# Relational work in Salesperson–Customer interaction

Jarkko Niemi

<u>Jarkko.j.niemi@helsinki.fi</u> Scientific Advisory Board Meeting September 28–29, 2017

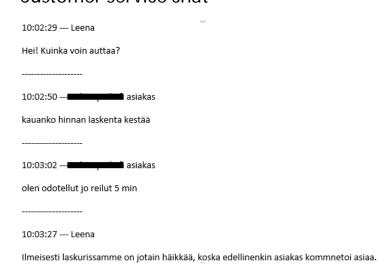




## On-going project: DICIA – Digitalization in Customer Interaction

- 31 video-recorded B-to-B sales encounters
- Customer service chat (5 days)

#### Customer service chat



23 face-to-face meetings



8 phone calls w. a shared computer screen



#### CA and relational work

- Relationship: "something that is subject to on-going, step-by-step management within talk between persons, rather than a state of affairs that underlies their talk" (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984)
- Relationship is built through and expressed in communication between the salesperson and the prospective customer
- Our research: Rapport building (Kaski, Niemi, & Pullins, in press) and building customer trust (Niemi, submitted)



#### First moments (00:00–00:24)

Rapport: "A harmonious relationship between participants; mutual connection and understanding or perceived similarity to one another" (Gremler & Gwinner, 2008; Clark, Drew, & Pinch, 2003)



#### First moments (00:00–00:24)

```
6 Buyer:
           ei oo ihan opettajan kesälomat mut melekei.
           not quite like teacher's summer holidays but almost
           mutta< e- meleko mukavasti.
7 SP:
                    quite nice
           on. °on on.°
8 Buyer:
           is. is is ((='that is true'))
9 SP:
           nii että välillä tota käyvään vähän töissä mutta taas
           so that every now and then you'll work a little but then
10
           sitte niinku jatketaan.
           again like continue.
11 Buyer: taas jatketaan harjotuksia.
           again we continue exercises
12
          (0.2)
13 SP:
          eikö seki, siinäki o aina oma homma että nää pääset taas
          isn't that too, it too has always its own work to get going
14
          kylykeen tähän näi ja,=
          with this ((work)) again and
15 Buyer: =o. iha tasan tarkkaa.
          =((it)) has. exactly so
16 SP:
```

nii,

yes



formulates her understanding of the C's story and elicits agreement (nii että - -, "so that - -")

affiliates with C by adopting his side and supporting his implied affective (emotional) stance (eikö seki - -, "isn't that too - -")

#### Findings

- Sales research has emphasized SP initiated sequences (asking the right questions, initiating small talk, making jokes at appropriate moments, etc.) in rapport building
- Our research suggests that SP's best tool in rapport building are his/her responsive actions
  - Alignment: SP not only claims understanding of the C's holiday talk by saying "I see" or "that's right," but aligns with C by continuing his line of action.
  - Affiliation: SP affiliates with C by adopting his side and supporting his implied affective (emotional) stance, thereby claiming "sharedness" or "similarity"
  - Formulations: By offering a rephrased version of the upshot of the C's story, SP explicitly shows her understanding of the C's story and elicits agreement. This results in an extended sequence of mutual agreement.

### Thank you!

Clark, C., Drew, P., & Pinch, T. (2003). Managing prospect affiliation and rapport in real-life sales encounters. *Discourse Studies*, 5(1), 5–31.

Gremler, D., & Gwinner, K. (2008). Rapport-building behaviors used by retail employees. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(3), 308–324.

Maynard, D. W., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1984). Topical talk, ritual and the social organization of relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *47*(4), 301–316.

Kaski, T., Niemi, J., & Pullins, E. (in press). Rapport building in authentic B2B sales interaction. *Industrial Marketing Management*.

Niemi, J. (submitted). Building customer trust. A comparison of real-life failed and successful B2B sales encounters. *Journal of Business Research.*