that Italian seems to deal with problems as they arise, rather than avoiding them pre-emptively, as in English. This is reflected in what, from an English viewpoint, seems a more conflictual style in Italian, where interruptions and on-record disagreements are manifold. Thus Brodine (1990) notes how Italian assistants' responses are regularly interrupted by customer echoic repetitions as a means of eliciting remedy; Zorzi Calò (1990a, b) argues that these procedures are in fact heard as collaborative rather than conflictual, constituting routine means in the culture of negotiating acceptability. From this point of view, it might be argued that to prospect a particular alignment through prefacing is of less importance in Italian, insofar as reparatory negotiation is relatively preferred. What may be prospected by reciprocal prefacing may simply be the possibility of such negotiation, that the lines of the encounter are not necessarily given in terms of a default script, with the opening up a “state of talk” in which almost anything may happen. For a second feature of the Italian data is the variety of just what does happen. Customers' requests receive such improbable (for the English data) responses as “What a strange request!” “What school do you go to?” and “That's the subtitle.” As Gavioli (1993) observes, it is common in Italian for participants to assume roles with a substantial personal component, where the assistant advises the customer what book she should buy and why, or the customer explains why they are looking for a book in the first place:
Buonasera. Mi dica, (Good evening. Yes.)

(35) Boff-f-10b

Cm + Senta, io mi sto: ++ cioè m- mi sono iscritto a un corso, e m'han detto di venire qui a prendere il libro. (Listen, that is I - I've enrolled in a course, and they told me to come here to get the book.)

AA "Ti uno", si c'è. (01) Questo lo tenga pur fuori, perché tanto lo fa vedere alla cassa 'prima di' dare i libri. ("T one", yes we have that. Keep this at hand so you can show it at the till when you take the books.)

(36) Boff-f-18a

Cw Vorrei - vorrei un consiglio. + Come - un libro di grammatica, mm abbastanza buona di inglese. (I'd like - I'd like some advice. As - a grammar book, mm reasonably good of English.)

AA Lei a che livello c? (What level are you at?)

Cw Mm: + "a metà." (Mm half way.)

AA "Perché" ne esistono tante. "di grammatiche. + e sono buone: in realtà, + per quello che uno deve fare. (Because there are a lot of grammars, and they're good really according to what you have to do.)

Cw "Mm."

Cw Mhm.

AA =Non in assoluto. (Not in any absolute sense.)

If Italian prefers to negotiate alignment during the main business rather than to establish it on a preparatory basis, a consequence is that prefacings in the openings of Italian encounters may be less closely linked than in English to subsequent exchanges. The degree of independence of opening and closing exchanges may, in other words, differ across cultures, according to their wider preferred practices of discourse organisation.

Transcription conventions (Gavioli & Mansfield 1990)

AL speaker = assistant, where L is the first letter of the assistant's name (AA and AP are men, AJ, AF and AZ are women)

Cw speaker = female customer

Cm speaker = male customer

Cmn speaker = male non-native customer

Cwn speaker = female non-native customer

[note] comments (paralinguistic and extralinguistic features)

(text) tape unclear: tentative transcription

(nsyll) tape untranscribable: n = approximate number of syllables spoken

(??) tape untranscribeable

+ short pause (less than one second)

++ longer pause (less than one second)

(n) long pause (n = length in seconds)

= latched to the preceding turn in the transcript
latched to previous-but-one turn in the transcript
spoken in overlap with next "text"
spoken in overlap with next "text"
title of book or series
stressed syllable or in loud voice
lengthening of previous sound or syllable (number of colons indicates extent of lengthening)
syllable cut short
tone group interrupted
low fall intonation
fall-rise intonation
low rise intonation
rise-fall intonation

Tables

Table 1: Openings in the PIXI data (English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer openings</th>
<th>followed by request</th>
<th>followed by greeting/acknowledgment of other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unprefaced</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excuse me</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6 (yes; all with NNS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello/Good morning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 (hello)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erm</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 (yes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous(^5)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant openings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 (hello)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I help you</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous(^6)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Openings which are unclear are not classified.

\(^5\) Miscellaneous customer openings include: I wonder if you could help me; Can you help me (3, all NNS); I have a question; Sorry to bother you; I'm sorry I --; [clears throat].

\(^6\) Miscellaneous assistant openings include greetings (Good morning/Hello) and Sorry.
Table 2: A comparison of openings in the English (Lod) and Italian (Bof) data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English (%) (n=150)</th>
<th>Italian (%) (n=180)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unprefaced Request</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer preface</td>
<td>29 (Excuse me/hello)</td>
<td>8 (Scusi/senta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer-assistant preface</td>
<td>10 (Excuse me - Yes)</td>
<td>26 (Scusi - Dica; Reciprocal greetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant preface</td>
<td>16 (Yes)</td>
<td>14 (Dica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant-customer preface</td>
<td>14 (Can I help you? - Yes)</td>
<td>28 (Reciprocal greetings; Dica - Senta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-classified</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References

ASTON G. (1992), What it takes to close a service encounter: A study in contrastive pragmatics, Bologna, CLUEB.


GAVIOLI L. & MANSFIELD G. (eds.) (1990), The PIXI corpora: Bookshop encounters in english and italian, Bologna, CLUEB.


