6

Information as valuable capital

This chapter examines the elements of the institutional order which bear upon the interactions examined in the present study. The interactional contributions of participants, mainly bureaucrats, cannot be fully comprehended without an understanding of the numerous institutional pressures and conflicting demands with which they have to cope. Their practices of information provision reveal a particular ideological conceptualisation of both their professional role and the individual clients they serve. Through their linguistic practices they contribute, intentionally and unintentionally, to the reproduction of an unequal social order. This thesis uncovers how institutional and individual power is exercised through talk. The focus of the present chapter is on the ways in which state and institutional power is exercised. Bureaucrats are the instruments of institutional power, but at the same time, they themselves endure it by having to submit to institutional regulations.

Information on the progress of their applications for legalisation is vital for immigrants. Their only way to attempt to abandon the marginal social and material circumstances in which they live is to become legal residents. Information, as a verbal service, is provided in and through social interaction. It is demanded and obtained through linguistic means. When linguistic resources are asymmetrically distributed, as is the case at the office investigated, minority speakers are at a disadvantage. Their chances of discursive participation are structurally constrained. More importantly, there is the potential for structural linguistic asymmetries to be *made* to work against the interests of the minority participant. Language is the primary locus for implementing social relations and creating social boundaries. The study of information as a verbal service gives us insights into how social inequality is sustained in and out of situated social activity.

This chapter analyses practices of information provision from a critical standpoint. It examines the linguistic format and the content of the information provided, but it also looks at the information immigrants need and never receive.

The ethnographic data collected during fieldwork, which was briefly presented in Chapter 5, highlights the discrepancies between what immigrants are told and what they *could* be told. My in-depth interview with Hussain serves to pin down what immigrants *need* to know. This study departs from the assumption that, in information provision, as in verbal communication, choices are made, and that alternative choices are possible and desirable. It seeks to unveil whose interests certain discursive practices serve and examines their effects and consequences for the lives of immigrants. The detailed, turn-by-turn analysis of the process of information exchange is undertaken in Chapter 7. The different strategies immigrant service seekers employ to satisfy their information needs are presented. Likewise, it examines the strategies mobilised by institutional representatives to comply with institutional pressures not to reveal certain types of information, while at the same time managing the demands of the interaction order.

Bureaucrats' reformulation practices

As was mentioned in Chapter 5, in service communication, bureaucrats reformulate the institutional information available to them in significant ways. This is information regarding the status of immigrants' applications for legalisation. When an application is given to them for checking, officials enter the applicant's personal details into the computer. A few seconds later, the applicant's computerised datafile appears on the screen. One of the fields tells the bureaucrat at what particular administrative stage the application is. An account of the different stages and the official labels they receive was provided in Chapter 5. Officials' service compliance responses are shaped differently according to the information they obtain from the computer. In situated service talk, applications are usually assigned to one of three stages. They may be in *trámite* (being processed), or some *falta* (problem) may have been found with them, or else, the permit may have been *concedido* (granted). This reformulation of available information is one of the most significant elements in the discursive practices of public representatives. They rarely employ the official labels devised by the institution, such as *fase de instrucción* (preparatory phase) or *propuesta de concesión* (proposal for approval), to refer to the different stages making up the

procedure. This would not be remarkable if it did not have an effect on the actual amount of information immigrants receive. Before examining the implications and effects of bureaucrats' information providing practices, it is interesting to examine how they originate.

In my semi-informal interview with B09, one of the information providing officials, I ask him about their routinised way of providing information to immigrants. In particular, I was interested in finding out whether bureaucrats were implementing institutional guidelines on how much, what type of information to provide, and how to convey it, or not. One intriguing question was why the word *trámite* was chosen as the standard, all-encompassing response, and where the decision comes from. In our conversation, I ask B09 whether the information staff had received any specific "training" from the institution on how to communicate with service seekers. He mentions that on the first day somebody from the *INEM* (the National Unemployment Agency) lectured them on general issues related to gaze, body posture and "friendly" communication. Among other things, they were advised to look enquirers in the eyes when addressing them (instead of, for example, staring at the computer screen), and to employ respectful language. These are all very general recommendations which do not take into account the specificity of the institutional site under investigation. I ask the official whether during their training session they were taught how to communicate with individuals from different cultures who may have varying degrees of proficiency in Spanish and/or Catalan. He answers in the negative. The same type of answer is provided when I ask the question of whether the institution has made suggestions or recommendations as to how much information to provide and how to go about it in situated service interaction. In short, as B09 recounts it, it is left up to institutional representatives to decide on the content and the linguistic format of their talk.

According to B09, it is the team of information officials who decide to replace "obscure" institutional terminology by lay words like *trámite*. The reasons he puts forward have to do with ensuring efficient communication. In the bureaucrat's view, it is a matter of common sense that the technical phrases employed by the institution, such as *fase de instrucción* (preparatory phase) or *propuesta denegatoria*

(proposal for rejection), are beyond the ability of immigrant information seekers to understand. In the official's account, their information provision practices are shaped by a pressing need to avoid communication difficulties in face-to-face interaction. These difficulties are believed to arise as a result of immigrants' poor command of Spanish, which is the language in which the institution functions, and thus, the language employed to label particular administrative stages. In short, officials simplify their productions to make them more accessible to their interlocutors, thereby attempting to facilitate mutual understanding. This same assumption by bureaucrats is attested by Sarangi (1996) in the British bureaucratic context. Bureaucrats assume that clients, as outsiders, do not have the background to interpret "technical responses", and that it is their duty to keep explanations as simple as possible. This conflicts with clients' efforts at understanding the bureaucratic procedure.

A number of issues arise from the bureaucrat B09's responses. Firstly, the institution does not seem to have a defined information policy which takes into account the specificity of the setting investigated. On the one hand, bureaucrats are not given institutional training of any sort in intercultural communication. On the other hand, the institution sees no need to establish clear guidelines as to what minimum levels of information all immigrants ought to obtain. Secondly, it also transpires from the interactions that the bureaucrat is unaware of the effects of their information providing practices. He does not problematise the ways in which the team of information providers reformulate the administrative information available to them. In particular, he voices no concern in relation to the types of information the expression *en trámite* does not convey. Thirdly, bureaucrats' discursive choices reveal a particular ideological conceptualisation of their professional role as information providers. Each of these issues will be taken up and developed in detail below. Before undertaking an in-depth analysis of the informative value of *trámite,* I examine B09's remarks with regard to the achievement of mutual understanding.

In his account, B09 presents the issue of understanding as one-sided. He "simplifies" his linguistic productions to make them more "transparent" to his interlocutors, and thus facilitate their understanding of bureaucrats' talk. Apart from

my serious doubts that the use of *en trámite* facilitates understanding in any way, I want to address the way in which avoiding communication difficulties is presented as benefiting immigrant service seekers only. In fact, both speaker groups gain from the alleged avoidance of miscommunication. The motivation for public officials not to use "technical" vocabulary is not just to enable information seekers' comprehension of their turns. Institutional representatives are greatly benefited by their own linguistic practices. By reducing their responses to a minimum, as shall be seen in Chapter 7, they also minimise the likelihood of non-understanding or miscommunication sequences occurring. Miscommunication is a constant threat to face, as working through understanding problems is highly disruptive of any social interaction (Bremer et al. 1996:69). Bureaucrats manage to create less work for themselves, and preserve their positive self-image as professionals who are able to perform their jobs efficiently. The example below illustrates how the perceived difficulty of getting his message across is experienced by the institutional participant as profoundly frustrating.

Example 6.1[1]

[...]

01 *B09: **wait three more weeks** -,.

[...]

02 *RES: *alguns posen una cara de resignació* !
%tra: some of them look so resigned!

03 → *B09: *este està* en propuesta de concesión *però si em poso a explicar-ho i no*
04 *m'entenen* <#> [>] *i em fot una ràbia i:* !
%tra: this one is in proposal for approval but if I start explaining and they don't understand me it's so annoying!

[...]

Example 6.1 shows how the amount of information provided is determined by the bureaucrat's desire to avoid his own feelings of frustration at not being understood rather than a concern about his interlocutor's need for relevant information (see lines 03 and 04). In this case, the application given for checking is about to be approved, but the information seeker does not get to know. He is only told to wait for three more weeks (see line 01). As will also be observed in subsequent examples, the bureaucrat's and not the immigrant's interests are made to prevail. It must be

[1] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_09.doc.

conceded that engaging in long-winded processes of meaning clarification to ensure mutual understanding would work against institutional expediency. As Agar states, "the time required for such privileged treatment of the client would consume the private profits or public budgets, and the institutional representative would be out of a job" (1985:157). In the immigration office investigated, a large number of information seekers have to be served every day. In addition, as long queues are the most visible feature of the service, they are also the main source of concern for the managerial staff. Long queues are periodically given media attention.[2] They are presented as indicators of poor service and deficient organisation. Managers are interested in serving as many immigrants as possible every day to reduce the long queues. By way of contrast, no interest is shown in the adequacy, from the point of view of immigrants' needs, of the service provided. The significance of local linguistic practice is neglected. Paradoxically, it is by examining situated talk that it is possible to get an insight into how and why waiting queues continue to grow. This lack of interest in situated talk is revealing of the institution's perception of what constitutes a good service. The same question can be raised with regard to the bureaucrat B09's perception of his duties as an information provider.

The official seems to conflate two separate issues in his remarks. Because information is a verbal service, the content of what is said can hardly be distinguished from how this is said. The linguistic format determines the types of meanings which are conveyed by a given utterance. Yet, from an analytical perspective, it is important to distinguish these two levels of investigation. The official refers to the linguistic difficulty of technical phases like *fase de instrucción* (preparatory phase). What he has in mind is the difficulty of decoding the abstract or lexical meaning of this phrase. Not very proficient speakers of Spanish are likely to be at a loss to decode the lexical import of the phrase. However, a different level of meaning intervenes in utterance interpretation, namely contextual meaning. Speakers assign contextual meaning to an utterance on the basis of a number of elements, such as their understanding of the context of situation, the speech genre,

[2] It must be noted that the motivation for journalists' reports seems to lie in the grievances of the neighbours, who complain about noise and garbage (see newspaper *El Periódico* 29 December 2001), rather than in a genuine interest in the social conditions of immigrants in Catalonia.

the social relationship existing between participants, and so on. The contextual meaning of *fase de instrucción* in this institutional setting is its procedural import, that is, what the implications of this phrase are in terms of how the procedure is organised and in relation to the final outcome. As was explained in Chapter 5, an application which is in *fase de instrucción* has received an initial positive evaluation by backstage bureaucrats. This first positive evaluation has still to be confirmed by the police. The documentation submitted will be checked again, and if everything is found to be in order and the applicant has clean criminal records, the permit will be granted. These are the contextual interpretations the term *fase de instrucción* echoes. For these interpretations to be grasped, a speaker needs to be very familiar with the organisation of the administrative procedure and of the decision making process. Normally, this type of insider knowledge is only available to institutional representatives. It is significant that the official B09 thinks only of the lexical difficulty of *fase de instrucción*, and of how to replace it by a more "transparent" term. At no point is reference made to the range of meaningful implications of the technical phrase, and to how these are not captured by the new term. These considerations do not enter the bureaucrat's understanding of the situation. He does not envisage that procedural details may be transmitted to enquirers.

This is the key point in the argument. What explains the official's understanding of his linguistic practices is his particular representation of what his professional duties are. Offering a good information service in this setting should mean providing information that is relevant and meaningful to immigrants, and ensuring that understanding is achieved. Specific actors and bureaucratic processes are associated with administrative stages. Each stage constitutes a step in the institutional decision making process. By virtue of their situational social role, information providers can interpret official labels in practical terms: what exactly is being done to the application, who is examining it, and how decisive that stage is for the final outcome. Because they are familiar with the procedure, bureaucrats are able to locate each stage within it, assess its significance and make predictions with regard to the final outcome. This insider "interpretation" of stages is never made

available to applicants. The question ceases to be a matter of terms and labels and becomes a question of institutional accessibility.

I do not want to claim that information providing practices are intentionally more deficient in this setting because the clients of the service are immigrants. In general, Spanish civil servants are characterised by their inadequate service treatment. In his book on the malfunctioning of Spanish public administration, Nieto (1996:102) states that all citizens have, at some point or other, experienced some civil servant's indifferent, arrogant and even humiliating treatment.[3] This is added to the general reluctance of institutions to disclose technical details on their procedures. The more information clients have, the higher the likelihood that the institution and its practices will be challenged. As Sarangi and Slembrouck state, "the institution will not provide any information that could be used to the client's advantage" (1996:55). Officials' goal is to provide information, but above all, to safeguard institutional interests. It is thus likely that Spanish or Catalan speakers in a similar service context would only be provided the "official" labels corresponding to each of the administrative categories mentioned in Chapter 5. It is similarly unlikely that procedural information would be volunteered by bureaucrats. The difference lies in that Spanish or Catalan speakers possess the linguistic resources to demand further details, negotiate mutual understanding, and if necessary, challenge the information provided. By contrast, most immigrant information seekers at the site investigated lack the linguistic skills to be able to make sense of vague or confusing information. And yet a positive outcome of their applications is fundamental for their chances of making a living in Spain.

Trámite as an illusion of information

The previous section addressed some of the consequences of bureaucrats' particular information provision practices. This section examines how informative bureaucrats' responses are, and introduces the perspective of immigrant information seekers in relation to this issue. The status of applications may be represented

[3] The exact quote in Spanish is: "*Todos los ciudadanos tienen experiencias directas de trato displicente, arrogante, vejatorio por parte de los denominados sarcásticamente 'servidores del poder' [...]*".

discursively in essentially three different ways. Once a final positive decision has been made, officials tell enquirers that their permit has been *concedido* (granted). *En trámite* (being processed) is the expression used to describe the situation of applications which are being examined after having received an initial positive evaluation.[4] Sometimes, after a second positive evaluation by the police, these applications are reported to be "better than in *trámite*" (better than being processed) but this extra piece of information is not always provided. *Falta* (missing, faulty) is the informal term used to refer to those applications that have received an initial negative evaluation. In those cases, immigrants are informed that the documentary evidence submitted is not valid to demonstrate arrival in Spain before 1 June 1999. They are given the chance to present new evidence to change the likely negative outcome of their application.

From the above presentation of terms it becomes apparent that no specific details are provided before an application is accepted unless problems are found with it. If everything is fine, immigrants are basically told to wait. It must be conceded that in a system with two alternative responses, that is, *trámite* or *falta*, the meaning of one response is defined by reference to the other. Put in other words, although *trámite* is an empty word in terms of conveying real news, its status as non-*falta*, that is, as the absence of a negative evaluation, gives it a positive connotation. However, such indirect inferences can only be made by information seekers who are familiar with the whole system of terms. The slightly positive information that *trámite* conveys is hardly accessible. Besides, it has the status of a hypothesis, since no explicit information is actually provided. In that sense, *falta* (missing, faulty) is a much more informative term than *trámite*. Immigrants get to know that their applications are not making progress. They are also informed of the way to reverse the situation, that is, by submitting new documentary evidence.

The two alternative responses before the *concedido* stage ceased to exist with the change in the institution's policy for providing information, mentioned in Chapter 5. The motivations and far-reaching consequences of this change are

[4] It may be recalled that, for the permit to be granted, this initial positive assessment made by bureaucrats must be confirmed by the police department.

examined in full detail in the second part of this chapter. Immigrants that do not fulfil the requirements are no longer informed that their applications will probably be rejected. They are thereby denied the possibility of submitting extra documentation, as tends to be common practice in Spanish bureaucratic procedures. In actual discursive production, the two previously possible situations, that is *falta* and *trámite,* are now conflated under one single category: *trámite.* This makes information very confusing. Service seekers start receiving contradictory details. This has important effects on the interactional level, where social relations between bureaucrats and immigrants become strained. The institution begins to be suspected of unfair treatment and loses credibility.

From the point of view of accessibility, the use of the word *trámite* does not make officials' responses more transparent. *Trámite* belongs to general, non-specialised vocabulary in Spanish.[5] It is commonly used to talk about matters related to bureaucratic organisations. It denotes the different administrative steps that have to be taken before a case reaches its final outcome. What these different steps consist of depends on the administrative procedure and the type of public institution examined. A tax consultant who has extensive experience dealing with public administration offices was asked about the informative value of *en trámite*. She pointed out that the expression in itself does not mean anything; its institutional import depends on what actors know about how a given institution is organised, how it processes paperwork, and how decisions reached. This kind of knowledge can only be acquired through intensive interaction with the institution. The lack of background information about the administrative stage referred to as *trámite* makes it an empty word.

The process of information provision at the office investigated can be defined as an "illusion". An appearance of information is maintained through the bureaucrats' use of a series of linguistic routines. First, a special service is offered to deal with immigrants' requests for information. It is open daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Secondly, a specific term, *en trámite*, is provided in response to enquirers'

[5] However, it is unlikely for immigrants who are poor speakers of Spanish to have come across this term in ordinary life. For them, *trámite* may be as technical a term as any other.

information requests. The value of *en trámite* is tokenistic and formulaic. It is "tokenistic" because *en trámite* is not used for its lexical import, since without extensive background information on the procedure, it does not mean anything. It is employed for the effect it makes on the audience, that is, to convey the impression that some information is being provided. In fact, *en trámite* is usually accompanied by a time adverbial expression like "three more weeks" (see detailed analysis of participants' contributions in Chapter 7). This is essentially the only meaningful piece of information service seekers are provided, that is, that they have to wait. However, the interactional routine of using the formulaic *en trámite* serves to conceal, at least on a formal level, the fact that enquirers are given no information. Bureaucrats cannot be "formally" accused of not providing information. The mechanisms whereby information is withheld from enquirers are difficult to expose because of the subtle ways in which they operate. A detailed examination of the strategies service seekers employ to find out more details about their applications is undertaken in the following chapter.

The formulaic value of *trámite* is illustrated in the following extract from the interview with Hussain. He is asked to explain how he interprets the word *trámite*. His illuminating response is contained in lines 09 to 14.

Example 6.2[6]

[...]

01	*RES:	no xxx a ti cuando vas a la oficina te dicen bueno tus papeles están en trámite -,
02		qué quiere decir -? qué significa?
	%tra:	no xxx to you when you go the office they tell you okay your papers are being processed -, what is the meaning -? what does it mean?
03	*HUS:	qué significas -? cómo trámite no sabes qué significa -? tú no sabes qué significa
04		trámite?
	%tra:	what it mean? how can it don't you know what being processed means -? you don't know what it means?
05	*RES:	hombre sí lo sé pero quiero saber si tú lo sabes!
	%tra:	well of coure I do but I want to know if *you* do!
06	*HUS:	en mi idioma -. no que.
	%tra:	in my language -. or what.
07	*RES:	no cómo explicas o sea si te dicen trámite tú qué piensas -? ah bueno # esto
08		está bien está mal tengo que volver o sea qué es lo que piensas?
	%tra:	no how you would explain that is, if they say being processed what do you think -? oh okay it's good it's bad I need to come back in a word, what do you think of?
09 →	*HUS:	no no es depende -. tú tienes que cuando te dicen miran tus papeles escriben de

[6] Extract taken from the interview with Hussain (lines 1002-1019), contained in Appendix C.

10 → fecha de hoy -, oye tal fecha que él vienes para preguntar qué escriben # trámite -.
11 → por ejemplo ellos cuando dicen trámite tú piensas que vale muy bien es trámite -. si
12 → quieres preguntas qué está mal o está bueno trámite o si no falta algo -, tú tienes
13 → que preguntar -. si no -, pues tú sabes tú preguntaste lo que ellos dicen te dicen oye
14 es trámite viene dentro de un mes para mirar otra vez xxx.
%tra: it's not it's it depends -. you have to when they say they look at your papers write today's date -, listen on that day he came to ask what do they write being processed -. for example when they say being processed you think okay fine it's being processed -. if you want you ask it's bad, it's fine being processed or something is missing -, you have to ask otherwise -, you know you asked what they said to you listen it's being processed come back after a month to hav it checked again.

15 *RES: y entonces si tú quieres más información tienes que preguntar no?
%tra: then if you want more informarion you have to ask right?

16 *HUS: sí +/.
%tra: yes.

17 *RES: o sea trámite no se sabe -. no tú si está bien o está mal.
%tra: so being processed one doesn't know -. no you whether it's good or bad.

18 *HUS: no no no.
%tra: no no no.

19 *HUS: si tú prefieres preguntar [//] si tú no sabes tienes que preguntar más -. si no
20 normalmente te dicen ## toma es trámite viene dentro de un mes.
%tra: if you prefer to ask [//] if you don't know you have to ask more -. otherwise usually they say ## okay it's being processed come back after a month.

21 *RES: uh huh -. y a ti te parece bien eso o crees que te deberían dar más información -. o
22 sea porque trámite no es mucha información no?
%tra: uh huh -. and do you think this is okay or do you think they should give you more information -. I mean because being processed is not a lot of information is it?

23 *HUS: no porque ellos tienen que decirte más -. que oye que tus papeles está muy bien
24 pero es trámite vale -? espera un par de mes o un quince días o un mes viene puede
25 ser que te te dicen algo -. pero no hace falta [//] no falta nada ni una cosas -. pero
26 tus papeles está bueno -. como llevan estos papeles -. pues esta persona seguro no
27 viene otra vez cuando sólo dicen ## escriben de fecha vale toma trámite -. pero no
28 saben qué es qué trám [//] cómo trámite qué es qué pasa está mal está bueno qué
29 es está bastante oscuro [?] por eso vayan cada vez o quince días otra vez -. qué ya
30 ha acabado trámite o no?
%tra: no because they have to tell you more -. listen that your papers are good but it's being processed okay -? wait for a couple of months or fifteen days or a month come back it's possible that they tell you something -. but it's not necessary [//] it's not necessary nothing -. but your papers are good -. like they tak these papers with them -. then it's sure this person will not come back when they only say ## write the date okay there you go being processed -. but they don't know what is what pro [//] what being processed what is what's going on it's bad it's good what is it it's pretty dark [?] this is why they go every time or fifteen days again -. has process finished or not?

[...]

From Hussain's answers, it becomes apparent that the information immigrants receive by default is minimal. As he explains in line 10, the only piece of information they regularly get is *trámite*. They have to ask for whatever additional details they want to know (see lines 12-13). For enquirers whose competence in Spanish or English is low, this is likely to be an arduous task. Another element that stands out is that the standard *trámite* response does not guide enquirers towards what really matters to them, that is, whether they will finally be granted a work permit or not. In

lines 23 to 26, Hussain explains the type of information immigrants ought to receive. In his opinion, telling them to wait is not enough. They need to be reassured that their applications are making progress and that no more documentary evidence is needed. These needs are not catered for by the institution. Instead, what they get is routinised responses which they are barely able to comprehend. The indeterminacy of *trámite* creates anxiety (see lines 27 to 30). Because *trámite* does not convey any relevant piece of information, immigrants do not wait the amount of time prescribed by officials. Uncertainty about their future leads them to seek information more often than necessary. This is why waiting queues do not cease to grow. Bureaucrats' information provision practices are shown to have the opposite effect of what was intended. B09 accounts for officials' simplification of their turns as a means to avoid engaging in complex processes of meaning clarification. These would work against the institution's need for expediency. Yet, as Hussain points out, the lack of information conveyed by *trámite* increases rather than diminishes officials' workload.

Institutional power and access to information

State bureaucracies are powerful instruments of social control, as Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996) claim. They regulate the organisation of social life and the distribution of individuals' rights and obligations. In the case of foreign immigration, national states control access to scarce socio-economic resources through the acceptance or rejection of work permit applications. Public institutions are responsible for the implementation of state policies. Whereas the legal framework establishes the conditions of entry and residency of foreign citizens, the bureaucratic procedure is defined and organised by a public administration office. It is in that institutional context that foreigners come into contact with the Spanish state for the first time. The government exercises its power by establishing strict requirements and eligibility conditions. The bureaucratic institution in charge of processing applications must make sure that immigrants fulfil the requirements and follow the bureaucratic procedure. It must also guarantee fair and equal treatment for all clients, and a rational mode of proceeding.

The daily functioning of the institution is in the hands of individual bureaucrats. They must carry state and institutional policies through. Their work does not take place in a social vacuum, but is embedded in an established set of habitual institutional practices that have to be understood with reference to their own tradition. Nieto (1996) describes Spanish bureaucracy as largely inefficient, and lacking an overall sense of accountability. No one is ever held accountable for the malfunctioning of a public service. It is a system where information and decisions do not flow freely. In cases of conflict, the solutions adopted try to ensure the least possible "disturbance" for institutional actors, even when this is at the expense of institutional efficiency. Nieto refers to the set of habitual institutional practices mentioned above as the "environmental niche" in which the work of civil servants is embedded and to which they adjust. This niche, according to Nieto, favours low productivity. A competent civil servant ends up being charged with the accomplishment of tasks nobody else in the office wants to do, but that does not usually translate into higher chances of promotion. A good civil servant is someone who complies with institutional guidelines but does not trouble managers with his/her practical problems. Civil servants tend to work in isolation and independently of their colleagues. Finally, the functioning of Spanish bureaucracy is usually not guided by a clearly defined policy. Instead, civil servants' practices are largely improvised.

In the light of what has been presented, it is not surprising that the practices of misinformation described above exist at the immigration office examined. State bureaucracies in general and Spanish bureaucracy in particular are not committed to the satisfaction of clients' needs. The primary concern of institutions is to ensure their long-term survival by constraining clients' access to "insider" information. Individual bureaucrats do not want to be seen to act "uninstitutionally", as their own welfare and socio-economic survival is also at stake. Within the environmental niche that Nieto describes, it is not easy for a bureaucrat to side-step and make "technical" insider knowledge available to "outsiders". By constraining immigrants' access to information, bureaucrats exercise power and accomplish institutional goals.

Bureaucrats' discursive practices work to sustain asymmetries of knowledge which prevent the workings of public institutions from being challenged.[7] Public officials manage to achieve one of the goals of bureaucracies, that is, to "hide its knowledge and action from criticism" (Weber 1948:233). In that sense, bureaucrats function as the gatekeepers of an unequal social order (Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996). Social inequality is particularly acute in the case of foreign immigrants interacting with local bureaucrats. It is significant that bureaucrats' withholding of information is accomplished by exploiting the linguistic asymmetries which characterise the social interactions examined. Unequal linguistic resources are the means whereby attempts at social control are exerted at this institutional site.

More consequential for immigrants' chances of participation in the social space is the fact that bureaucrats restrict their access to the knowledge institutional discourse mediates. For example, immigrants are not given an insight into how the procedure is organised, how many administrative steps an application goes through before it is accepted and what actors intervene in the decision-making process. At a local level, this implies that, whatever sense of progress the labels for different stages may convey is lost through the use of the formulaic *trámite*. For individuals whose life chances depend on the legalisation of their status, information is valuable capital. Whatever small piece of information they are able to gather is crucial. It can give them hope and some sense of confidence in the future. There is a wider sense in which knowledge of the bureaucratic procedure is valuable capital for immigrants. It constitutes the backdrop against which understanding of institutional actions in their future dealings with Spanish bureaucracy is facilitated.

Bureaucrats' use of words like *trámite* and *falta* creates a bureaucratic reality which conceals the actual procedure. This is where power resides, that is, in bureaucrats' ability to create new realities and construct "objects of truth". As Foucault argues, "power produces; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault 1977:174). Power must not be conceived solely in terms of its

[7] There might be a distinction between being challenged from "outside" or from "inside". By "outside" I refer to the status of immigrants as non-members of the recipient society, who are accorded virtually no social rights under the current immigration law. In that sense, they would be perceived as being less legitimated to challenge the workings of Spanish bureaucracy than "insider" associations like trade unions, specialist agencies, lawyers and such like.

repressive capacities. It is also profoundly creative. The power of bureaucrats disguises realities and redefines meanings. One could argue against the idea of considering bureaucrats "agents of power" by stating that they are largely unaware of the consequences of their acts, in this case, of their language practices. Yet, as Giddens claims, "the notion of power has no inherent connection with intention or 'will' (1979:92). For Giddens, "the unintended consequences of action are of central importance to social theory in so far as they are systematically incorporated within the process of reproduction of institutions" (1979:59). Unintentionally but also intentionally, the bureaucrats in this study contribute to the maintenance of an unequal social order.[8] Bureaucracies are institutional machineries that work independently of the needs of the individual clients they are supposed to serve. This understanding of bureaucracy is deeply rooted and is sustained and reproduced in/through the way in which information is (not) provided. Within a bureaucratic organisation, the role of its representatives is defined by its contradictory goals and tensions. Bureaucrats are caught in a web of pressures. They are expected to perform their job well, while at the same time safeguarding institutional interests. They are in a subordinate position with respect to institutional regulations and policies, which they must carry through even if they do not agree with them. Their activities are subject to the workings of organisational power. The metaphor of the web used by Foucault (Gordon 1980) serves to illustrate bureaucrats' position. Power is employed and exercised in a net-like organisation. Accordingly, individuals are not only its inert target, but the elements of its articulation. In that sense, public officials are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.[9] They are the vehicles of power. This can clearly be observed in the examination of the change in the institution's policy for providing information on the procedure presented below.

[8] They contribute to the reproduction of asymmetries of knowledge intentionally when they implement the new policy of information established by the institution.

[9]There is a significant individual dimension to bureaucrats' practices of power which cannot be underestimated. For an in-depth discussion, see Chapter 8.

Directions of change in institutional practice

Critical approaches to the study of the complex and multidimensional relationship between language and the social world aim at unveiling the mechanisms whereby social difference is constructed out of local linguistic practice. One of the objectives of researchers' work is to be practically relevant, that is, to contribute to social change. From the considerations made above on information provision practices, the question arises as to what could or should be done to balance out participants' asymmetrical participatory rights. With respect to the institutional order, face-to-face interaction is the only means by which service seekers can communicate with the institution.[10] Thus, it is in face-to-face or local exchanges that feelings of discrimination or mistrust originate.[11] If an institution is truly committed to providing a good service, the politics of face-to-face communication cannot be left to the goodwill of individual officials. There has to be a real investment in the significance of face-to-face social interaction. As Sarangi (1998:303) claims, "from the perspective of the institutional representative, an encounter with clients is routine practice, but from the point of view of the client the same encounter is unique". Officials at the counter may not be aware of the consequences of their linguistic practices, but the institution should be. Clear guidelines ought to be established about how officials are expected to behave interactionally, and adequate training provided. The goal should be to guarantee fair treatment to all service seekers

Secondly, although it is true that face-to-face communication might be difficult in contexts in which at least one of the participants is not fluent in the linguistic code employed, linguistic asymmetries cannot be used to legitimate unfair institutional practices. If a public organisation is really committed to information, it will be creative enough to devise ways in which its workings are made more transparent. Of course, that implies that its way of proceeding will come under close scrutiny, and that it will be subject to criticism. There is no trade-off. This is the

[10] Apart from written communication, of course, but the extent to which there is "true" interaction in writing is questionable.

[11] See Chapter 7 for details.

only direction in which our institutions can advance towards becoming more democratic, safeguarding individuals' civil rights and increasing their chances of participation.

Any *falta*? Discursive staging of change in institutional policy

Moments of change in institutional policy enable the visualisation of tensions, require participants to position themselves, and facilitate the articulation of discourses. These give us insights into the institution's ideological conceptualisation of the social world. In this section I focus on the analysis of the circumstances leading to and surrounding a process of policy change that occurs at the immigration office investigated. This change refers to the institution's general policy for providing information to the public. During my fieldwork, the decision was made to curtail the quantity of information to be given to immigrants. In this section I assess the significance of the new policy in terms of what it unveils about the institution's perception of its social function. Secondly, I examine the discourse produced by the institution to legitimise its decision, as well as the discourses and counter-discourses produced by institutional representatives to justify or challenge its application. An examination of the strategies bureaucrats employed in local service communication to implement the new policy of information while detaching themselves from it is undertaken in Chapter 7. This will be supplemented by the analysis of the strategies service seekers employ to make sense of talk addressed to them, assess its import, and accept or challenge the situation as it is presented to them.

The analysis of the ways in which the institutional order is entangled in the production of interactional talk is undertaken through the detailed examination of a conversation between two public officials (see Example 6.6 below). Each of them has a different view with respect to the change mentioned. The analysis of this conversation is interesting because it brings into the open the contradictions with which bureaucrats have to cope. A fundamental tension exists between their "official" role as information providers, and the pressures of the institution not to disclose certain types of information. Their difficult position is aggravated by three

facts. First, the specific details bureaucrats are supposed to withhold become available to them every time an application is checked. Second, the officials working in the afternoon shift do provide to their clients the information that has been forbidden. Third, the institution keeps taking in supplementary evidence for immigrants' files. The communicative strategies institutional representatives devise to cope with immigrants' challenging moves in the minute-to-minute unfolding of interactions are discussed in Chapter 7. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the elements of the institutional order which bear upon the service talk produced. Without a thorough comprehension of the implications of specific institutional policies, and the conflictual relations between individual bureaucrats and institutions, the reasons for officials' modes of proceeding in interaction cannot be understood.

Setting the scene

When I began tape-recording interactional data at the site investigated, a change in the institutional policy of information provision took place. The decision was made by the supervisory staff to cease informing immigrants that their applications for legalisation had received an initial negative evaluation, usually because the documentary evidence submitted did not meet the requirements established by the government.[12] Under immigration law LO 4/2000, unregistered immigrants who could demonstrate arrival in Spain before June 1, 1999, and had submitted a work permit application before March 31, 2000, were eligible to become legal foreign residents. As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, only documents issued by public institutions such as post offices, city councils or social security offices were accepted as valid proof. This information, although crucial, was not contained in the

[12] These criteria are established in the "*Resolución de 16 de marzo de 2000, de la Dirección General de Policía y de la Dirección General de Política Interior del Ministerio del Interior y de la Dirección General de Ordenación de las Migraciones del Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, por la que se aprueban las instrucciones relativas al proceso de regularización de extranjeros, previsto en la Disposición Transitoria Primera de la Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero y aprobado mediante Real Decreto 239/2000, de 18 de febrero de 2000*" (Instructions approved on 16 March 2000, issued by the Police Department, the Ministry of the Interior and the State Migration Office belonging to the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs in relation to the organisation of the campaign to legalise foreigners provided for by Immigration Law LO 4/2000 of 11 January, and approved by Royal Decree 239/2000 on 18 February 2000).

information booklet published by the government which is furnished to immigrants (see copy in Appendix A).

Before the institutional policy changed, a large number of applicants, especially of South Asian origin, were informed that their applications were not going to be accepted. The routine expression employed by officials was *te faltan papeles* (papers are missing), from which the shorter pivot word *falta* (missing, fault) is derived. Most service seekers tried to submit supplementary evidence in hopes of avoiding a final negative outcome. To present new documents, information seekers do not have to queue up outside the office for hours. One of the bureaucrats at the information counter, namely B11, was in charge of receiving supplementary documents for files, including new documentary evidence to demonstrate *estancia* (presence in the country by 1 June 1999). Additional documents must always be accompanied by a form called *expone* in which the applicant, after providing his/her personal details, states the reason why s/he wants to submit more documentation. Applicant's new documents are enclosed with the form (see copy in Appendix A). B11 took these new documents and passed them on to the officials backstage for processing. According to officials at the counter, no specific team of backstage bureaucrats was charged with the processing of these new documents. They were placed at the bottom of the pile of newly arrived applications. At least a month elapsed before applicants' new documentation was examined.

Approximately a week before I started my observations at this institutional site on a regular basis, the institution's policy of information changed. The office manager called a meeting of the information staff in which she asked employees to stop informing immigrants that the documents enclosed with their application had not been accepted. The reasons she gave have to do with limited human resources. The amount of paperwork generated as a result of providing this specific piece of information could not be handled by the office. The manager added to her argument that in most cases this paperwork turned out to be useless, as many of the supplementary documents submitted by immigrants were forged. It was therefore not worth giving service seekers a second chance. This discourse of "legitimisation" is explored in full detail in the following section.

For the implementation of the new policy, the institution made recommendations as to language use in face-to-face communication.[13] The manager advised officials to extend the use of *trámite,* which she had heard them employ in service communication, to include those applications which were about to be rejected. Under this new "ecology of terms", all applications which had still not been accepted were to be denoted in *trámite*. Some of them would eventually be accepted, while some others –the vast majority– would finally be rejected. The fact that the manager suggested the use of *trámite* to conceal the fact that relevant details are not provided confirms the purely formulaic uses of this word, which in terms of content, is completely void of relevant institutional meaning..[14] Another of the recommendations made by the manager concerns the way in which officials should account for the change in the information they provide. In a previous section it was described how the uncertainty created by the lack of information *trámite* conveys leads immigrants to enquire about the status of their applications fairly often. It may be the case that, within a very short time span, they receive two different pieces of information. Institutional representatives are the face of the institution. They are in charge of implementing policies with which they may disagree. Yet, in the ongoing development of situated interaction, they are likely to be held accountable for inconsistencies in information provision. Individual bureaucrats may be accused, in a more or less indirect manner, of arbitrariness. If challenged, the manager advises officials to "stage" the change in information as resulting from a shift in the amount of information produced by the computer. Relevant details on information seekers' applications cannot be provided any longer because they are not available to bureaucrats. The blame is placed on the machine or on backstage bureaucrats to whom access is denied.[15] Immigrants are left in a powerless position. The official to whom they have access cannot be held accountable, and they do not have access to the people that can be held accountable. Details of the strategies whereby these

[13] It is significant that the institution focuses on local communication only to establish what is *not* to be revealed.

[14] Otherwise, it would not be possible to employ it to refer to the status of applications that have already been reported faulty.

[15] In institutional contexts, "blaming the machine" is a favourite strategy to account for all instances of malfunctioning, such as delays in the procedure, or as in this case, lack of information. It is a way of escaping responsibility and not being held accountable.

contradictions were brought into the open and coped with in interaction are presented in the following chapter.

Discourses of legitimisation and counter-discourses

In the previous section a descriptive account was presented of the most significant contextual elements surrounding the process of policy change. The legitimising discourse of the institution was outlined. The aim of this section is to explore how bureaucrats as social actors make sense of the new policy they must implement, and how they position themselves vis-à-vis the managerial decision. This is done through the detailed examination of a conversation between two of the officials, namely B09 and B11, who display widely different understandings of the situation.

In his analysis of administrative behaviour, Simon (1957) examines the issue of managerial authority in organisations. He defines authority as "the power to make decisions which guide the actions of another. The superior frames and transmits decisions with the expectation that they will be accepted by the subordinate" (1957:125). What happens is that the subordinate holds in abeyance his own critical faculties for choosing between alternatives. In other words, individual choice is suspended in favour of coordinated behaviour, which is essential for administrative activity to be efficient. The different factors that may induce acceptance of authority are, among others, purpose and economic security. Employees will be more willing to accept managerial decisions when they sympathise with the purpose to be achieved, and when they believe that the decision made will be effective in achieving it. This confidence may be less based on the knowledge of the correctness of the decision than on faith in the ability of those who made it. The effectiveness of the second factor mentioned, namely, economic security, is undoubtedly more transparent. As Simon remarks, "obedience may be the price of retaining the position, securing a higher salary or other advantages" (1957:133). He also admits that the fact that many organisations tolerate a great deal of insubordination without dismissal diminishes the effectiveness of these sanctions as a means for securing authority.

Focusing on institutional settings, Agar (1985) emphasises the systemic nature of institutional discourse. He describes institutions as "discourse ecologies", where individual agency gets blurred away in favour of an analysis based on the conceptualisation of speakers as social actors who are socially and institutionally constrained in terms of what they want or are able to say or do. To illustrate his point, Agar argues that there is very little room left for public officials to act outside the prescribed order of things. Even if they wanted to hand control over to the client, they could not afford to do so. They would run the risk of being accused of "disloyalty" or, as he puts it, of misusing public funds, and would face dismissal. If that is added to "a recent institutional representative history of unemployment in a glutted labour market" (1985:157), the picture becomes even sharper.

Turning to the institutional site investigated, the two factors mentioned by Simon, namely, purpose, and economic security, have a clear bearing on bureaucrats' attitudes towards the change. The examination of their influence requires a detailed analysis of the institutional order. The institution investigated is defined by its numerous contradictions. They are the result of institutionalised sloppiness and lack of managerial accountability: irrational division of work between shifts,[16] constantly changing practices for processing paperwork, difficult communication between frontstage and backstage bureaucrats, lack of managerial control over officials' work and so on. Decisions are made ad-hoc. No sense of collective responsibility exists. Managers' capacity to organise work in a rational and efficient manner is questionable. The supervisory staff does not seem interested in presenting a positive public image, nor in providing a good service. In addition, they seem to care little about their employees' "well-being", as shall be shown later. The following examples are illuminating with regard to bureaucrats' perception of the institutional order in which their work is embedded.

[16] The way in which work was divided between the two shifts turned out to be inefficient. This caused significant delays in the processing of applications.

Example 6.3[17]

[...]

01 *B11: *escolta B10 pot ser que un del dia vint i tres de març estigui en instrucció*
02 *fase d'instrucció* ?
%tra: listen B10 can one [application] from March twenty third still be in preparatory preparatory phase?

03 → *B10: *bueno de tots colors* !
%tra: everything is possible!

[...]

Example 6.4[18]

[...]

01 *RES: *i els jefes no li diuen res* ?
%tra: and how come the managers don't tell him off?

02 → *B09: *els jefes no s'enteren del que passa aquí* !
%tra: the managers have no idea of what's going on here!

[...]

Example 6.5[19]

[...]

01 *B09: *és que durant una època no sé per què als que ja es veia que:* [/-] *si estan los*
02 *papers bé es posa* en trámite *si no es posa lo altre* -. *doncs va haver-hi una època*
03 *que quan veien que estaven bé ja posaven directament* propuesta de concesión.
%tra: there was a time when I don't know why those [applications] which seemed [/-] if the papers are fine they write being processed, otherwise they write the other thing -. so there was a time when if eveything seemed fine they wrote proposal for approval straight away.

04 *RES: ah!

05 → *B09: *i llavors # hi ha uns expedients d'aquestos que són realment los que estan en*
06 propuesta de concesión *i falten dos o tres setmanes i n'hi ha d'altres que tarden*
07 *més* -. *llavors ells diuen pues a mi m'ho vas dir* !
%tra: so there are some of these files which are really about to be accepted in two or three weeks but there are some others which take longer -. then they say you told me!

08 → *B09: *o sigui que el millor és no dir-los-ho*.
%tra: which means the best thing is not to tell them.

[...]

Example 6.3 alludes to the fact that the administrative processing of applications does not seem to follow rational criteria. Example 6.4 describes managers' lack of interest in what goes on in the office. Example 6.5 gives us an insight into how changing criteria for processing paperwork affects the amount of information

[17] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C)_03.

[18] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C)_01.

[19] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_09.doc.

provided to service seekers (see line 08). B09 describes how he is challenged by service seekers because of changes in the way applications are classified by backstage bureaucrats (see lines 5-7). This highlights the absence of careful organisation and advance planning. Bureaucrats suffer the consequences of managerial incompetence in the form of protests, challenges, and threats to face by service seekers. Their coping strategy hinges on the concealment of information. As usual, service seekers are the victims of the workings of the institutional order. The institutional context outlined above does not induce "acceptance of authority", in Simon's terms. Obviously, no causal relationship can be established, since different officials may have different perceptions of the situation and they may attach importance to different elements of the contextual background. Yet it is likely that some of the factors mentioned above explain the sceptical attitude B12 and B11 show towards the change in institutional policy examined in this section.

Economic security is the second factor mentioned in relation to acceptance of authority. All the officials working at the information office were employed on a twelve-month contract. Before taking up this job they were all unemployed. Like the institutional representative described by Agar, BF9 and B10 had a long history of temporary job contracts and were anxious to hold down a permanent post.[20] Both had university degrees in the field of humanities which do not seem to open up many professional opportunities for them. In a conversation with me, B09 mentioned a couple of times that he hoped to pursue a career in the civil service. Work stability seemed to be a lasting source of worry for him. One of the first things he mentioned in the informal interview we had almost a year later was that he and B12 are out of work, while B10 and B11, who had been reported for their rudeness by service seekers twice, continued to work for the immigration services. He felt frustrated and completely let down by the institution.[21] Another example of this constant preoccupation with his job is an email message sent to me on 4

[20] This may apply to B11 and B12, but I did not have the chance to converse with them on this issue.

[21] It is significant that B09 points out the fact that B10 and B11 have retained their jobs in spite of service seekers' complaints. B09 is likely to have assumed that the possibilities for him of retaining his job were dependent on his professional performance, whereas for B10 and B11 this association was not apparent. This is in line with Nieto's (1996) remarks on the characteristics of the Spanish bureaucratic system, where promotion is not dependent upon the worker's professional performance.

December 2000 in response to a question I had asked on how to translate certain words from the tapes which are in Arabic. B09's message is reproduced in English below. The original text, in Catalan, is provided in a footnote.

> "Hello before the holiday, maqbul and mahfuz with long u mean granted and rejected. What you write that B10 and myself used to say I don't have a clue of what it is. B10 is on holidays and we cannot ask him until next week. That thing about bilnifits no idea tarabya could be Arabic (arabiya) and bakawuab I don't know either. Baka on its own means it's missing, but no idea about wuab. If you don't bring it here it's impossible, but this will have to be after the holiday. *By the way here we are all really scared because they want to sack us all because they say there is no more work to be done, and we are all pretty upset*"[22] (italics added).

After answering my questions, he raises the topic of his uncertain job situation (in italics). Note that his choice of words (the superlative form of the adjective *espantadíssims* [really scared] and *estem fotuts* [we're pretty upset]) tinges the message with an air of drama, which certainly indicates the importance he attaches to the professional aspect of his life. I do not want to claim that economic considerations alone serve to explain B09's attitude with regard to the managerial decision discussed here. They are part of the complex set of interlocking contextual conditionings that inform, yet cannot be mapped on to, participants' behavioural patterns.

The particular positioning of two of the bureaucrats who have been requested to implement the new policy is shown in the extract below. Although this is a fairly long excerpt, presenting it complete enables the observation of how the positions of the two bureaucrats get shaped discursively in the unfolding of the interaction, and how they get transformed. The two bureaucrats display different attitudes towards the policy change. The interaction examined involves B09, B11 and myself. It is motivated by a service compliance turn provided by B11 that is considered inappropriate by B09. B09, who is engaged in a different interaction, admonishes his colleague. Then, a fairly heated argument between the two public officials begins.

[22] 'Hola antes del pont, maqbul i mahfuz amb la u llarga son concedido i denegado, això que poses que deiem el B10 i jo no tinc ni idea del que és, B10 és de vacances i fins la setmana que ve no se li pot preguntar, això de bilifits ni idea tarabya pot ser algo de àrab (arabiya) i bakawuab tampoc ho sé baka sol vol dir falta, pero wuab ni idea o sigui que o ho portes o res, però això desprès del pont, *per cert que aquí estem tots espantadíssims perquè ens volen fotre al carrer perquè diuen que s'ha acabat la feina i estem tots bastant fotuts*.'

B09 and B11 put forward their divergent views on the institutional decision under scrutiny.

Example 6.6[23]

01 *B11: está igual -. faltan faltan papeles -. # faltan papeles -. ## faltan papeles.
%tra: nothing has changed -. papers are missing missing -. # papers are missing -. ## papers are missing.
%com: B11 is engaged in a different encounter

02 → *B09: B11 *estan* en trámite *tots*.
%tra: B11 they are all being processed.

03 *B11: están en trámite -. trámite.
%tra: they are being processed -. process.

04 *UUU: #0_2.

05 → *B09: *no ho podem dir*.
%tra: we are not allowed to say that.

06 *B11: xxx.

07 *B09: o del +/.
%tra: or from +/.

08 → *B11: *però és que els de la tarda sí que ho diuen ara* !
%tra: but our colleagues in the afternoon they do say it now!

09 → *B09: *ja però però la* www <*la* www> [>] # *la* www *no ens ho va deixar dir a natros* !
%tra: I know but www < www> [>] # www did not allow us to say that !

10 *B11: <*ara al revés*> [<]!
%tra: <now it's the opposite> [<]!

11 *B11: xxx.
%add: ENQ

12 → *B11: *però que si estan en* en trámite *estaran sempre* !
%tra: but if they are being processed they will always be!

13 *B09: *ja* !
%tra: I know!

14 *B11: *no cal mirar-ho ja* !
%tra: there is no need for us to check them!

15 *B09: *en tres semanes*.
%tra: in three weeks' time.

16 *B11: *ja no cal mirar-ho* !
%tra: there is no need!

17 *B09: *a vegades* +/.
%tra: sometimes +/.

18 *B11: +^ *a veure si està en fase vuitanta tres o canviarà mai* !
%tra: listen if they are in phase eighty three their status will never change!

19 → *B09: *a lo millor han portat papers perquè com algú els ho diu* !
%tra: perhaps they have given in more papers because somebody tells them!

[...]

20 *B11: *és que amb tots és això -. si mires els expedients -, els que estan en fase vuitanta*
21 *tres -, <quan estan xxx>* [>].
%tra: it is the same for all of them -. if you look at the files -, those which are in phase eighty three -, <when they are xxx> [>].

[23] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_05.doc.

22 *B09: <trámite> [<].
%tra: <being processed> [<].

23 *RES: xxx.

24 *B11: <no si no xxx> [>].
%tra: <well if they aren't> [>].

25 *ENQ: <puedo preguntar> [<] esto -? ## éste cómo alguien que presente del tre:s de
26 marzo -, # uh qué pasa trámite qué?
%tra: <can I ask> [<] this -? ## this how somebody who submits on March third-, # uh what happens being processed what?

27 *RES: <xxx> [>].

28 *B09: <ni idea -. trámite> [<].
%tra: <no idea -. being processed> [<].

29 *B11: *clar jo suposo que fins que no: # no <arribi una ordre>* [>1] *de Madrid o lo que*
30 *sigui xxx <desfavorables>* [>2] *favorables perquè els hi falta <en principi>* [>3] *els*
31 *hi falta algo* -. # *si estan denegats és perquè els hi falta algo però clar no els hi*
32 *podem dir que: # que estan denegats perquè encara no xxx vale* +/.
%tra: of course I guess that until we do:n't # don't <get an order> [>1] from Madrid or whatever xxx <negative ones> [>2] negative ones because it's missing <in principle > [>3] something is missing -. # if they are turned down it is because something is missing but of course we cannot tell them that their applications have been rejected because they are still xxx right +/.
%add: RES

33 *ENQ: <hay falta: -? papeles> [<1]?
%tra: <anything missing: -? papers> [<1]?

34 *B09: <no sa::le si hay falta [=! impatient tone]> [<2].
%tra: <it does not show if anything is missing [=! impatient tone]> [<2].

35 *B09: <aquí sólo
36 sale trámite -,> [<3].
%tra: <the only
thing that it shows is trámite -,> [<3].

@Situation: B09 checks status of following application

37 *RES: +^ *xxx és un cacau això.*
%tra: +^xxx this is a mess.

38 *B11: *és un cacau*.
%tra: it's a mess.

39 *UUU: #0_3.

40 → *B11: *perquè perquè xxx si els hi dius que falten papers com a mínim que portin algo*
41 *si poden* !
%tra: because because xxx if you tell them that they need more papers at least they can give in something!

42 → *B09: *la versió de* www *és que no se'ls hi pot dir perquè si ja ho tenen ho han tingut*
43 *que portar.*
%tra: www's version is that we are not allowed to tell them because if they had anything they should have provided it.
%com: www is the name of the manager

44 *B11: *per què* -? *per què* ?
%tra: why -? why?

45 *B09: *que si ho tenien -, ho tenien que haver portat quan van portar els papers.*
%tra: if they had it -, they should have provided it when they submitted their papers.

46 *B11: *sí però llavors* +/.
%tra: yes but then +/.

47 → *B09: +^ *si no el que fan és fer-ho fals*.
%tra: otherwise what they do is provide forged documents.

48 *B11: *fals* ?
%tra: forged?

49 → *B09: *és pitjor per a ells perquè la policia els detindrà*.
%tra: it's worse for them because the police will arrest them.

50 *B11: *sí no això també la veritat és que sí -. perquè clar d'alguna manera o altra*
51 *intentaran aconseguir el que sigui per # per treure-ho*.
%act: moves towards counter to serve client
%tra: yes well in fact that's also true -. because of course some way or other they will try whatever they can to get it.

52 *B11: *sí que de vegades no saps que és millor*.
%tra: yes at times you don't know what's best.

53 → *B09: *però jo ja li he dit tres vegades a* www *que els de la tarda ho diuen -, i es queda* ah !
%tra: but I've said to www three times that our colleagues in the afternoon tell them -. and she goes oh!

54 *B11: *és que abans nosaltres ho dèiem*.
%tra: the thing is we used to tell them.

55 *B09: *ja ja*.
%tra: yes I know.

56 *B11: *i ara és al revés -. o sigui que no ho entenc.*
%tra: and now it's the opposite -. so basically I don't understand anything.
[...]

At the beginning of the excerpt B11, one of the immigration officials, is providing information to a service seeker. B11 tells her interlocutor that his application is not making progress, because the applicant has not submitted appropriate documentary evidence to demonstrate arrival in Spain before June 1, 1999. The applicant cannot show that he meets the eligibility criteria established by the government. New documents have to be presented if a final negative outcome is to be avoided. Before the service seeker is able to respond, B09 chips in. He corrects his colleague's words, reminding her that the appropriate response to give is that applications "*estan en trámite tots*" (are all being processed). The use of the quantifier *tots* (all) is significant. Its suitability is questionable in terms of how accurately it describes a given state of affairs. Surely, B09 does not mean that *all* applications are in *trámite*. B09 knows, as does B11, that a number of permits have already been granted. What the use of "*tots*" points at is the blurring of informative distinctions regarding the status of applications that have not been accepted. B09 alludes to the fact that the only thing B11 needs to do is establish whether a given application has been or is about to be accepted or not. Phrased in other words, B09's use of "*tots*" indexes the new binary mode of thinking established by the institution's new information policy,

whereby whatever application that has yet not been accepted is categorised as being in process.

The examination of B11's discursive behaviour upon being corrected is illuminating. The institutional representative retraces her words and gives a completely different version of the status of his/her application to her interlocutor (see line 03). If, in line 01, the service seeker is told that s/he needs to present more documentary evidence, in line 03 s/he is told that his/her application is being processed. The service seeker receives completely different information in two consecutive turns. The bureaucrat projects an image of arbitrariness, which contradicts the goal of bureaucratic organisations (Weber 1948). The question arises of whether the bureaucrat does not fear that her responses will be challenged. Her discursive behaviour is illuminating in terms of how she perceives and constructs the space of social relationships in which these service interactions are embedded. One way of interpreting B11's behaviour is to claim that she disregards her addressee's ability to spot and bring her inconsistencies into the open, either because she takes the latter to be slow-witted or to lack the linguistic resources to understand what is going on. Another interpretation would be that B11 conceives of their social role relationship as being of a clearly asymmetrical nature. The implications are that, even if the service seeker is able to identify the contradiction, B11 will not be challenged –as she has the upper hand– or if she *is* challenged, she does not feel she should render her actions accountable to such an interlocutor. Through her talk, B11 constructs her interlocutor's potential for action as severely restricted. Two different ideological conceptualisations of the social world are interwoven. First, as the "client" of a bureaucratic institution, ENQ is expected to adopt not an active but rather a passive role. Secondly, as an illegal immigrant, ENQ is a non-citizen. S/he has virtually no rights.

Going back to the interaction, B09's turns (see lines 45, 47 and 49) echo the discourse of the institution. A dialogue is established between B09's arguments, which work to "defend" the institution's new information policy, and the counter-arguments put forward by his colleague B11. The latter's discursive productions are examined here first. When B09 reminds his colleague in line 05 that they have been

forbidden to say that new documents are needed for enquirers' applications, B11 retorts by exposing the blatant inconsistency of the situation. Whereas they are not allowed to give that particular piece of information to enquirers, their colleagues working in the afternoon do provide it (line 08). The arguments B11 uses to support her subversion of managerial authority have to do with the lack of a clear, unified policy. This is connected to Simon's notion of "purpose" as a key factor in inducing acceptance of authority. If measures are not taken to guarantee that policies are carried through by all bureaucrats, acceptance of authority becomes almost a matter of good will. This is especially true of the new policy of information implemented because it affects the very essence of bureaucrats' jobs. Their task is to provide information to immigrants, but at the same time the institution is asking them to conceal information. This raises the question of what is left for them to do.

The institutional change discussed embodies an attack on bureaucrats' understanding of their work as meaningful and worthwhile. If public officials cannot advise information seekers to provide new documentary evidence, their applications will not make any progress (see line 18). Bureaucrats' professional activity becomes meaningless. This is precisely the point B11 makes from line 12 to line 18: there is no need for them to go on checking the administrative status of immigrants' applications because their situation will not have changed. A few turns later (see lines 40-41), the official continues to show her disapproval. On this occasion, the reasons she provides to criticise the new institutional policy have to do with immigrants' chances of participation. By furnishing them with precise details, immigrants are given the opportunity to change the course of events. In brief, B11's arguments show a mixture of concern about her own situated social role on the one hand, and her interlocutors' chances of success on the other. Yet her "worries" are not to be taken at face value. In the paragraphs above, it was shown how B11's representations of her interlocutors as indexed by her talk are far from being "charitable". The interactional context in which the official's concerns are voiced is worth examining. It gives us the key as to how B11's argument should be interpreted. The official uses immigrants' reduced chances of participation as a secondary argument only. Her main argument, and the one she puts forward first,

has to do with the very definition of her professional role as an information provider. Worries about immigrants' opportunities for action become an argument to challenge the institutional framing of the situation insofar as they work to lend support to the official's positioning against the new information policy. If her interests as a public official were to come into conflict with immigrants' interests, no doubt the former would override the latter.

Worried as he is with presenting "a unified front" (see next section for details), official B09 uses a variety of strategies to counter his colleague's criticisms. In line 09, for example, he responds to B11's accusation that managerial recommendations are in contradiction with the behaviour of afternoon officials by appealing to the authority of the manager. B09 is, in Simon's terms, suspending his own critical faculties for choosing between alternatives. Implicit in his words is the idea that it is not up to them to make judgements on the appropriateness of the institutional decision, and that they should adopt the recommended mode of behaviour. B09 is then confronted with a new argument by B11: if the possibility is not left open for enquirers to file additional documentation, the situation becomes nonsensical. There is no need for service seekers to queue up; there is no need for bureaucrats to keep on checking the status of immigrants' applications. This argument constitutes an attack on the very essence of public officials' work, and consequently, on their sense of self-esteem. B09 needs to find arguments to keep on justifying his professional adherence to the new policy. The voice of the institution is not heard any more. The speaking voice is that of the professional whose sense of self-respect is being questioned. B09's reasons move down to the terrain of everyday reality. He states that the possibility of there being changes in the status of applications is real because somebody keeps telling service seekers that they need to submit new documentary evidence (line 19). B09's line of argumentation becomes twisted: it is only because of the existence of "subversive" attitudes among bureaucrats that their work as information providers makes sense.

Another of B09's "legitimising" arguments is presented in lines 42-43. The voice of the institution is heard again. B09 carefully frames it as such, as the voice of the institution. The phrasing of the introductory segment "*la versió de www és...*"

(www's version is that...) indicates that B09 wants to detach himself from the "official line".[24] This turn allows interesting insights into the discourse produced by the institution to legitimise its new policy: all documentary evidence should have been provided when applications were first submitted.[25] Immigrants are expected to get their documents straight from the beginning.[26] Of course, this is only the argument employed by the institution to back up its policy, but even as a mere argument it sounds weak. The institution needs further support. It resorts to anecdotal evidence to make generalisations about service seekers' behaviour. According to the official discourse, what most applicants do after being told that their documentary evidence is not valid is forge new documents (see line 47). This is the main argument employed by the institution to justify its new policy of withholding information. Implicit is the idea that whatever effort is made to process new paperwork, it will be useless. It is interesting to note that officials' concerns about immigrants' well-being surface once again. In line 49, B09 claims that it is better for immigrants not to be told that their documentary evidence has not been accepted. The reason is that if they get forged documents, police will arrest them. B09's words echo and respond to B11's previous concerns about immigrants' possibilities for action (see lines 40-41). As with B11 previously, however, the safeguarding of service seekers' interests appears to be a secondary argument. It is used to lend further support to the officials' position. Immigrants' rights or welfare is never the main reason behind institutional policies.

B09 manages to convince his colleague B11 that not giving detailed information is best. B11's turn in line 52 attests to the official's change of attitude: "*sí que de vegades no saps què és millor*" (yes at times you don't know what's best). To show acceptance of some of B11's arguments, B09 raises again the issue of the two work shifts' inconsistent information provision practices (see line 53). He not only shows his entire agreement with B11's positions, but underlines the fact that he has

[24] In this case, the symbols www stand for the manager's name.

[25] Yet it is common practice in Spanish public administration to allow citizens the chance to hand in supplementary documentation for a case within approximately ten days after submission.

[26] This is a particularly arduous task if we take into account that details of the types of documents accepted by the institution to demonstrate arrival in Spain by 1 June 1999 are not contained in the information booklet.

told the manager three times without a clear response from this superordinate. B09's words evidence the lack of managerial responsibility over the collective image of the institution. It is precisely this type of attitude that works to undermine employees' trust in managers' ability to organise work efficiently. Resistance rather than acceptance of authority seems to be the logical consequence.

A brief comment is in place on B09's attitude towards the new institutional policy of withholding information. The extract presented above has shown him siding with the institution. Yet it was also discussed above how economic pressures may work to override individual considerations on the legitimacy of a given conduct. The excerpt that follows shows how B09's attitude needs to be understood with reference to his being a social actor whose actions are constrained by his position in the social and institutional structure.

Example 6.7[27]

[...]

01	*B09:	*que li faltaven tots los papers que no tenia res i com que no tenia peles segons ell si*
02		*tenia peles li donarien falsos però com no en té que vol que ho borrem.*
	%tra:	that he was lacking all the papers [documentary evidence] that he did not have anything and that as he did not have any money according to him if he had money he would get forged papers but since he does not have any he wants us to erase it [his file].
03 →	*RES:	*si hagués estat aquí realment tindria papers no* ?
	%tra:	if he had really been here he would have papers [documentary evidence] wouldn't he?
04 →	*B09:	*ja bueno hi ha molta gent que no eh* -? *però* +...
	%tra:	well there are many people who don't though, but +...
05	*RES:	*bueno ja però* +...
	%tra:	yes well but +...

This exchange between B09 and myself takes place after a rather unusual service interaction involving a Pakistani service seeker. His service request consists in having his file erased from the institution's computerised database. The reason he puts forward is that, after being told that his application for legal residency has been negatively evaluated, he has not been able to get new documentary evidence. The service seeker's poor command of English together with the uncommon nature of the request makes mutual understanding difficult. Once B09 gets an idea of what the enquirer wants, he tries to make him understand that he cannot fulfil his request

[27] This extract is part of B09's follow-up comments on the encounter transcribed in OFC01_04.doc.

because his job is to inform ("I only see the computer") and thus he is not allowed to change anything from the database. The enquirer keeps insisting and raises the issue of money. He claims that he is not able to get new certificates to back up his application because he does not have enough money to pay for forged ones. Implicit is the claim that many of his fellow countrymen submit false documentation and get away with it, i.e. they are granted work and residence permits. B09, as a public official, tries to counter that accusation by putting forward the institutional argument that if the enquirer had been in Spain by 1 June 1999, he would have evidence to prove it. The service seeker retorts by accusing B09 of not wanting to understand the situation. At this point, B09 makes a significant move. Stepping out of his official role, he admits that he does understand, utters the conjunction "but" and shrugs his shoulders. As an individual, B09 knows that the enquirer is right; as a bureaucrat, he cannot do anything to change the situation. The exchange goes on for a few more turns. The service seeker claims to have arrived in Spain before 1 June 1999, but not to have any papers to prove it. B09 concedes that that might be case but that a bureaucratic administration needs to have evidence on which to base decisions.

When the encounter is over, I pretend not to have understood the enquirer's request. I ask the official to explain. Our backstage conversation is contained in Example 6.7. It provides insights into B09's understanding of the interaction. He reports the enquirer's words in lines 01 and 02 (note the use of the subordinating conjunction "that" indicating that a reporting verb is elliptical). When I try to counter the service seeker's claim that he was in Spain by 1 June 1999, but does not have evidence to prove it, by using the same argument that the official put forward in his interaction with him, namely that if he had actually been in Spain by that date, he would have documentation to bear witness to it, B09 produces a revealing response. In line 04 he admits that the institutional argument is tenuous, since in fact many –and not just a few– applicants do not have documents to show they meet the government's eligibility requirements.

The above example is conclusive in showing the need for researchers to be cautious in making claims about opportunities for individual agency in institutional

settings. As has been remarked, the arguments B09 offers in his social role as a public bureaucrat do not harmonise with his individual views on the matter. Participants' interactional contributions in institutional settings have to be understood as shaped by their social positioning in the complex web of interest and pressures which make up the institutional order. Researchers need to analyse these institutional conditionings in detail to be able to comprehend the constraints framing institutional talk. Yet this does not imply that talk is totally determined by contextual considerations. Social subjects have their own understandings of the institutional scene and it is in relation to these subjective, individual perceptions that discourse is produced and social actions are shaped.

Team work and the lack of a unified front

In the previous section it was shown how acceptance of authority cannot be taken for granted in the setting studied. Some public bureaucrats, such as B09, decide to go along with the institution's new information policy, while others, such as B11, are reluctant to implement the changes. This results in a considerable degree of tension among workmates and has clear bearings on an interactional level. Officials have different reasons for acting as they do (some of these reasons were spelt out in the previous section). What is significant is that bureaucrats' non-implementation of the new institutional guidelines is tolerated by the institution. Nieto's (1996) comments on the "environmental niche" in which the work of Spanish bureaucrats is embedded are relevant here. Spanish civil servants tend to work in isolation and independent of their colleagues' actions. The notion of "team", referred to below, is largely non-existent in Spanish bureaucratic contexts. And yet, bureaucrats' actions are consequential for their colleagues' work and the image of the institution. When the information provided by the institution is not consistent, immigrants are given arguments to challenge officials' words. This is especially the case when the information provided is not favourable to their interests. The public bureaucrat may be accused of withholding information. These situations are profoundly face-threatening. They represent a personal attack on institutional representatives' image of fair and honest individuals. More importantly, they affect immigrants' perception

of the treatment they receive. It is in these types of situations that feelings of discrimination originate. As Goffman (1983) points out, "equality of treatment", is a perceptual achievement in interaction rather than an objectively identifiable feature. As soon as immigrants have the impression that they are being confused, the public institution loses credibility.

Employees in an organisation have been described by Goffman (1959) as members of a "team" engaged in staging a "show". He refers to them as "performers" in that they work to sustain a given definition of the situation. In Goffman's words, they maintain a "line" before an "audience" (i.e. service seekers). The metaphor of the "show" is particularly useful for an understanding of the setting examined. Members of an organisational team are always expected to behave in certain socially prescribed ways. Deviations from expected modes of behaviour are assessed by members of the audience and inferences are immediately made as to their meaning. In the institutional context examined, Goffman's theatrical metaphors are illuminating. The change in the institution's policy of information needs to be carefully staged by officials. The same information as previously is available to them, but fewer relevant details are provided to immigrants. Public representatives must be cautious "not to give the show away" (1959:83). Alternatively, the individual bureaucrat that decides to go along with the new information policy may be accused of being secretive. It is essential that officials keep a unified front, since otherwise, public disagreement among members of the team may embarrass "the reality sponsored by the team" (1959:86). A unified front is a means of self-protection. If all members of the team stage the same representation of reality, it is unlikely that officials are challenged on an individual basis.

The lack of a unified front characterises service provision at the immigration office analysed. As bureaucrat B09 remarks in Example 6.6 above (line 53), this "discrepant" behaviour is tolerated by the managers. This is in line with Nieto's comments (1996) in the sense that managers in Spanish bureaucratic organisations do not want to be bothered with the practicalities of their employees' daily work. Only some of the bureaucrats decide to implement the new information policy.

Example 6.8 below shows the extent to which B09 resents his colleagues' "disloyal" behaviour. In the extract, B09 remarks on the fact that his interlocutor has been given more information than prescribed. That is, ENQ has been told twice that he needs to submit new documentary evidence to prevent the rejection of his application. This is precisely the information that the institution does not want officials to reveal. B09 knows that the enquirer has been given it twice because, as was explained in Chapter 5, it is common practice for officials to write the date together with the response provided to enquirers at the top of application forms.

Example 6.8[28]

[...]

01	*B09:	espera.
	%tra:	wait.
02	*B09:	sólo traes uno eh?
	%tra:	you only bring one right?
03	*ENQ:	uh huh.
	@Situation:	B09 checks status of ENQ's application in computer
04 → 05	*B09:	*a este li han dit dos vegades que li falten # això vol dir que falten i això vol dir que falten.*
	%tra:	this one has been told twice that things are missing # this means it's missing and this means it's missing.
06	*RES:	*i no ha portat res més*?
	%tra:	and has he not brought anything else?
07 →	*B09:	*si li apunten això vol dir que lo qui li apunta li diu.*
	%tra:	if they write it, the person who writes it also tells him.
08	*B09:	todavía está en trámite -. no se sabe si:: [/-] has traído más papeles tú o no?
	%tra:	it's still being processed -. we don't know if:: [-/] have you brought more papers or not?
09	*ENQ:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
10	*B09:	pues todavía tienes que esperarte.
	%tra:	then you still have to wait.
11	*B09:	del seis de junio -, falta un mes por lo menos.
	%tra:	from June sixth -, one more month to go at least.
	%com:	ENQ gives him a form which B09 looks at.
	@End	

B09's comment in lines 04 and 05 ("*a este li han dit dos vegades que li falten # això vol dir que falten i això vol dir que falten*" [this one has been told twice that things are missing # this means it's missing and this means it's missing]) is unexpected in this sequential context. B09 makes this backstage remark while he is searching the

[28] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_06.doc.

electronic database for information on the status of the enquirer's application. As the comment is made in Catalan, I take it as being addressed to me. Line 06 contains my response to B09's turn, and shows my understanding of it. I do not interpret the official's turn as a criticism on his colleagues' behaviour, but rather more locally, that is, as a negative assessment of his interlocutor's way of proceeding. In line 07, B09 keeps insisting that some of their colleagues tell service seekers that their applications are stuck because the documentation submitted is not valid. It becomes clear then that his initial turn in lines 04 and 05 was meant to be critical of his colleagues' behaviour. Later on in the exchange, it is interesting to examine B09's service compliance turn (line 09). The background context discussed above influences the way in which the official shapes his turn. He starts off by providing the official "line" ("*todavía está en trámite -. no se sabe si::*" [it's still being processed -. we don't know if::]). Then, suddenly he stops and starts off in a completely different way ("*has traído más papeles tú o no?*" [have you brought more papers or not?]). B09 acknowledges that ENQ has been requested to submit new evidence. Exceptionally, the official's response is not routinised but shaped in response to the information provided by the service seeker. B09 does not stage his show because he knows that the show has already been given away. Interestingly, this results in a more "interactive" exchange. The service seeker is not given the confusing standard information, but details that are relevant to his particular case.

The previous example has shown how the lack of a unified front is consequential for the type of service provided. In the case of Example 6.8, this works to the enquirer's benefit. The following excerpt (Example 6.9) illustrates the tension that the lack of a unified front creates among colleagues. The excerpt contains B09's backstage comments on a rather tense service interaction he has just been engaged in. As in the previous examples, these comments are addressed to me. B09 explains how the service seeker challenged his responses (line 01), and then reports on his own behaviour. He claims to have told the enquirer that he did not have access to precise details as to whether he needed to submit new documentary evidence. The enquirer, by contrast, argues that that same morning somebody gave him a different piece of information.

Example 6.9[29]

[..]
01 *B09: *segons ell havia vingut avui amb los papers que no estaven escrits ni res i li hem dit*
02 *que li faltaven papers i natros no ho podem dir encara que el senyor que es senta*
03 *aquí ho diu a mi m'ho han prohibit hem de dir que està en tràmit pos ell deia que*
04 *me falten papers i jo pos aquí no posa quins papers falten i jo jo no sé per què*
05 *aquí no està i ell pos este matí m'han dit que me'n faltaven llavons jo li he dit xxx*
06 *i diu ahir vaig portar més papers i ens els va portar ahir dic si ens els portes ahir*
07 *t'has d'esperar un mes a que estiguin introduits i volia veure el seu expedient*.

%tra: according to him he came today with his papers which weren't written or anything and we told him that papers were missing and we cannot say that although the gentleman that sits here does so I have been fobidden to say it we have to say that it's being processed but he was saying that I am lacking more papers and I was saying here it doesn't say which papers are missing and I go "I don't know because it's not in here" and he goes "this morning I was told that I was lacking papers" then I said xxx and he goes "yesterday I brought in more papers" and so he brought them yesterday I go" if you brought them yesterday you have to wait for a month before they are processed" and he wanted to see his file.

B09's remarks on one of his colleagues are revealing (see lines 02 and 03). He does not refer to his colleague B12 by his name, as he usually does, but by means of a paraphrase "*el senyor que es senta aquí ho diu*" (the gentleman that sits here says it). Two elements merit close attention in this sentence: first, the sarcasm conveyed by the use of the word "gentleman" to denote a colleague, and secondly, the use of the paraphrase itself. B09 avoids uttering the name of the disloyal colleague. B09 seems to imply that B12 does not deserve to be named.[30] His inconsiderate attitude deprives him of an individual treatment. He is not B12, but just "the person who sits here". B09 opposes his colleague's behaviour to the behaviour prescribed by the institution "*natros no ho podem dir encara que el senyor que es senta aquí ho diu*" (we cannot say that although the gentleman that sits here does so). He underscores the fact that "he has been forbidden" to say that papers are missing (see line 03). The use of this expression is significant in relation to his initial "we cannot say it" (line 02). He moves from general "we" to individual "I". Someone's sense of accountability is less intense if a command is given to a whole group. By emphasising that he himself has been forbidden to provide a specific piece of information, he shows that he feels

[29] Taken from follow-up comments on encounter OFC02_04.

[30] It could be argued that B09 is trying to avoid using B12's name to make identification more difficult in case he is overheard. It seems to me that the identity of the official being talked about is fairly transparent anyway. The idea that B09 does not care much about being overheard is reinforced by the fact that B09 does not lower his tone of voice while uttering his comments. The situational and linguistic context in which the paraphrase is embedded seems to reinforce the hypothesis that B09's use of the phrase "the gentleman that sits here" is mainly motivated by his desire to be critical of his colleague's behaviour.

personally accountable for open disobedience. B09 is trying to justify a professional conduct with which he may disagree on a personal level . Hence his preoccupation with presenting a unified front.

B09 is concerned not to give the show away to such an extent that on some occasions he even avoids using the official term *propuesta denegatoria* in front of me. He treats it as a taboo term, either because he fears that he may be overheard by members of the public, or because he tries to erase its very existence by denying it discursive reality. This linguistic practice is illustrated by Example 6.10 below.

Example 6.10[31]

[...]

01 *B09: *pues primer se miren si estan bé i s'introdueix i es posa* en trámite *o es posa lo altre*
02 *que també vol dir* trámite *per a ells saps lo que et vull dir* ?
%tra: so first we check whether they are okay and we enter [the information] and we write being processed or the other thing that also means being processed for them do you know what I am talking about?

03 *RES: fase de instrucción o + ...
%tra: preparatory phase or +...

04 *B09: <o denegatoria> [>].
%tra: <or rejection> [>].

05 *RES: <propuesta denegatoria> [<]?
%tra: <proposal for rejection> [<]?

[...]

Concluding remarks

This chapter has undertaken a detailed critical analysis of the practices of information provision displayed by government officials engaged in face-to-face service communication with immigrants seeking to become legal residents in Spain. The chapter has tried to show how decisions made at an interactional level are not neutral. They reveal the conscious or subconscious beliefs held by public bureaucrats about the social group of clients they serve. The analysis has shown that immigrants' right to accurate, truthful information is neglected. Immigrant clients are supplied vague and ambiguous responses which fail short of satisfying their most elementary information needs.

[31] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C)_04.

The chapter has also examined the role played by participants' manifest asymmetrical language abilities in shaping bureaucrats' discursive practices. It has been shown how the asymmetrical distribution of linguistic resources is problematised by institutional representatives. Instead of devising creative ways of ensuring that vital information gets across, public officials decide to curtail the amount of details provided to clients. The routinisation of their responses, together with the institution's lack of investment in providing a good service, favour officials' uninformative behaviour.

Finally, some of the contradictions and tensions among members of staff that emerge as a result of institutional disorganisation are examined. The absence of a "unified front" invalidates the efforts made by the institution to prevent the submission of piles of new documents. Individual bureaucrats, as social actors, are expected to adhere to the new institutional policy of withholding information. Because of immigrants' challenging moves, in actual social interaction bureaucrats devise ways of maintaining face while detaching themselves from the institutional role they are expected to enact. The following chapter will be devoted to the examination of the micro-politics of face-to-face social interaction in close detail. The aim is to investigate what participants' interactional micro-shifts reveal of the institutional order in which these exchanges are embedded.

7

Power and conflict in interaction

This chapter undertakes a micro-analysis of the discursive practices of immigrant information seekers and public officials at the institutional site investigated. Because of the importance of meaningful information for immigrants seeking legalisation, the present chapter focuses on bureaucrats' service compliance turns, where information on the status of immigrants' applications is provided. These turns are the core of the exchange, as they accomplish its social goal and articulate subsequent discourse. This chapter sheds light on the strategies each group of social actors deploy to pursue their diverging interactional agendas. From a critical perspective, it demonstrates how the social events investigated are not constructed through the unconstrained participation of both speaker groups. Bureaucrats' contributions tend to reinforce unequal asymmetries of power and knowledge. Their routinised behaviour works to the detriment of immigrant information seekers with limited linguistic skills in the habitual languages of interaction. Their "scripted" behaviour has an effect on the nature of the information provided but also on the extent to which immigrants are given the chance to ask for clarifications, negotiate understandings, and eventually make sense of talk being addressed to them. The ultimate significance of these interactions is that the ways in which immigrants are treated (or perceive they are treated) in this key institutional context is, as Goffman upholds, "likely to flavor their sense of place in the wider community" (1983:14). The analysis of the micro-level of interactional talk shows how macro-processes of social marginalisation are (re)created in the daily activities of situated speakers.

The chapter illustrates some of the interpretive procedures engaged in at an interactional level. It sketches out the contextual considerations that are brought to bear in producing and understanding service talk-in-interaction. It also explores how different types of knowledge and a different framing of the encounters may result in interactants' diverging understandings of each other's contributions. The chapter is organised into four main sections. The first section is devoted to the illustration of

the main linguistic routines of the information-providing group. The second section briefly presents service seekers' interactional handling of the information provided to them. The last two sections focus on the discursive strategies employed by each group to try to accomplish their social and interactional goals.

Bureaucrats' linguistic routines

This section focuses on the analysis of bureaucrats' most frequent responses in information-providing turns. A defining trait of these productions is that they are highly routinised. Both the content and the format of officials' responses vary little from one interaction to another. As was shown in Chapter 6, it is possible to classify the information on the status of clients' applications into a limited number of response types. This indicates the extent to which public representatives' discourse seems to follow a pre-established script. The reasons why routinisation is detrimental to information seekers at the site examined are spelt out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Following Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996), bureaucracy is understood in this study as a specific set of practices that construe particular types of social events as "bureaucratic". Bureaucracy does not exist independently of the social actors that (re)create it. It is in and through language practice that bureaucratic events are accomplished. One defining characteristic of bureaucratic organisations if the routinisation of their practices. Bureaucrats' handling of clients as "files" rather than individuals is one aspect of this process of routinisation. The treatment received is precisely what causes a given social event to be experienced as "bureaucratic". From a clients' perspective, routinisation depersonalises the service offered, and is usually experienced negatively. Yet the notion of routinisation is not inherently negative. In his seminal work on bureaucracy, Weber (1948) argues that the more "dehumanised" bureaucratic organisations are in their functioning, the more successful they will be in removing from public business all purely personal, emotional, and therefore, non-rational elements. He sees the impersonal nature of bureaucracy as an advantage over local powers which are driven in their actions by arbitrary personal considerations. This functioning principle is the result of the

demand for "equality before the law" which lies at the core of any modern democracy (1948:224). Along the same lines, Goffman (1983) claims that contemporary service transactions proceed under the assumption that all clients will be treated equally. The routinisation of service procedures is an efficient way of ensuring neutrality of treatment. From the perspective of the service provider, routinisation saves effort and provides a sense of security in one's job. This feeling of "security" is examined by Cook-Gumperz (2000) in interactions between workers and customers at a fast food restaurant. These social exchanges are tightly controlled by a prescribed organisational script, and leave little room for improvisation. Yet workers do not experience these scripted exchanges as constraining. For them, they constitute an interactional "safe zone", as they no longer have to make judgements about how to relate to each individual customer. These interactions provide structural opportunities for both participant groups to collaborate in the accomplishment of the goals of the exchange.

By contrast, the kinds of routinised practices upon which this chapter focuses are not structurally designed to enable the participation of both speaker groups. Routinisation occurs primarily in the service compliance turn. This is the most important turn in the exchanges analysed for various reasons. It is the turn in which the public official provides the information requested. It is, therefore, the turn which accomplishes the core goal of the exchange. It is also the turn that shapes the rest of the social interaction, as immigrants' subsequent contributions depend largely on the information presented in it. The routinised presentation of information is detrimental to immigrants because it does not cater for their information needs. As linguistic competence in Spanish or English varies greatly among immigrants, bureaucrats opt for a "minimalist" solution. They simplify information to a minimum, and then provide these simplified responses routinely. Similar information is provided to all service seekers in the corpus, regardless of their linguistic skills. Some of them, as will be seen in the examples presented in this chapter, can mobilise linguistic resources of various kinds to try to go beyond bureaucrats' scripted responses and challenge them. Many others, however, do not possess the linguistic abilities to attempt to uncover relevant details about their

applications.[1] Routinisation is disadvantageous for both groups of information seekers, but especially for the least competent in Spanish or English.

The key question is the extent to which equal treatment guarantees equality of opportunities. Subirats (2002) claims that, in contemporary social life, a non-differentiated treatment of individuals no longer guarantees equality and fairness in the provision of services and the regulation of the social world. He states that, in fact, the principle of non-differentiation conflicts with the demands of a new society in which the recognition of difference is a constitutive element of citizenship. Subirats' ideas counter the traditional view, held by Weber and Goffman, that equality of treatment protects individuals from being subject to discriminatory practices. It is by failing to adjust to the different demands of culturally and linguistically diverse interlocutors that institutions constrain immigrants' chances of participation in the social arena. The issue of the management of social diversity is largely problematic in the Catalan/Spanish context, in which institutions, used to a relatively homogeneous clientele, need to devise new ways of ensuring equal opportunities for everybody. The extent to which this can be achieved through generalised equality of treatment is open to debate.

Apart from bureaucrats' information provision routines, this chapter examines the process of information exchange as a whole. It focuses mainly on those encounters in which immigrants are told that a decision on their applications has not yet been made. This is the case with most interactions in the corpus. The absence of a final outcome triggers repeated demands for more details. It was mentioned in Chapter 6 that, at the beginning of my data collection, a change in the institution's policy for providing information was implemented. Essentially, unless accepted, all applications were reported as "*en trámite*" (being processed). The examination of these instances of immigrant-official communication allows revealing insights into the different discursive strategies immigrants employ to make sense of the information presented to them. Within the context of changing

[1] The verb "attempt" is used to avoid giving the impression that, if they are competent in Spanish or English, immigrant speakers will be allowed to negotiate relevant information with bureaucrats. As was presented in Chapter 6, there are certain types of information to which they will never have access, because they are intentionally withheld from them.

practices of information provision, immigrant clients try to figure out how the new information they are furnished fits in with previously obtained details. As regards bureaucrats, they are expected to implement the institution's new policy and account for their differing responses over time. In addition, because of the absence of a "unified front",[2] officials often get challenged for their inconsistent information provision practices. This is likely to be the case when the information provided is less favourable to the enquirer's interests, as when the vague, routinised formula *en trámite* is offered. The examination of the examples presented below is intended to present the main formal features of bureaucrats' service compliance turns.

The pivot word *trámite*, around which most talk revolves in these interactions, is always uttered in Spanish, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 5. Hardly ever is a translation into any other language attempted. In actual service communication, the official may decide to provide only the word *trámite* as a response, or supplement it with some other details. One of the bureaucrats examined, namely B10, is more inclined to reducing information to a minimum. B09, by contrast, is more willing to offer more details. However, official B09's turns tend to be more routinised than B10's productions.[3] Below an excerpt is reproduced in which B10's laconic information responses are illustrated (Example 7.1).

Example 7.1[4]

[...]

01 →	*B10:	trámite ale.
	%tra:	being processed there you go.
02	*EN1:	**okay** xxx?
03 →	*B10:	no -. trámite.
	%tra:	no -. being processed.
04	*EN1:	falta.
	%tra:	missing.
05 →	*B10:	falta **two weeks**.
	%tra:	missing two weeks.
06	*UUU:	#0_4.
07	*B10:	**after two weeks come here**.

[...]

[2] See Chapter 6 for details.

[3] In Chapter 8, a detailed examination is presented of B10's idiosyncratic language practices.

[4] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_07.doc.

Not only does B10 provide very little information (line 01), but when he is asked to explain what he means by *trámite* (line 02), he just repeats this key word. In addition, he seems to be trying to confuse his interlocutor by recycling the word *falta*, which the information seeker (EN1) employs in a sense closer to "problems" in line 03, and inserting it into a temporal structure with a totally different meaning (see line 05). His interlocutor's four-second silence indicates how puzzled he is by B10's response. Finally, the public official decides to provide a synonymous, less confusing sentence (line 07), in which *falta* is replaced by the words "after" and "come here". It is interesting to note the use of the word *ale* (literally, come on) in B10's initial turn. *Ale* is an interjection employed in Spanish to encourage the addressee to initiate some kind of action, in this case, probably to bring the encounter to a close. Its use is rather unexpected in this contextual situation, as it indexes a certain degree of familiarity between speakers which does not yet exist. In addition, its use echoes the voice of a figure of authority positioned in a clearly asymmetrical social relationship, such as that of a school teacher, a parent or a policeman. The incorporation of these voices is characteristic of B10's interactional behaviour. A detailed analysis of these phenomena is undertaken in Chapter 8.

One frequent discursive routine is for *trámite* to be accompanied by a directive, as is common practice in institutional discourse (Agar 1985). By means of this directive, the institutional representative indicates to the information seeker how to proceed. In the site investigated, the word *trámite* is usually accompanied by a verb like "wait" or "come back"–which may be elided– and a temporal adverbial phrase specifying how long enquirers are required to wait. This directive can be expressed in Spanish, English, or both languages (see example 7.3 below). "Three weeks" is the amount of time enquirers are always asked to wait, regardless of the administrative stage at which their applications are. Bureaucrats' directives are not modulated or hedged in any way. No degree of uncertainty about how quickly or slowly applications will be processed is expressed. The repetition of identical responses may give rise to feelings of mistrust among immigrants. It is also indicative of their limited information value. To an outside observer, the frequent "three weeks" phrase echoes a culturally specific way of providing information, in

which bureaucrats' responses are uncommitted. In their dealings with bureaucracy, Spaniards are aware that bureaucrats' time predictions are not intended to be taken at face value. To a certain extent, "three weeks" is as good a response as any other. This is confirmed by B09 in backstage informal talk (see lines 01 and 02).

Example 7.2[5]

01 →	*RES:	xxx *és per dir algo*.
	%tra:	xxx is to say something.
02 →	*B09:	*és un temps aproximat*.
	%tra:	it's an approximate length of time.
03	*RES:	*és un temps aproximat*.
	%tra:	it's an approximate length of time.
04	*B09:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
05	*RES:	*podria ser un mes*.
	%tra:	it could well be a month.
06	*B09:	sí sí.
	%tra:	yes yes.
07 → 08	*B09:	*perquè si els hi dius tres semanes vénen al cap d'una o dos si els ho dius un mes vindran demà*.
	%tra:	because if you tell them three weeks they come after one or two if you tell them a month they will come tomorrow.

"Three weeks" is just an approximate length of time. Due to the lack of efficient channels of communication between frontstage and backstage bureaucrats, it is difficult for B09 to be precise about how long it may take applications to move from one administrative stage to another. B09's account of his own information practices is revealing. In lines 07 and 08, the official explains why he has chosen the phrase "three weeks" as a routine response. Rather than having to do with the accuracy of the information provided, his motivations seem to be related to his wish to regulate the frequency of enquirers' visits to the office, in other words, with attempts at exerting some degree of social control.[6] Officials' routines are shaped by their negative expectations about clients' behavioural patterns.[7] The value of "three

[5] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C)_08.

[6] The issue of social control will be discussed at length in the ensuing chapter (Chapter 8).

[7] We need to be cautious about attributing responsibility to individual bureaucrats. As Agar (1985) states, not all institutional representatives handle institutional discourse in the same way. The effects of the institutional order cannot be neglected. It is hard to make predictions in an organisational context where tasks are not distributed in a coherent manner, and where procedural routines are constantly changing. In an institution which is not committed to working efficiently (nor, as has been shown, to keeping its clients informed), the question arises as to why individual bureaucrats should run the risk of losing face by making predictions which may not come true.

weeks" is the effect it has on immigrant addressees. It is a long enough period of time to space immigrants' visits to the office, but not too long to have the opposite effect of what was intended. In the interview (Example 7.3 below), Hussain shows how aware he is that bureaucrats' instructions should not be taken at face value. He presents himself as a knowledgeable social actor who waits longer than the period prescribed (lines 05 and 06). He interprets bureaucrats' temporal expressions as general requests to wait still longer rather than exact predictions as to when more precise information will be available. Hussain explains how not waiting for at least three weeks is interpreted by bureaucrats as an act of "subversion" of the established social order (lines 13 and 14). Accordingly, it is severely reprimanded. In Chapter 8, a detailed analysis of bureaucrats' attempts at exerting social control is presented.

Example 7.3[8]

[...]

01	*RES:	o sea las veces que has ido allí a la oficina uh cómo cómo explicarías la experiencia
02		de ir allí -. o sea es un es algo difícil es difícil hablar con esa gente -, es fácil o sea +...
	%tra:	in other words when you've been to the office uh how would you explain your experience -. is it something that's difficult is it difficult talking to those people -, it's easy or +...
03	*HUS:	no es [///] para mí no es difícil porque yo como sabía un poquito a mí me dicen una
04		vez cuando yo me fue me dicen oye # trámite está bien -. me vienes dentro de un
05 →		mes -. yo no vayas dentro de un mes -. yo me vayas un mes y medio -. por ejemplo
06		yo siempre llegas tarde no pierdes el tiempo.
	%tra:	it's not [//] for me it's not difficult because since I knew a little bit they told me once when I went they told me # listen it's being processed it's okay -. you come back in a month's time .- I did not go after a month -. I went after a month and a half -. for example I always arrive late I don't waste my time.
07	*RES:	[=! laughs].
08	*HUS:	porque yo sí sabes como gente vayas cada semana cada quince días -, molestan
09		así -. por ejemplo una persona te dice de oficina -,.
	%tra:	because I do know like people who go every week every fifteen days -, they annoy them -. for example somebody from the office says to you-,.
10	*RES:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
11	*HUS:	oye tú tienes venir # venir dentro de un mes.
	%tra:	listen you have to come back # come back after a month.
12	*RES:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
13	*HUS:	pero tú vayas dentro de una semana qué te dicen otra vez oye vayas otra dentro de
14		un mes por mejor +/.
	%tra:	but you go back after a week, what do they tell you again, listen come back after a month better +/.

[8] Example taken from the interview with Hussain (lines 959-975), contained in Appendix C.

15 *RES: y tú crees que se enfadan si ellos ven que has ido dentro de una semana?
%tra: and do you think they get angry if they see that you're back within a week?

16 *HUS: sí sí.
%tra: yes yes.

17 *RES: se enfadan.
%tra: they get angry.

[...]

With regard to the format of the service compliance turn, apart from the routine *trámite* formula accompanied by a directive, no reference is usually made as to what immigrant clients can expect at the end of the "three week" period. Implicit in bureaucrats' responses is an assumption of relevance. Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996) uphold that one of the features of bureaucratic discourse is that clients are expected to take for granted the truthfulness of what the bureaucrat says. The analysis of the interactional data presented here reveals that, apart from being truthful, bureaucrats' responses are assumed to be relevant. Even if no mention is made as to what changes are expected to occur at the end of "three weeks", immigrants are expected to assume that changes of some sort will take place.[9] Bureaucrats' positions of speaking frame talk in such a way that the relevance of their responses is taken for granted. This provides evidence for the claim that pragmatic investigations of speakers' interpretative processes and the ways in which meanings are constructed in interaction cannot ignore socially-informed analyses which take into account the fundamental asymmetries underlying processes of information exchange in bureaucratic settings. One of these asymmetries is related to speakers' discursive rights and obligations, which, as shall be seen in the remainder of this chapter, are fundamentally unequal. Examples 7.4 and 7.5 below illustrate the format of a typical service compliance turn as discussed above.

Example 7.4[10]

[...]

01 → *B09: en trámite -. tres semanas más -. **three more weeks**.
%tra: being processed -. three more weeks -. three more weeks.

02 *ENQ: **three weeks**?

[9] This is not obvious at the site examined. The applications that have been found to present problems get stuck in the "proposal for rejection" stage, and it is likely that no changes will have occurred by the end of the three weeks.

[10] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_03.doc.

03 *B09: **yes**.
[...]

In line 1, the official B09 routinely provides the pivot phrase *en trámite* followed by a time adverbial expression in Spanish. This adverbial functions as the directive described by Agar (1985). Immediately after it, the official produces a translation into English of the adverbial phrase, resulting in a code-switched service compliance turn. Switching into English at this point is part of officials' discursive routines when interacting with South Asian enquirers. Code-switching is not motivated by immigrants' displays of linguistic competence. Sometimes, as in the example above, the use of English is taken up by the service seeker (see line 02). At other times, the encounter proceeds in Spanish. The following data excerpt (Example 7.5) illustrates a syntactically more "complete" service compliance turn.

Example 7.5[11]

[...]
01 → *B09: ya está -. en trámite tienes que esperar tres semanas más.
%tra: okay -. being processed you have to wait for three more weeks.
02 *EN1: xxx.
03 → *B09: **you have to wait three more weeks**.
04 *EN1: ah trámite [=! very softly]!
%tra: uh being processed [=! very softly]!
05 *B09: trámite.
%tra: being processed.
06 *EN2: **english english**.
07 *B09: uh: **you have to wait three more weeks**.
08 *EN2: **three more week** ah!
09 *EN1: **three weeks**?
10 *B09: +^ <**three weeks**> [>].
11 *EN1: <**okay**> [<] **okay thanks**.
@End

The use of the verbal phrase *tienes que* (you have to) + *infinitive* preceding the temporal adverbial is significant (line 1). The idea of obligation conveyed by the verbal phrase reinforces the directive function of the utterance. Another element that merits consideration is the interactional treatment of the word *trámite*. In line 06, EN2, one of the two service seekers, requests an English translation of B09's

[11] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_12.doc.

previous turn, which was made up of the single word *trámite* (see line 05). The official responds by repeating the directive, i.e. "you have to wait three more weeks", but does not attempt an English translation of the word itself. There are many ways in which this move can be interpreted. The official's behaviour may be motivated by his limited proficiency in English. He may not know how to translate *trámite* into this language and therefore skips it. That could well account for B09's behaviour. However, at no time did any of the officials seem interested in learning a possible translation for this word. As was discussed in Chapter 4, my expertise in English was sometimes called upon to help achieve mutual understanding. Conveying the meaning of *trámite*, however, did not seem to be a source of worry for officials. This ties in with the discussion offered in Chapter 6 on the tokenistic value of *trámite* and its role in the creation of an illusion of information. It was argued that the tokenistic value of *trámite* hinged on its always being uttered in Spanish. Language choice was key in sponsoring a reality where *trámite* skilfully replaced real institutional terminology. This may explain why B09 does not attempt an English translation of *trámite*; it is not needed for the interactional "game". The bureaucrat translates only that part of his previous turn which carries real meaning in enquirers' life worlds, namely, that they still have to wait for three more weeks.

Falta, trámite, and the negotiation of shared understanding

The aim of this section is to explore how the information provided in the service compliance turn is handled interactionally by information-seeking participants. Different immigrant service seekers may display different modes of behaving interactionally depending on a number of factors. The most fundamental one seems to be command of the linguistic codes they can employ to communicate with information providers, in particular, Spanish or English. Although linguistic proficiency can be established objectively, it also has an important perceptual dimension. To a large extent, immigrants' behaviour in interaction is determined by their own perception of how capable they are, linguistically, of negotiating the meaning of talk addressed to them. Immigrants' mode of acting interactionally may also depend on other factors, such as their perception of the contextual situation

and of how "appropriate" it is for them to request further details, contest the information presented, and such like. Immigrants' displayed reactions can be classified into two groups. Either they take the information they are presented at face value, or they probe into it. The fact that they acknowledge the information obtained but do not inquire further does not imply that they are satisfied with it. Other factors may intervene. Some of them will be presented in the ensuing paragraphs. Participants' motivations for acting as they do have to be investigated by means of follow-up interviews,[12] which because of the nature of the research site investigated, could only be carried out to a limited extent. The focus of the analysis is, therefore, on immigrants' strategies of negotiation of information as they are displayed in face-to-face communication. Example 7.6 is an instance of the first type of interactional behaviour mentioned above.

Example 7.6[13]

01	*ENQ:	0.
	%act:	hands B09 a copy of the application form
02	*B09:	0.
	%act:	checks status of file in the computer
03	*B09:	éste está en trámite # tienes que esperarte tres semanas más.
	%tra:	this one is being processed # you have to wait for three more weeks.
04	*UUU:	#0_1.
05	*B09:	entiendes?
	%tra:	do you understand?
06	*ENQ:	0.
	%act:	makes denying gesture
07	*B09:	**english**?
08	*ENQ:	**yes**.
09	*B09:	eh **you have to wait three more weeks**.
10	*ENQ:	**three more weeks** [=! soft] ?
11	*B09:	0.
	%act:	nods his head
	@End	

The interaction presented here is complete, from beginning to end. In the initial moves, no greetings are exchanged. The service request is performed non-verbally by means of the enquirer's handing over of his application form to the public

[12] Even with follow-up interviews, psychological states can only be investigated partially.

[13] Extract taken from transcript OFC01_02.doc.

bureaucrat. The official (B09) proceeds to search the computer for information on the enquirer's file (line 02). When the searching stage is over, he provides his routinised response in line 03 ("*éste está en trámite # tienes que esperarte tres semanas más*" [this one is being processed # you have to wait for three more weeks]). He chooses Spanish as the language of communication. The enquirer's lack of uptake in line 04 is interpreted by the official as an indication of non-understanding. In line 05, B09 produces a comprehension check, "*¿entiendes?*" (do you understand?). With a non-verbal response, ENQ confirms the official's interpretation of the situation. Because of the absence of verbal productions by the immigrant, the public official infers that language choice may be the problem. He decides to switch languages and suggests the use of English. His suggestion is readily accepted by ENQ (see line 08). B09, then, repeats the "core" of his previous service compliance turn to ENQ.[14] ENQ checks his understanding of the officials' talk in line 10. ENQ's understanding is confirmed by B09, and the interaction ends there. The few turns following the official's service compliance response are not motivated by the service seeker's desire to question or contest the information furnished but by a lack of proficiency in the linguistic code employed. Once languages are switched and the official's message gets across, the interaction is brought to an end. A different attitude on the part of the information seeker is exemplified in the extract below.

Example 7.7[15]

[...]

01 → *B09: en trámite -. tres semanas más.
%tra: being processed -. three more weeks.

02 *UUU: #0_2.5.

03 → *B09: entiendes?
%tra: do you understand?

04 *ENQ: 0.
%act: nods shyly

@Situation: B09 continues checking status of rest of applications

05 → *ENQ: **any** falta -? falta -? no?
%tra: anything missing -? missing -? no?

[14] It is possible to see how B09 repeats exactly the same routine that was discussed in Example 7.2 above, that is, when asked to translate his initial service compliance turn into English, he translates only the directive, and not the word *trámite*. This confirms the tokenistic value of *trámite* and gives an idea of the widespread currency of this practice.

[15] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_01.doc.

06 → *B09: en trámite: **we are looking if it is all right or don't** -. **we don't know**.
%tra: in proce:ss we are looking if it is all right or don't -. we don't know.

07 *ENQ: <**okay**> [?].

08 *UUU: #0_55.

09 *B09: trámite -,.
%tra: being processed -,.

@Situation: B09 continues checking applications

10 *B09: en trámite.
%tra: being processed.

11 *B09: 0.
%act: presses button to serve following enquirer

@End

After being told that his application is in *trámite*, the service seeker tries to find out more details about it. Contrary to what would be expected, he does not ask for further information immediately after the official's service compliance move (line 01), but a few turns later. As in the previous extract, there is lack of uptake on the enquirer's part, which is interpreted by the official as an indication of non-understanding. After a 2.5-second silence, the bureaucrat asks ENQ whether he has understood (line 03). He responds in the affirmative by nodding his head (line 04). B09 moves on interactionally and starts to check another of the applications furnished by ENQ.[16] It is at this point that ENQ decides to query whether everything is okay with his previous application. He uses the code-switched question "any *falta*?" for this purpose.

This sequence of turns provides interesting insights into speakers' inferential mechanisms and the ways in which they interpret each other's moves. In particular, the bureaucrat's handling of the enquirer's request for further information is highly revealing. When asked whether he has understood (line 04), the enquirer nods affirmatively. The official moves on interactionally. The bureaucrat's assumption is, presumably, that common ground has been established. However, the service seeker decides to ask a question that may be interpreted as calling that previously avowed

[16] Throughout the period I conducted fieldwork, each enquirer could have up to five applications checked in the same encounter. Together with his/her own application, many enquirers would take applications from relatives, friends, acquaintances or simply other foreigners they got to know in the office. As with many other practices, this routine changed over time. When I went back to the site in October 2000, enquirers were only allowed to have their own applications checked, unless a certificate enabling them to act on other people's behalf was furnished. Officials were unaware of the reasons for this change, which worked to make the procedure more complicated.

understanding into question (line 05). In his next turn (line 06), the official displays the way in which he interprets ENQ's new question. He views it as stemming from actual lack of understanding of his previous *trámite* response, as was suspected. This is proved by the fact that B09 does not simply provide an answer to ENQ's question. He recycles the word *trámite* and provides an institutional definition of it (line 06). The official's interpretation reveals a pattern of inferencing which assumes that service seekers' acknowledgements of understanding cannot be taken at face value.[17] This construes immigrants as "problematic" interlocutors. Co-participants can never be certain that a shared interactional understanding has been achieved. Avowals of understanding, which may well be motivated by immigrants' desire not to initiate interactional "conflict", are treated as indexing an underlying pattern of unpredictable behaviour. In Sarangi and Slembrouck's words (1996:48), "suspicion provides a basis for client construction". The quote below illustrates information providers' construal of immigrant clients as unreliable interlocutors.

Example 7.8[18]

01 *B09: *això de que els digues qualsevol cosa i et diuen que sí és que em posa* !
%tra: it drives me crazy when they say yes to whatever you tell them!

The remark in Example 7.8 is made by B09 subsequent to a service interaction which is quite strenuous in terms of mutual understanding. Throughout the exchange, the official keeps addressing information-seeking questions to his interlocutor, and only response he gets repeatedly is "yes". It seems obvious that the immigrant enquirer is not comprehending his questions, yet he does not explicitly avow lack of understanding. This infuriates the official. From an immigrant perspective, however, non-understanding is a source of discomfort, as attested by Bremer et al. (1996) because it foregrounds immigrants' lack of linguistic competence in the majority language(s). The result is loss of face. It is highly likely

[17] One could argue that this is not the case. The official may not be interpreting the enquirer's behaviour as contradictory. The fact that the enquirer understands the word *trámite*, that is, that he is able to "decode" it, does not imply that he understands the institutional import of this word, that is, its implications on a procedural/institutional level. In the previous chapter, however, it was shown how officials rarely make the distinction between these two levels of understanding.

[18] This instance of backstage talk is produced by B09 as a follow-up comment on the interaction transcribed in OFC01_06.doc.

that less linguistically competent participants will try to minimise public admissions of non-understanding. In the setting examined, linguistic competence in Spanish is key to enquirers' interactional construction of themselves as entitled to legal residency. On the one hand, under the regulations of the exceptional legalisation campaign of the year 2000, all immigrant applicants are required to have been in Spain for approximately a year to be entitled to legal residency. Poor command of Spanish may be interpreted as an indication of late arrival and the enquirer may be suspected of trying to cheat on the requirement. On the other hand, institutional ideologies underlying language use have it that Spanish is the "legitimate" language of interaction in Spanish immigration offices.[19] This linguistic ideology echoes a more general assumption in Spanish society regarding immigrants' language learning processes. Immigrants' lack of competence in Spanish is usually interpreted as revealing their reluctance to "integrate". It is almost perceived as an act of disloyalty towards the recipient community. The pressure for enquirers to disguise their comprehension difficulties in this bureaucratic setting is enormous.

Going back to Example 7.7, it was pointed out that the institutional representative treats the apparent mismatch between turns as deriving from the enquirer's lack of understanding. From an outsider's perspective, it is possible to make that assumption by looking at the peculiar format of the official's turn. The first striking feature of that turn is that its most relevant part, that is, the stretch of talk that actually responds to the immigrant's question ("we don't know"), comes at the end. In terms of interactional relevance, this piece of information would be expected to occur at the beginning of the turn. The fact that the public bureaucrat chooses a marked structuring of his interactional contribution is significant. It was claimed earlier that B09's initial stretch of talk functions as a "teaching line". This hypothesis is borne out by the intonation of the utterance, which is kept rising throughout. There is no pitch fall or pause after *en trámite*, which would be the case if the official was merely repeating the prepositional phrase. In fact, in some other interactions, as in Example 7.9 presented below, the enquirer actually provides a

[19] Further details about practices of language use can be found in Chapter 8.

definition of *trámite* introduced by the verb *quiere decir* [means] (see lines 02-04 below).

Example 7.9[20]

01 *EN1: vale quiero preguntar un [/] una cosa # está todo bien o:: <falta> [>] +...
%tra: okay I want to ask som [/] something # is everything okay or is there something missing +...
02 → *B09: <no se sabe> [<] cuando
03 está en trámite quiere decir que están mirando si los papeles están bien # y todavía
04 no se sabe si falta o no falta.
%tra: <we don't know> [<] when it's being processed that means that they are seeing if the papers are okay # and we don't know whether anything is missing or not.

As regards Example 7.7, I have remarked that the official's teaching line occupies a prominent position. It appears that explaining the meaning of *trámite* is more important for the bureaucrat than fulfilling the requirements of the adjacency pair, that is, answering the enquirer's interrogative sentence. The question arises as to what the official's motivations might be. It could be argued that the bureaucrat's insistence on defining what *trámite* means in this context derives from a desire to provide a good service, that is, to make his interlocutors understand the procedural import of *trámite*. However, definitions of the sort presented here occur only in very specific sequential contexts, namely, after questions by immigrants concerning the *falta* issue. Officials' information responses do not routinely include a definition of the word *trámite*. A directive telling service seekers to return to the office in three weeks' time is the only piece of information usually offered. The hypothesis put forward here is that the reasons for the bureaucrat's turn have to be found in the institutional order framing these interactions. The word *falta* echoes a particular practice of information provision that the institution's new policy is intended to eliminate. As was shown in Chapter 6, this specific official (B09) feels uneasy about the new practice of telling all applicants that their applications are being processed *(trámite)*, but sees it as his duty to implement it. Immigrants' use of the word *falta* foregrounds the institution's policy change, because it recontextualises (Auer and di Luzio 1992) this situated local interaction and embeds it in a series of interactional events spanning over time. The importance B09 attaches to providing a definition

[20] Extract taken from transcript OFC08_08.doc.

of *trámite* is explained in terms of the tension he has to manage between projecting a positive self-image, while at the same time having to withhold information from his interlocutors. B09's teaching utterance contextualises his claim that he does not know if any problems have been found with the client's application. His definition functions as a justification framing his "we don't know" response. The ethnographic information gathered, which included numerous informal conversations with B09, point to an "institutional" line of interpretation which is related to the contradictions just mentioned.

B09 displays a policing attitude towards his colleagues' practices of information provision. He wants to make sure that all bureaucrats "stage the same show", in Goffman's terms (1959), that is, sponsor the same definition of reality. In this new reality, the term *falta* does not exist any more. B09 is concerned with removing all traces of *falta* from the talk that occurs in the office, either in face-to-face service communication with immigrants, or in his own backstage comments addressed to me (see Example 6.11 in which he treats this term as a "taboo" word). To achieve his goal, B09 has to make sure that service seekers understand the institutional meaning of *trámite*. The word *trámite* is used in this context in a narrowly defined way, namely as the absence of any official decision on the application.[21] Like a teacher who is trying to make his pupils reason, the official provides the general frame first, that is, the institutional definition of the word, and then presents his actual response as deriving logically from it. He tries to illustrate step-by-step the reasoning procedure behind his response ("we don't know") in the hope that enquirers' will stop asking about the *falta* (problems) with their applications.[22]

B09's interpretation of the state of affairs is highly questionable because it misses an important point. In the real life world of his interlocutors, *falta* is an opportunity for action, whereas *trámite* conveys no information and embodies an

[21] *Trámite* is a clearly "uncommitted" response. The institution does not want service seekers to find out that their applications have been found faulty, but they do not want to commit themselves to a positive final outcome either. It is the insistence on the "uncommitted" meaning of *trámite* that is relevant. The word *trámite* outside this context can be understood in a rather more positive light, that is, as indicating that the application is making progress because no problems have been found with it.

[22] On several occasions, B09 actually told me that he interpreted enquirers' questions on the issue of '*falta*' as deriving from their being accustomed to officials' previous information provision practices.

enforced passive stance. B09 is bringing an institutional frame to bear in that he interprets the situation in institutional terms, that is, as a matter of changing interactional routines; yet for the enquirer it is probably his relation with the real world that is brought to bear. It is not difficult to imagine a context in which an enquirer who was familiar with the meaning given to *trámite* in this bureaucratic organisation would still employ the *falta* question to find out supplementary information about his/her case. Speakers' interactional behaviour is dynamic. A number of motivating factors lie behind the decisions they make in the course of unfolding verbal exchanges. The interpretive hypotheses presented here, based on observable details of service talk, shed light on participants' inferencing processes and foreground some of the elements which are at the root of their sense making procedures. Example 7.7 could be understood as an attempt by the service seeker to question, albeit in a mitigated way, the information presented to him. The following section illustrates some of the strategies to which enquirers resort in order to challenge officials' responses explicitly and bring institutional inconsistencies into the open.

Contesting bureaucrats' information

This section focuses on the examination of the variety of strategies information seekers employ to make sense of bureaucrats' responses. Their aim is to uncover as many details as possible about the status of their applications. The importance of immigrants' strategies of contestation lies in their potential for reframing the interactions presented in counter-hegemonic ways. As Erikson (2001) claims, bureaucrats' default mode of conduct is hegemonic, that is, it tends toward the reproduction of existing power relations in society. Immigrants' contesting moves, by contrast, aim to achieve social spaces of participation and inclusion. They attempt to reduce asymmetries of knowledge by finding opportunities for the negotiation of meaningful understandings; they try to balance out asymmetries of power by having their civil rights respected. Even if these attempts are not successful, they can be considered "a kind of swimming upstream against the prevailing currents of history" (2001:164). For the purpose of expository clarity, this

section focuses on one speaker group only, namely, information seekers. The following section, in turn, is devoted to the examination of bureaucrats' interactional behaviour. This distinction does not parallel the way in which interactions unfold. The emphasis of this section is on information seekers' contributions, taking into account the fundamental part that bureaucrats, as co-participants, play in the shaping of their talk. In Example 7.10 below, an extract is presented of a service interaction involving official B09 and a middle-aged North African enquirer. The information seeker deploys different strategies to try to gather more information, but avoids a direct confrontation with the official. The exchange unfolds mostly in Spanish, although the information seeker inserts a few words in French in his final turns.

Example 7.10[23]

[...]

01	*B09:	en trámite.
	%tra:	being processed.
02 →	*ENQ:	trámite ahora?
	%tra:	being processed now?
03	*B09:	todavía tiene que esperar tres semanas más.
	%tra:	you still have to wait for three more weeks.
04 →	*ENQ:	eh no fal [/] no falta?
	%tra:	uh no nothing missing?
05 →	*B09:	no sale -. sale en trámite -. trámite están mirando si está todo bien o si no # ,, vale?
	%tra:	it doesn't say -. it only says it's being processed -. being processed they are seeing if everything is okay or not # ,, okay?
06	*ENQ:	trámite?
	%tra:	being processed?
07	*B09:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
08	*UUU:	#0_21.
09	*ENQ:	trámite -. vuelga: vuelga # vuelgue vuega # volve volver.
	%tra:	being processed -. coom coom came cam com come back.
10	*B09:	volver -. tres semanas.
	%tra:	come back -, three weeks.
11	*ENQ:	tres semanas otra -. # tres semanas otra.
	%tra:	three weeks other -. # three weeks other.
12	*B09:	0.
	%act:	nods.
13 →	*ENQ:	gracias -. uh no sabe esto: `qu'est-ce que c'est` esto -. no sabe.
	%tra:	thanks -.uh doesn't know thi::s what is this -. doesn't know.

[23] Extract taken from transcript OFC03_04.doc.

14	*B09:	no sé.
	%tra:	I don't know.
15 →	*ENQ:	+^ mais si -. esto ef # ef uh: ocho tres.
	%tra:	yes you do -. this ef # ef uh eight three.
16	*B09:	quién te lo ha escrito?
	%tra:	who wrote this?
17	*ENQ:	aquí.
	%tra:	here.
18	*B09:	yo no.
	%tra:	not me.
19	*ENQ:	esto número esto # expediente.
	%tra:	this number this # file.
20	*B09:	el número de expediente del ordenador.
	%tra:	the number of the file in the computer.
21	*ENQ:	muchas gracias (a)diós.
	%tra:	many thanks bye.
	@End	

A variety of strategies are mobilised by ENQ to try to gather more information than he is offered. The institutional representative provides the formula "*en trámite*" in line 1. The enquirer's next turn introduces a first element of challenge. The use of the temporal adverbial *ahora* (now) in "*trámite ahora*?" underscores the enquirer's awareness of changes in the information furnished by the institution. Implicit in the enquirer's turn is the expectation of some kind of account of why the information with which he is provided now is different from the information he was given in the past. B09 does not pick up on the enquirer's implied request. Instead, he responds by providing the usual routinised directive requesting his interlocutor to wait for three more weeks (line 03). No reference is made to the enquirer's indirect allusion to change. The bureaucrat tries to avoid having to account for the institution's changing information practices. However, the use of the adverbial *todavía* (still) in his turn is significant. Although he does not want to pick up on the indirect reference to change, he tries to compromise by responding to the other implicit idea in ENQ's turn, namely, that the enquirer has been awaiting a final decision for a long while.

The enquirer does not give up in his attempts to elicit more details. In line 04, he produces a new turn containing the usual *no falta?* question. His use of *ahora* (now) in line 02 constructs him as a regular visitor to the office, and an informed client. His *falta* question needs to be interpreted as a reference back to a previous exchange. This leads the bureaucrat to produce a more elaborate response than in

Example 7.7: "*no sale -. sale en trámite -. trámite están mirando si está todo bien o si no* # „ *vale*?" (it doesn't say -. it only says it's being processed-. being processed they are seeing if everything is okay or not # „ okay?). B09's answer in line 05 is awkward in terms of content and format. The way in which the turn is organised highlights the fact that the information requested does not come out on the computer screen. The enquirer in this encounter has experienced different practices of information provision. In previous exchanges, he was told that the documents submitted were not accepted by the institution *(falta)*. The chances that he may contest the new information he is now given are high. *Falta* is not just a linguistic formula or strategy to uncover information; it is a real institutional response in the light of which he tries to interpret the zero information value he is now supplied.[24]

The public representative tries to prevent challenges to his way of behaving as an individual bureaucrat, and thus, save face, by underscoring the fact that his knowledge is mediated by a computer. The computer does not allow him access to the information requested. The positioning of the utterance *no sale* (it doesn't say) at the beginning of the turn shows that the bureaucrat interprets the enquirer's question in terms of the contextual frame evoked, i.e. inconsistent practices of information provision, rather than as a simple request for further information. In terms of content, a series of implicatures are generated at various levels. Being able to grasp the different layers of meaning which are potentially contained in the turn requires engaging in complex inferential processes. Whereas in the previous example (7.7), B09 claimed not to know whether the service seeker needed to provide more documentary evidence because his/her file was still being examined, in this case, the institutional representative states that the information requested is not available to him, "*no sale*" (it doesn't say). He dodges providing a relevant answer to the question on account of his lack of information. What the official is doing is "staging" the

[24] This is where the difference between Example 7.7 and this example lies. In 7.7, the bureaucrat did not know how the information seeker had learnt to use *falta*. It may have been the case that the immigrant enquirer had been told to use this formula by fellow countrymen.

institutional shift in information provision practices as resulting from a change in the amount of details furnished by the computer.[25]

Several layers of implied meanings are interwoven in B09's discursive productions. To begin with, the implicature generated by the first utterance in the turn, i.e. "*no sale*", is rather indirect but fairly accessible. The fact that the information on whether problems have been found with the enquirer's application is not available does not preclude the existence of such problems. Secondly, the public official cannot tell the enquirer if everything is okay. The implicature is that someone –backstage officials, for instance– may have been manipulating the computerised database. The institutional representative is, in very subtle ways, conveying the information he is supposed to conceal. In a display of "discursive acrobatics", the bureaucrat is attempting to outline a possible scenario in which the responses immigrant clients are provided cannot be mapped on to the real status of their applications.[26] In the following section a more detailed analysis is presented of the strategies employed by bureaucrats to cope with the pressures of the interactional order. Many questions arise from the examination of the bureaucrat's turn. What is the usefulness of adding layers of meaning and complexity to his talk? Are the implicatures discussed above likely to be grasped by B09's interlocutors? There is no evidence in the interaction that ENQ reacts to the implied meanings in B09's turn. It seems highly unlikely for the enquirer to be able to make the complex inferential processes required to assess the implied import of that turn in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction.

Going back to the enquirer's behaviour, in lines 06, 09, and 11, he uses delaying strategies. With final rising intonation, he repeats pieces information already supplied. The bureaucrat is expected to confirm or refute them. These utterances allow the enquirer time to think. In addition, they provide sequential opportunities for the bureaucrat to add any extra information. The enquirer does not want to put an end to the encounter. He wishes more information but is trying

[25] It may be recalled that this was the recommendation given by the office manager in the initial stages of implementation of the new information practices (see Chapter 6 for further details). This recommended framing of the situation managed to wear down front-line bureaucrats' resistance.

to find a way of unearthing it. In lines 13 and 15, the encounter takes an unexpected turn. The enquirer asks what an abbreviation that is written on his application (F83) means. F83 stands for *fase ochenta y tres* (phase eighty three). This was one of the technical names for the *propuesta denegatoria* (proposal for rejection) stage. Applications at this stage have received an initial negative evaluation, mainly because of problems with the documentary evidence presented. The key word *falta* refers to applications at this stage. Before the change in the institutional policy, bureaucrats would advise immigrants to try to find supplementary evidence to prevent a final rejection. The fact that the enquirer had F83 written on his application confirm our previous hypotheses that in the past he was told that his application was not moving forward. The enquirer probably knows that F83 and *falta* are related. This is a final attempt to confront the official. If B09 responds to his question, and explains what F83 means, he will have to account for why the information is now different, and the implications of this mismatch. The official denies being familiar with it. The enquirer insists and makes his object of inquiry more explicit (line 15). The official cannot respond in the negative again, or he could be accused of withholding information. It is preposterous for a member of an institutional party not to be acquainted with the abbreviations used by the organisation. The official resorts to a different strategy. He detaches himself from the institutional team. He is ready to be held accountable for his individual actions only. Within that frame, he refuses to respond to the enquirer's question in line 15 on account of his not having written the "problematic" piece of information. The enquirer gives up. He asks a further question (line 19) about a number on his application (probably to alleviate the tension created by his previous question and to "mask" his real intentions) and decides to bring the interaction to a close.

In this face-to-face service interaction, the enquirer has used a variety of implicit and explicit strategies to fight for his right to information. These are attempts to de-routinise the process of information exchange by trying to go beyond the strict limits imposed by the institutional party. Some service seekers are more articulate in their attempts to expose the inconsistencies in the way the organisation

[26] Because enquirers are only allowed to communicate with frontstage officials, there is no way in which the institution itself can become accountable.

relates to its clients. The enquirer in the extract shown below (Example 7.11), for example, challenges the public official openly.

Example 7.11[27]

[...]

01	*B09:	trámite.
	%tra:	being processed.
02 →	*EN1:	xxx eh: diferente de xxx **somebody telling that** falta xxx.
	%tra:	xxx eh: different from xxx somebody telling that missing xxx.
03 →	*B09:	**I don't know** -. **here is** trámite **only**.
04	*EN1:	uh huh # **and then yesterday** # **I come and give the falta** xxx.
05	*B09:	**yesterday**?
06	*EN1:	**and then you say that** trámite.
07	*B09:	**yes**.
08 →	*EN1:	+^ **I not understand what is the problem** -. **this is my passport**.
09 →	*B09:	**if you give more things yesterday you have to wait three** <**four**> [>] **weeks**
10		**we have this with the things of yesterday**.
11	*EN1:	<**okay okay**> [<]
12	*EN1:	pero **yesterday give a man filling** [?] **computer.**
13 →	*B09:	**yes the computer is not changed**.
14 →	*EN1:	**is it possible to check** xxx **file to what is the** falta.
15	*B09:	**if you give us yesterday you have to wait one month more to have this in**
16		**the computer**.
17	*EN1:	**about** eh falta.
18	*B09:	**I don't know**.
19 →	*EN1:	**two day ago my friend** www **take this here and** eh: **I don't know who**
20		**checked it but** xxx **tell me that** xxx **there is** falta.
21 →	*B09:	**if you have bring us papers yesterday we don't have your papers with this**
22		**you have to wait one month**.
23	*EN1:	**thank you**.

The enquirer's (EN1) strategy begins already in line 02. Upon being told that his application is in *trámite*, he responds by highlighting that this new information is different from the information he had up to then *(falta)*. Confronted with this inconsistency, B09 avows lack of knowledge and insists on his initial response (line 03). As in the previous example, he resorts to his social construction as a mere "computer checker" to provide a frame that justifies his response (a detailed analysis of the use of this strategy by bureaucrats is presented in the following section. He is telling his interlocutor what he knows, that is, what is in the computer. The enquirer

[27] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_04.doc.

goes on to provide more details about his actions, which turn out to be highly useful for the service provider. EN1's turns in lines 02, 04 and 06 belong together in that they constitute the service seeker's contextual explanation of his query. This is proven by the way the turns are syntactically constructed –note that both lines 04 and 06 are introduced by means of the phrase "and then" indicating that more details on some previous narrative are going to be provided. Furthermore, EN1 ignores B09's question "yesterday?" in line 05, which shows that it is not his interactional priority. After stating that he was told that new evidence for his file was needed, that he had taken it on the previous day and that now he was being told that his application was being processed, EN1 explicitly declares his lack of understanding and requests an account (line 08). As would be expected, B09 dodges accounting for the divergent pieces of information EN1 claims to have received. Instead, he pursues the theme of the new evidence provided on the previous day (lines 09 and 10). This is the only piece of information he can disclose.

EN1 continues his narrative by repeating that he had submitted his new certificates the day before (line 12). B09 responds by following his previous line of argument that a month has to elapse before new evidence is examined. From an outsider's perspective, the official's talk seems rather confusing. On the one hand, he claims not to know anything about the *falta* issue, yet on the other, he admits that the office is taking in more documents for processing (lines 15 and 16). Along the same lines, he constructs his role in the office as that of a mere "computer checker", and yet he knows that it takes his backstage colleagues up to a month to process new evidence. His position does not stand up to a close examination. The minute-to-minute working of the interaction, however, does not allow participants such detailed analyses of each other's arguments. Another example of the slippery ground on which the official stands is his contribution in line 13, where he states that nothing has been changed in the computer. In retrospect, this would give EN1 more resources to challenge the "reality sponsored by the team". If nothing has changed, one wonders why information is so blatantly different. However, that is not the main goal of EN1, as becomes apparent in line 14. He wants to have access to his file to find out about the nature of his problem. He moves from a *warrior*

towards a *professional* client type (Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996). Rather than fight over broad issues, such as inconsistencies in information provision, as he seemed to do from lines 02 to 08, he tries to redirect the interaction towards achieving specific details that ensure a positive outcome. The institutional representative ignores his request and repeats his previous line about having to wait for one more month.

Although the service seeker has not been getting any of the information requested, he does not despair and insists on wanting to know about his *falta*. The state bureaucrat replies by repeating a previous response: he does not know. EN1 keeps insisting that somebody accepted his application for checking and that he was told that the evidence presented was not in order (lines 19 and 20). He uses a face-redressive strategy in that he acknowledges he does not know who the official who checked it was ("I don't know who checked it but..."). In response, B09 fails once more to pursue the *falta* theme, but repeats that the service seeker has to wait for a month to know whether his new certificates have been accepted (lines 21 and 22).

In the excerpt examined, there is a total lack of alignment between the public bureaucrat and the service seeker. Each speaker is pursuing his own agenda; at no point do these different agendas converge. This is because participants have conflicting goals and interests: the bureaucrat is expected to "act institutionally" by not revealing details of the institutional procedure, while the enquirer attempts to assert his right to be informed. One could argue that these positions cannot be reconciled, and that B09, as a social actor –and not as an individual speaker– could not act differently. However, what needs to be underscored is a more profound dimension of institutional practice, that is, the complete disregard for immigrants' civil rights. On a discursive level, a fundamental asymmetry in participant rights and obligations defines these exchanges. As has been shown, the institutional representative can afford to repeatedly not provide relevant responses to enquirer's questions because he knows that he will not be challenged. As Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996) uphold, clients of bureaucratic organisations are often afraid of stating their rights because they feel that this may jeopardise their case.

The two previous excerpts (7.9 and 7.10) have illustrated the interactional behaviour of two service seekers who try to make sense of the information they are

provided. Basically, they try to ascertain the meaning of the *trámite* response in relation to the old *te faltan papeles* reply. In both cases, nothing has actually changed.[28] The only difference lies in the institution's policy for providing information to its clients. The bureaucrat's search in the database produces the same results as in the past, namely, that the enquirers' documentary evidence has not been accepted. But now the bureaucrat cannot tell his interlocutors. He is expected to implement the new policy of information. He resorts to a variety of strategies to avoid disclosing information. In the extracts that follow (7.12 and 7.13), a different situation is presented. Both extracts begin with the official's service compliance turn. The lack of precise information triggers enquirers' questions. In the first example (7.12), the enquirer's application has been positively evaluated by backstage bureaucrats, and has been transferred to the police department for further examination. In the second example (7.13), the application has received a second positive evaluation by the police department and is about to be accepted. The file is being transferred back to the immigration office for processing.

Example 7.12[29]

[...]

01	*B09:	en trámite -. **three more weeks**.
	%tra:	being processed -. three more weeks.
02	*ENQ:	cuántos?
	%ta:	how many?
03	*B09:	<tres semanas más> [>].
	%tra:	<three more weeks> [>].
04	*ENQ:	<cuántos días> [<]?
	%tra:	<how many days> [<]?
05 →	*ENQ:	tres semanas -? mira esto: # primero primero día presenta # y cuándo <cuándo
06		vas venir> [>].
	%tra:	three weeks -? look at thi:s # first first day I submit # and when <when you are going to come> [>].
07	*B09:	<primer día> [<]?
	%tra:	<first day> [<]?
08	*B09:	sí sí primer día.
	%tra:	yes yes first day.
09 →	*ENQ:	que tengo tengo una pregunta -. qué ahí tiene problemas o qué -? no sé.
	%tra:	that I have I have a question -. what there does it have problems or what -? I don't know.

[28] This information was available to me. Since I was sitting next to the public official, I had visual access to the computer screen.

[29] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_13.doc.

10 *B09: no salen que haya problemas eh -? parece que está todo bien -. tienes que esperar.
%tra: it [the computer] doesn't show any problems right -? it seems like everything is okay -. you have to wait.

11 → *ENQ: porque mi amigo todo amigo Bangla Desh # presenta -, todo concedido para mí
12 esperar.
%tra: because my friends all friends Bangla Desh # they submitted -, all granted and I have to wait.

13 *B09: tres semanas.
%tra: three weeks.

14 → *ENQ: ahí tienes algún problema eh de de: +/.
%tra: there you have any problems uh of o:f +/.

15 *B09: no sale que haya ningún problema.
%tra: it doesn't show any problems.

16 *RES: *està en instrucció no* ?
%tra: it's still in preparatory [phase] right?
%add: B09

17 *B09: *està en instrucció sí sí*.
%tra: it's in preparatory [phase] yes yes.

18 → *ENQ: que hay mucha mucha tempo y +...
%tra: there has been a long time and +...

19 → *B09: sí pero.
%tra: yes but.
%act: shrugs his shoulders.

20 → *ENQ: cuando tienes ahí tienes problema -, cuando quieres una abogado -, si que ahí tiene
21 problema tú quieres abogado o qué -? antes cuando viene dice que: tengo una
22 expulsión.
%tra: if you have there you have a problem -, if you want a lawyer -, if there is a problem there you want a lawyer or what -? before when I came they said I have a deportation order.

23 *B09: la expulsión no es problema -. aquí todo el mundo no tiene papeles -. hay muchos
24 que tienen expulsión porque no tienen papeles -, por eso estás aquí.
%tra: the deportation order is not a problem -. here everybody doesn't have papers -. there are many that have deportation orders because they don't have [legal] papers -, that is why you are here.

25 *ENQ: pero yo xxx.
%tra: but I xxx.

26 *B09: no hay problemas hay que esperar tres semanas.
%tra: there are no problems you have to wait three weeks.

27 *ENQ: tres semanas?
%tra: three weeks?

28 *ENQ: este papele no?
%tra: this paper no?

29 *B09: éste no es de aquí -. éste es del gobierno civil.
%tra: this one is not from here -. this is from "gobierno civil".
[...]

The application considered in this example is in *fase de instrucción* (preparatory phase), as can be seen in lines 16 and 17. This means that the application is making progress. It has gone through a first process of evaluation which has been positive. None of that information, however, is conveyed in the bureaucrat's initial response ("*en trámite* -. *three more weeks*" [being processed -. three more weeks]). Having to wait

longer, which is the only relevant piece of information provided, annoys the enquirer. In line 5, he begins to challenge the institutional procedure. He employs his first remarks to set the scene and construct himself as a conscientious enquirer. He highlights the fact that he submitted his application on the first day. This precise piece of information works as a contextualising device. Before ENQ is allowed to finish, the official produces an utterance which questions the immigrant's claim to having submitted his application on the first day. This reveals B09's perception of his interlocutors, that is, as individuals whose words cannot be taken at face value. Enquirers' talk is constantly being scrutinised. The enquirer interrupts his talk and resumes it in line 09 by asking whether there are any problems with his application. The relevance of this question was established by his previous framing of the scene. This interaction was recorded on 28 June 2000, and the first day to submit applications was 21 March 2000. Three months legitimises ENQ's request for an explanation. The immigration official responds that everything seems to be in order, but that he still has to wait. No information is disclosed about how paperwork is processed, what actors intervene in the process, what can be expected when the current stage is over, and such like. Language does not seem to be a barrier, as the enquirer is fairly competent in Spanish. The official is routinely imposing a constraining interactional order where enquirers are given no space for negotiating information that is crucial for them. In the interaction, the enquirer is not allowed to understand the situation; he is asked to simply "trust" the official and have faith in his words (lines 10 and 15). However, it is interesting to note how modulated the official's statements are (line 10). He uses hedging devices like "*no sale que haya problemas*" (according to the computer there are no problems) and "*parece que está todo bien*" (it seems like everything is okay). Language use indexes the institutional order. Experience tells him that making any strong claims about the future is risky because of the way in which the institution functions.

In line 11, ENQ presents his second argument. All his fellow countrymen have been awarded a permit except for him. Implicit in his turn is his dissatisfaction with the official's previous response. He expects a more precise account, but the official repeats the "*tres semanas*" (three weeks) formula. The enquirer is still not

satisfied. He does not understand the institution's erratic practices for processing paperwork, and he is not given any sort of explanation. He insists on asking whether there are any problems. The vagueness of the information provided causes mistrust towards the institution and towards officials' words. In line 18, he repeats that a long time has elapsed since submission. The official agrees with him and shrugs his shoulders. This is a sign of official's powerlessness. There is nothing he can do to accelerate the process, because it depends on backstage bureaucrats. In addition, there is no coherent account he can provide of why this particular file has been delayed. The enquirer's turn in lines 20 to 22 contains his final attempt to uncover what is happening. His earlier construction as an informed client is ratified here. He adopts a professional attitude in that he suggests causes for the delay (his deportation order) and possible solutions (a lawyer). The official rejects the enquirer's reading into the situation that a previous deportation order may be causing the delay in the approval of the application, and insists that there are no problems (line 26).

The final example in this section (7.12) illustrates the behaviour of a client, who, despite his linguistic difficulties, fights fiercely for relevant information. He displays the use of an array of strategies, which, as could be expected, do not take him far. Some of his strategies have already been examined, such as asking repeated questions, voicing one's mistrust, complaining about the malfunctioning of the organisation, and exposing discrepancies between old and new information. All these strategies are related to the enactment of the social role of client of a bureaucratic organisation. What is interesting about this encounter is that, at one point, the service seeker steps out of his expected role and changes the footing of the interaction by moving from an institutional to a personal mode of talk. The service provider does not align himself with the new frame suggested, and consequently, the enquirer's efforts fail.

Example 7.13[30]

[...]
01 → *B09: está casi concedido pero faltan dos o tres semanas ,, vale?
%tra: this one is almost granted but there are still two or three weeks to go ,, okay?

02 *UUU: #0_2.

03 *B09: entiendes?
%tra: do you understand?

04 *UUU: #0_2.

05 → *ENQ: **what** señor **is the** falta falta?
%tra: what sir is the missing missing [paper]?

06 → *B09: no falta # todo bien.
%tra: no missing [paper] # everything is okay.

07 *ENQ: todo bien?
%tra: everything okay?

08 *B09: dos o tres semanas y estará bien.
%tra: two or three weeks and it'll be okay.

09 *UUU: #0_4.

10 *B09: en qué hablas?
%tra: what do you speak?

11 *UUU: #0_1

12 *B09: **do you speak english**?

13 *ENQ: **I speak english**.

14 *B09: **it's alright you only have to wait two or three more weeks but the papers**
15 **are alright** ,, **okay**?

16 → *ENQ: xxx concedido uh xxx **passport**.
%tra: xxx granted uh xxx passport?

17 *B09: **yes but now it's okay -. okay** -, **but not** concedido -. **wait two or three weeks**
18 **but okay**.

19 *B10: **not** concedido [=! shouting].
%com: speaker puts on an english accent when uttering the word "concedido".

20 → *ENQ: xxx **they tell me okay you: come in uh next** <**uh** xxx> [>].

21 *B10: <*ja se n'ha anat* > [<] *aquell del*
22 *Pakistan* -? *aquell de* < *barba* -? *li haguéssim pogut preguntar com es diu això en*
23 *el* [/] *en el urdu*> [>] -. ## nos hubiéramos enterado todos un poco más.
%tra: <is he gone> [<] that one from Pakistan -?
the one with a beard -? we could have asked him how you say that in the [/]the urdu>
[>] -. ## we would all have understood a little bit more.

24 *B09: <**yes but now** # **it's still have to wait two weeks okay**> [<]?

25 → *ENQ: **please** [?] **explain if anything is** falta uh +/.

26 *B09: +^ **now** no falta no falta.

27 *ENQ: xxx.

28 *ENQ: **last month having any things for** falta uh **give the** falta **papers** ,, **yeah** -? **and**
29 uh **next two weeks** uh **to get** [/] **to get the paper** <**to get** falta **get** falta> [>].

30 *B09: <**yes but it's not okay it's**
31 **not okay it's not okay**> [<] **wait two weeks**.

32 → *ENQ: **this** tramit **is not okay** -. **my paper is not okay what can** +...

[30] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_06.doc.

33 → *B09: **okay but** falta **two weeks**.

34 *ENQ: **more** [?] **two weeks**?

35 *B09: **yes**.

36 → *ENQ: **very long time** # **very lo:ng time**.

37→ *B09: **very long time**?

38 → *ENQ: **my paper is** <**april**> [>].

39 → *B09: <**april**> [<] **there is people from twenty one of merch not okay** -.
40 **you are very fast** -. # **you're very lucky** -. **it's okay only have to wait** -.
41 **that's it** -. **wait**.
%com: march

42 *ENQ: **perhaps you could** xxx uh +/.

43 → *B09: +^ **when it's okay we send you a letter** ,, **okay**?

44 *ENQ: **I bring that letter here on friday two june** # **my** falta **isn't** xxx?

45 *B09: **no this is okay now**.

46 *ENQ: +^ **okay** xxx.

47 *B09: **after two or three weeks we send a letter to you** -. **if you want come here**
48 **in three weeks but we send a letter**.

49 *ENQ: **will you send a letter my house** uh **address**?

50 *B09: **yes this address**.

51 → *ENQ: **this address** -. **but I I don't give give me in in** informe **letter**.

52 *B09: no -. **i::s it's not** informe -. **you have to say** concedido.

53 *ENQ: <**papers** concedido> [>].

54 *B10: <**you have to say** concedido> [>].
%com: mocking B09's accent

55 *B09: **not** concedido.

56 → *ENQ: **not** concedido **what** falta?

57 *B09: **in two weeks** concedido -. # **in two or three weeks there is** concedido.

58 *ENQ: **they told me** uh concedido.

59 *B09: **if you want come after three weeks come here** # **if not we send you a**
60 **letter**.

61 *ENQ: **later I come here my papers next week okay here** xxx **papers**.

62 *B09: +^ **next week no in two or three weeks**.

63 → *ENQ: **need** [?] **letter** [=! softly] <**need the letter**> [>].

64 *B09: <**in two or three weeks**> [>] **here** concedido.

65 *ENQ: concedido **wait** [?] uh +/.

66 *B09: +^ **now** no **now** no.

67 *ENQ: **what xxx** # **next two weeks**?

68 *B09: **yes it's almost** concedido.

69 → *ENQ: **almost** xxx **you know you know very it's very big problem** no concedido **you**
70 **know**.

71 *B09: +^ **yes yes**.
%act: presses button indicating he is ready to serve another enquirer

72 → *ENQ: **it's very big problem**.
%act: hands B09 another application form

73 *B09: **what is this paper** -? **you only one paper** -. **you say only one paper** -, **only one paper**.

74 *ENQ: **see this** [=! begging tone].
75 *B09: no no **only one paper**.
76 *ENQ: **see this**.
77 *B09: **you have more than this**?
78 *ENQ: **no this only**.
[...]

This is an exceptionally long encounter in the corpus. The service seeker's knowledge of Spanish seems limited to a few pivot bureaucratic words like *falta*, *trámite*, *concedido*, and *informe*, which he constantly inserts in his interactional contributions. Most of his talk is in English. It must be highlighted that, although he does not show a fluent command of this language, this does not seem to constitute a barrier for him to adopt a remarkably active role in this exchange. He questions, contests and challenges the official's words throughout the interaction. All his turns from line 05 onwards are oriented to the achievement of his goal. As becomes clear in lines 51 and 63, his objective is to obtain an *informe laboral*. This is the provisional certificate issued by frontstage bureaucrats once the permit is granted and before the official letter of acceptance is sent out. He refers to it as the "*informe* letter". With the *informe laboral*, the foreigner can be legally employed. It is important to obtain this certificate, because the official letter may take up to a month to be sent to the applicant's address.

At the administrative stage the file is, the application and the enquirer's criminal records have been screened by the police. Everything has been found in order. The application has been sent back to the office for administrative processing. Backstage bureaucrats are in charge of entering information on the "accepted" status of applications into the computer and producing official letters. The enquirer's application is probably waiting to be processed. As in the previous example, none of this information is transmitted to the enquirer. He is only told that everything is okay, and that he has to wait. As has been seen in previous examples, the meaning of having to wait is never made clear. It is not a good signal for enquirers, as it is usually equated with difficulties in the process. Even if there are no problems, waiting means a delay in the achievement of their objective. The immigrant's questioning turns are triggered by a mixture of mistrust towards the

institution and a lack of understanding of the situation. The bureaucrat's unfortunate choice of words compounds the speakers' lack of interactional synchrony. In lines 01 and 33, for example, the official uses the verb "*falta(n)*" (missing) with a temporal expression, as in "*faltan dos o tres semanas*" meaning "there are still two or three more weeks to go". This is confusing for enquirers, who associate *falta* with problems with their applications. An utterance can acquire negative connotations by virtue of its having *falta* in it (see enquirer's upset reaction in line 05). On the whole, the enquirer's questions are motivated by his lack of understanding of why he has to wait for two or three extra weeks. If his application is okay, as the state official keeps telling him, then he should be able to get an *informe laboral*. If this is not possible and he has to wait, there must be something wrong with the evidence submitted. His hypotheses are reinforced by the fact that the previous week he was told that he could go and collect the *informe laboral* in a week's time, and now he is told this is not yet possible (see line 20). If this enquirer was familiar with the different administrative stages making up the procedure, and knew what stage his application was at, what was being done to it, and what he could or could not expect in the future[31], his fears would probably diminish.[32]

The main focus of the analysis is on lines 36, 39 to 41, and the sequence contained between lines 63 and 73. In line 36, after establishing that he has to wait for two more weeks, the enquirer states that this is a "very long time # very long time". The pragmatic function of this turn is ambiguous. It can be interpreted as a mild complaint on the slow working of the institution, or as a personal appeal to the official. In the second case, the enquirer would be trying to evoke pity from the institutional representative with a view to obtaining more favourable treatment, i.e. to be given the *informe laboral*. The response he obtains from the bureaucrat in lines 39 to 41 is revealing: "april there is people from twenty one of merch not okay -. you are very fast -. you're very lucky -. it's okay only have to wait -. that's it -. wait".

[31] By "what he cannot expect in the future" I mean being reassured that after passing a certain administrative stage there is no way back. For example, after a granting proposal has been made, which means that an application has been positively reviewed by both bureaucrats and police, no further problems can arise.

[32] I am using the word "diminish" here instead of "disappear," since enquirers will always show a certain degree of anxiety about the outcome of their cases. This is logical, on account of the importance that being able to take up legal residency has for their future.

Whether he is complaining or appealing to the official's feelings, it is clear that in line 36 the enquirer is assessing time from a personal reference point. The official rejects the enquirer's personal assessment of the situation, and imposes an institutional framing of it. He seems to take the enquirer's turn as a complaint about the slow working of the institution. According to the official, there is no reason for ENQ to complain, as his application is being processed faster than others that were submitted earlier. This was for example the case with the application referred to in the previous example. The bureaucratic frame legitimises the official's outright dismissal of his interlocutor's words. His talk is aggressive. The tone of his voice raises. His turn is made up of short, unmodulated statements, intensifiers ("very fast, very lucky"), and imperatives ("that's it -. wait"). No facework is attempted. There is no space for negotiation. The institutional frame is made to prevail. In his following turn (line 42), the enquirer seems to try to formulate a request, but he is interrupted by the official. In an impatient manner, the official states that the enquirer will be sent a letter when the permit is granted. The latter perseveres in trying to get a more favourable response. Finally, in line 51 he reveals that his goal is to obtain the "*informe* letter". The official tries to explain why he cannot be given the certificate, but he seems unable to go beyond stating that the enquirer has to return to the office in two weeks' time.

In line 63, ENQ decides to produce his first personal appeal: "need letter need the letter". He attempts to change the footing of the interaction by stepping out of his situated social role as the client of a bureaucratic organisation to position himself as an individual for whom the *informe* certificate is vital. In so doing, he suggests a more symmetrical social relationship, in which the official is positioned as an individual person who can understand and even identify with the enquirer's worries. There is no reaction on the part of the official, as his talk overlaps with the last part of the enquirer's turn. The enquirer tries again a few turns later (lines 69 and 70): "almost xxx you know you know very it's very big problem no *concedido* you know". The institutional representative does not align himself with the new footing suggested. He simply produces an agreement token, which is quickly repeated: "yes yes". The latching of his turn with the enquirer's previous turn, together with his

quick repetition of the agreement token and his non-verbal behaviour (pressing the button to serve another enquirer) indicate that he does not want to adopt the enquirer's personal mode of talk. The enquirer's final attempt (line 72) is again not responded to by the official, as his attention is now focused on the new application his interlocutor has produced.

All of the strategies employed by the service seeker to attempt to go beyond the tight control of information exerted by the institutional representative fail. This is not surprising given that officials use their situational powers to constrain enquirers' chances of participation in the process of information exchange. The limits of what is negotiable are established beforehand. Information exchange is not a dynamic process. Bureaucrats' contributions sound like written lines that are repeated independent of the service seeker and his/her request. The latter's efforts at "deroutinising", that is, "debureaucratising" (Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996), official's talk do not succeed.

Coping with immigrants' contesting moves

This section identifies some of the strategies used by public bureaucrats to handle enquirers' challenging moves in face-to-face interaction. As with service seekers, the examples presented do not intend to be fixed stereotypical representations of behaviour. They try to illustrate some of the resources mobilised by institutional representatives to cope with the demands of both the institutional and the interactional orders. The detailed micro-analysis of bureaucrats' talk is fundamental to understanding how what happens on an interactional level cannot be completely predicted by examining macro-societal contextual factors. This is what Goffman (1983:8) sustains when he claims that, because a great deal of the work of organisations is done face-to-face, it is "vulnerable to face-to-face effects". In his view, "insofar as agents of social organisations of any scale, from states to households, can be persuaded, cajoled, flattered, intimidated, or otherwise influenced by effects only achievable in face-to-face dealings, then here, too, the interaction order bluntly impinges on macroscopic entities".

Most of the examples presented below involve official B09. He is the institutional representative in the largest number of interactions in the corpus. However, this is not the only reason why most exchanges involving B10 are examined in detail in the following chapter (Chapter 8) rather than in this one. Firstly, unlike official B09, official B10 was not always in charge of providing information. On some occasions, he would only take in additional documents for enquirers' files. Since the focus of this chapter is on processes of information exchange, verbal exchanges not centred on the demand and provision of information have been excluded from the analysis. Secondly, B10's interactional behaviour, which is comparatively rather aggressive, deserves a detailed investigation. His tone of voice tends to be fairly high and his use of vocabulary demeaning. His linguistic and paralinguistic behaviour work to pre-empt enquirers' challenging moves. Example 7.14 contains a revealing metacomment made by B10 in which he explains how, by getting unpleasant, he manages to limit the number of requests to check applications.

Example 7.14[33]

01 *B10: *quan com no t'entenen veuen que et poses borde i diuen ah pues dóna-me'n un.*
%tra: it's like since they don't understand you they see that you're getting unpleasant and then they say give one back to me.

His use of paralinguistic devices to put enquirers off is apparent. He states that service seekers do not understand him, and yet they can tell that he is getting annoyed. This leads them to even ask for one of their applications to be given back to them before it is checked. Pre-empting enquirers' attempts to question or contest the information they are provided is a feature of B10's interactional behaviour. In the ensuing excerpt (Example 7.15), it is the official's verbal behaviour that appears to discourage the enquirers' questions.

Example 7.15[34]

[...]

01 *B10: éste trámite.
%tra: this one being processed.

[33] This extract is taken from tape OFFICE(C)_05.

[34] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_01.doc.

02 *EN2: tramite.
%tra: being processed.
%com: stresses word on second syllable

03 → *B10: +^ ya le puedes ir contando lo que es tramite.
%tra: +^ you can start telling him what "tramite" is.
%com: stresses "tramite" on second syllable.

04 *EN2: cómo trámite?
%tra: what being processed?

05 *EN1: qué karó?
%tra: what mate?
%com: Punjabi
[...]

The enquirer EN2 is acting as an interpreter for his friend EN1, who had previously requested his help. In line 01, B10 provides his usual isolated *trámite* response. In line 02, EN2 repeats this word. In line 03, B10 produces an unusual turn: "*ya le puedes ir contando lo que es tramite*" (you can start telling him what *tramite* is)[35]. The sarcasm conveyed by B10's words is surprising. He seems to acknowledge that understanding or explaining what *trámite* means is difficult, but at the same time he makes it clear that he is not willing to provide a clarification. That is left for EN2 to do.

One of the strategies put to work by officials B10 and B09 alike centres around the (re)definition of their professional role. Hall et al. (1999) argue that it is not possible to define social roles, such as professional occupation, unproblematically. Rather, it is necessary to examine how sets of expectations associated to specific roles are subject to a process of differentiation in situated institutional talk. To capture the ways in which social actors actively manipulate and negotiate social role expectations to present themselves in a specific light, Hall et al. put forward the concept of *role-identity*. This notion is useful for understanding the process of redefinition of their own professional identity in which bureaucrats engage. Roles are viewed as non-static, and as a resource that speakers draw upon to create a particular identity for themselves in local face-to-face interaction. Following Zimmerman (1998:87), the notion of "identity" is also used here as an "element of

[35] Note that the official makes fun of the enquirer's mispronunciation of *trámite* (with the stress on the second syllable) by recycling the mispronounced word in his turn. B10's mocking attitude towards his interlocutors' behaviour will be illustrated at length in Chapter 8.

context". Particular role-identities constitute the background against which speakers' actions and moves have to be interpreted and from which they derive their meaning.

State officials at the immigration office examined are in charge of providing information to the institution's clients. A set of expectations is associated to their professional role. They are the "face" of the institution, and therefore, are expected to behave as their representatives. Because of their situated role as "information providers", they are expected to have the "insider" knowledge that enables them to inform their interlocutors adequately and account for specific organisational practices. The implementation of a new policy of information provision has a bearing on officials' relationship with the institution. They are expected to carry the new policy through, even if they do not agree entirely with it, as was shown in Chapter 6. The institution's new policy, as may be recalled, consists in supplying fewer relevant details on the progress of enquirers' applications. This is justified by the need to reduce the amount of paperwork generated by immigrants' submission of new certificates to demonstrate arrival in Spain by 1 June 1999 (their initial documents were not accepted by the institution).

The consequences of this new policy on an interactional level are predictable. A high degree of tension between immigrants and officials is likely to ensue, since the goals of one speaker group conflict with the goals of the other. In addition, the managerial staff do very little to ensure uniformity in officials' responses, even though they are aware of existing discrepancies.[36] Public officials often find themselves in an uncomfortable position. They may be challenged by service seekers for providing divergent pieces of information, or they may be asked to account for the malfunctioning of the institution. Their way of coping with the contradictions of their situated role often hinges on a redefinition of it. They draw on the many, differentiated activities associated with their social position to create a strategic new role-identity for themselves. They redefine their local situational role as that of "computer checkers". It is in the light of this new role-identity that their linguistic productions have to be made sense of. Checking the computer to find out about the status of clients' applications is one of the central activities of their professional

[36] See the interpretation of Example 6.7 for more details.

routines As insiders to the institution, however, it is expected that they are able not only to make sense of the information shown on the screen but also to account for the presence or absence of certain responses. This second expected ability is denied in their redefinition of themselves. They cannot account for anything because "they only see what is in the computer". Their new role-identity foregrounds their subordinated position within the institutional hierarchy. It indexes a slight detachment from the workings of the institution. When they present themselves as "computer checkers", officials do not act as "institutional representatives" but rather as individuals employed to "mediate" between the computer and the institution's clientele. The extract below (Example 7.16) illustrates some of the responses provided by bureaucrats to enquirers' recurrent *falta* questions. It may be recalled that they concern the need for enquirers to submit new documentary evidence. According to the new policy of information, institutional representatives are supposed to say that applications are being processed *(en trámite)*.

Example 7.16[37]

[...]

01 *EN1: éste no falta no?
%tra: this one no missing [papers] no?

02 → *B10: trámite **I don't kna** [//] **know** -. **computer when is i:n paper in** trámite # eh: **don't say it** # falta o: # o no falta.

[...]

The enquirer tries to find out whether his new evidence has been accepted or not (line 01). He expects his interlocutor to be able to provide an appropriate response. However, B10 refuses to be the recipient of such a question. He claims not to have access to that information, as the computer does not show it. The state bureaucrat's response can only be made sense of against the background of a situated role-identity as a computer checker who has limited access to information. At times, this strategic presentation of "self" is also employed to account for differing responses among officials. The following extract, taken from Example 7.10, is reproduced again below.

[37] Extract taken from transcript 02_07.doc.

Example 7.17

[...]

01 *B09: trámite.
%tra: being processed.

02 *EN1: xxx eh: diferente de xxx **somebody telling that** falta xxx.
%tra: xxx eh: different from xxx somebody telling that missing xxx.

03 → *B09: **I don't know** -. **here is** trámite **only**.

[...]

In line 03, the official skips accounting for why a colleague of his gave a different piece of information to the service seeker. B09 tries to save face by stating that this is the only information the computer produces. In Example 7.18 below, the service seeker complains that his application does not seem to be making any progress, as he is always provided the same piece of information, namely *trámite*. Up to four times he has been told to return to the office at the end of three weeks. The service seeker appears to be questioning the truthfulness of officials' service responses. The bureaucrat retorts by drawing on the role-identity of "computer checker" to account for his concise information practices (line 05): "*Yo sólo sé lo que pone aquí*" (I only know what it says here). B09 underscores his lack of further information by means of the adverbial *sólo* (only), which he was also seen to employ in the previous excerpt examined (Example 7.16). He stages the way in which he provides information when he says "*si aquí pone trámite -, trámite*" (if here it says being processed -, then being processed). He claims to be transmitting information only, without it being subject to any modifications. If the computer shows that the application is in *trámite*, that is exactly what he tells enquirers. His final "*yo!*" (me!) accompanied by a shrugging of this shoulders mark his desired detachment from the institution. He should not be held accountable, as he is only a mere "computer checker". This is of course not true, but little can be said or done to a frontstage bureaucrat who claims to have limited access to backstage information.

Example 7.18[38]

[...]

01 *ENQ: cuánto tiempo yo sólo espera -? # cuánto tiempo?
%tra: how much time I only wait -? # how much time?

[38] Extract taken from transcript OFC08_01.doc.

02 *B09: tres semanas.
%tra: three weeks.

03 *ENQ: eso siempre tres.
%tra: that always three.

04 → *ENQ: por favor esto escribe tres **week** cuatro vez -. # siempre ## trámite.
%tra: please this write three weeks four times -. # always ## being processed.

05 → *B09: yo sólo sé lo que pone aquí -. si aquí pone trámite -, trámite -. yo!
%tra: I only know what it says here -. if here it says being processed -, then being processed -. me!
%act: shrugs his shoulders

[...]

The following example (7.19) illustrates an attempt by a service seeker to contest the local role-identity promoted by the state bureaucrat to avoid disclosing more information. The enquirer is a young Moroccan woman who had previously resided in the town of Banyoles, in the province of Girona. The enquirer's goal in this interaction is to find out whether her new documentary evidence (to show uninterrupted residence in Spain since 1 June 1999) has been accepted.

Example 7.19[39]

[...]

01 → *B09: ya ya aquí pone que todavía no lo han puesto aquí -. yo te digo lo que
02 sale en el ordenador.
%tra: yeah yeah here it says that they haven't noted it on your file -. I'm telling you what it says in the computer.

03 *ENQ: dónde dónde puedo: dónde haces esto?
%tra: where where ca:n I where is this done?

04 *B09: esto lo hacen aquí pero cuando está esto puesto esto +/.
%tra: this is done here but this is examined this +/.

05 → *ENQ: tengo que preguntar gente que trabaja con esto no aquí.
%tra: I have to ask people who work with this not here.

06 → *B09: gente que trabaja con esto no habla con la gente -. aquí estoy yo para
07 informarte -. aquí sale que todavía está en trámite y que tienes que
08 esperarte tres semanas más.
%tra: people who work with this don't talk to people -. I'm here to inform you -. here it says that your papers are still being processed and that you have to wait three weeks.

[...]

Previous to the extract shown here, the two speakers argue about whether the enquirer's new evidence should already have been examined or not. The state official tries to bring the argument to an end by stating that, according to the computer, the documents have not been processed yet, and that this is the only piece of information he can tell her (line 01). What is significant in this interaction is

[39] This extract is taken from tape OFFICE(C)_03.

the enquirer's reaction to the official's strategic construction of himself. She tries to assert her right to information by finding out where her documents are being processed (line 03). When she is told that they are being handled by the same office, she interrupts the official to make an unusual request. She wants to talk to the bureaucrats in charge of processing paperwork (line 05). She rejects B09 –in his role as "computer checker"– as a valid interlocutor. Since he does not seem to have the information that she needs, she thinks it necessary to talk to a more informed interlocutor. Yet ENQ is not allowed to go beyond the constraining institutional order as defined by B09 (see lines 06 to 08). The state official asserts that he is her only possible interlocutor, and repeats the same information he provided in line 01. His turn contains no traces of face-redressive strategies. The turn construction units are short, unmodulated statements. The language is blunt ("*aquí estoy yo para informarte*" [I'm here to inform you]; "*tienes que esperarte tres semanas*" [you have to wait three weeks]). The enquirer's attempts at finding a way round the official's uncooperative behaviour are thwarted immediately. The official uses his situational powers to discourage enquirers' attempts at negotiating interactional and institutional orders that allow them some spaces for active participation.

One interesting feature of officials' productions is their fluctuating use of personal pronouns. The ambivalent ways in which officials position themselves with respect to the institution, that is, as "spokespeople" or as "mouthpieces" (Thomas 1986), is indexed by their vacillating use of the personal pronouns "I", "we", or "they". Sometimes, inclusive "we" is used, as in Example 7.20 below (line 05).

Example 7.20[40]

[...]

01	*B09:	en trámite -. tres semanas más -. **three more weeks**.
	%tra:	being processed -. three more weeks -. three more weeks.
02	*ENQ:	**three weeks**?
03	*B09:	**yes**.
04	*ENQ:	**okay** ODER uh +...
	%tra:	okay or uh ...
05 →	*B09:	**we are looking if it is alright or don't** -. **we don't know yet**.
06	*ENQ:	**yes**

[40] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_03.doc.

07 *B09: +^ **you have to wait three weeks**.
[...]

In this example, B09 acts as the spokesperson for the institution. No distinction is made between his individual position and that of the organisation. Through the use of inclusive "we", he constructs himself as an institutional representative. At other times, first person "I" is contrasted with third person "they", as in Example 7.21.

Example 7.21[41]

[...]
01 *B09: éste es en trámite.
%tra: this one is being processed.
02 *B09: www.
03 *RES: www.
04 *ENQ: perdón **document** [?].
%tra: sorry document [?].
05 *B09: **yes**.
06 *ENQ: **what adjustments** [?] **do they find**?
07 → *B09: **I don't know** -. **in the computer in** trámite # **they are looking if the**
08 **papers are good or don't** -,.
09 *ENQ: **yes**.
10 → *B09: **and we don't know yet**.
[...]

In line 07, B09 establishes a distinction between his work as an information provider and the job of his backstage colleagues, in charge of processing paperwork. The institution is not presented as a unitary whole, but as separate entities with an independent way of functioning. The latter depiction is closer to real institutional arrangements than the former. However, the appearance of a "fragmentary" institutional order may give enquirers arguments for contesting officials' responses and their status as valid interlocutors (as was seen in Example 7.18 above). This explains why, two turns later (line 10), B09 goes back to his inclusive, more institutionally appropriate "we".

In the examples presented above of immigrants' "strategies of contestation", brief reference was made to some of bureaucrats' strategies for coping with enquirers' complaints on the malfunctioning of the institution. In Example 7.11, the

[41] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_06.doc.

enquirer's grievance that it is taking the institution too long a time to process his application, which was incidentally submitted on the first day, was responded to by the official by means of an agreement token "yes" and a shrugging of his shoulders. The state bureaucrat understands that the enquirer has grounds for complaint but cannot do anything about it. Providing a coherent account of why it is taking the institution so long to process paperwork is complicated and risky. Since this account would only serve to highlight the nonsensical nature of certain institutional arrangements, it would give service seekers still more arguments to challenge the institutional order.

In Example 7.12, a similar complaint from a service seeker was rejected by the bureaucrat. On that occasion, an institutional framing of the situation was made to prevail. The enquirer's assessment of the time elapsed since submission as excessive was rejected. The enquirer's complaint was rendered irrelevant because, from an institutional viewpoint, there are other applications which are making even less progress than the one examined. The final example presented in this chapter illustrates two further strategies used by the institutional representative to cope with challenges from service seekers. These are blaming immigrants for the alleged unfavourable treatment received from the institution and threatening them. The interaction presented here is long and complex. Several layers of implied meanings can be discovered. Many of the phenomena illustrated in this chapter are present in it. For the purposes of the current analysis, we shall only concentrate on the examination of a few relevant turns, namely, those contained in lines 22 and 33-34.

Example 7.22[42]

```
01    *ENQ:    0.
      %act:    hands copies of applications over to B09

02    *B09:    éste todavía no está -,.
      %tra:    this one is not available yet -,.
03    *ENQ:    esto: cuánto: # tiempo se <tarda> [>]?
      %tra:    thi:s how # long does it <take> [>]?

04    *B09:                          <dos meses> [<].
      %tra:                          <two months> [<].

      @Situation:        B09 checks status of application in computer

05    *B09:    en trámite -, # tres semanas -,.
```

[42] Extract taken from transcript OFC08_01.doc.

%tra: being processed -, # three weeks -,.

06 *ENQ: to:dos todos todos.
%tra: all all all.

@Situation: B09 continues checking status of applications

07 *B09: trámite.
%tra: process.

08 *ENQ: trámite.
%tra: process.

09 *UUU: #0_5.

10 *ENQ: esto: # un momento:.
%tra: thi:s # one moment:.

11 *UUU: #0_2.

12 *B09: qué?
%tra: what?

13 *ENQ: una vez éste falta # ochenta y tres -. ahora trámite.
%tra: once this missing # eighty three -. now process.

14 *B09: has traído más cosas cuando faltaban?
%tra: did you bring more things when they were missing?

15 *ENQ: no no no sé -. una vez <falta> [>].
%tra: don't don't I don't know -. once <missing> [>].

16 *B09: <xxx aquí sale> [<] trámite.
%tra: <xxx here it says> [<] process.

17 *ENQ: no falta.
%tra: no missing [papers].

18 *B09: no sé si falta -. en trámite no se sabe si falta o no -. están mirándolo.
%tra: I don't know if anything is missing -. when it's being processed we don't know -. they are examining it.

19 *ENQ: esto: primero éste # escribir.
%tra: thi:s first this # write.

20 *B09: +^ al principio salía falta ahora no sale en el ordenador si falta.
%tra: +^ at the beginning it used to say if papers were missing now the computer doesn't say.

@Situation: B09 continues checking status of applications

21 *ENQ: esto tres o cuatro veces.
%tra: this three or four times.

22 → *B09: de aquí te dijeron tres sema:nas <y> [>] ha pasado una!
%tra: they told you to wait for three weeks <and> [>] only one has elapsed!

23 *ENQ: <sí> [<].
%tra: <yes> [<].

24 *ENQ: en el primero también.
%tra: and the same with the first one.

25 *B09: es éste!
%tra: it's this one!

26 *ENQ: +^ sabes por qué esto no: de: # esto xxx no: bien de xxx?
%tra: +^ do you know why this no: from # this xxx not okay from xxx?

27 *ENQ: no falta no # sólo trámite -. # yo no sé por qué.
%tra: no missing [papers] only trámite -. # I don't know why.

28 *B09: <ésta en trámite> [>].
%tra: <this one being processed> [>].

29 *ENQ: <pero siempre> [<] siempre igual.
%tra: <but always> [<] always the same.

30	*ENQ:	por favor yo # otros de mi # de: # falta # de prufa.
	%tra:	please I # some others from my # missing # of proof.
31	*B09:	a ver tú has traído todos los papeles que tenías cuando presentas esto -? pues
32		ya está!
	%tra:	let' see did you bring all the papers that you had when you submitted this? then that's it!
33 →	*B09:	si falta no puedes hace nada si traes algo falso no te lo van a
34		dar jamás.
	%tra:	if something is missing there is nothing you can do if you bring something forged they will never give it to you.
35	*ENQ:	y cuántos meses más?
	%tra:	and how many more months?
36	*B09:	tres semanas [=! impatient tone] tres semanas [=! impatient tone] una dos y tres.
	%tra:	three weeks [=! impatient tone] three weeks [=! impatient tone] one two three.
37	*ENQ:	más tres?
	%tra:	three more?
38	*B09:	0.
	%act:	nods
39	*ENQ:	siempre # siempre igual.
	%act:	always # always the same.
40	*B09:	tres semanas.
	%act:	three weeks.

[...]

The turn in line 22 is a response to an enquirer's complaint about the fact that he has been given the same information, namely *trámite*, three or four times. The official adopts the tactic of "blaming the client" for not having waited for three weeks, as he was told, and returning to the office just a week later. Against the backdrop of his "disorderly" behaviour, the enquirer's complaint loses force. The sequential context in which the turn in lines 33 and 34 occurs is shaped by the enquirer's efforts at establishing whether everything is okay with his application. The official, B09, keeps telling him that his application is in *trámite;* he does not reveal any more details. The enquirer insists on wanting to know if any problems have been found with it. The official then responds by issuing a threat. If the enquirer had filed every document he had when he first submitted the application – as is expected within the moral order defined by the institution (see following chapter for details)– there is nothing he can do now to change the status of his application. The official threatens him with not being granted the permit ever if he tries to submit forged documentation. The intended effect of this turn is to put an end to the enquirer's challenging moves rather than make real predictions about the future. Examining documents is not part of frontstage officials' work. So many actors intervene in the process of assessing applications that making such

predictions is always risky. The official's goal is only partially achieved, as the enquirer tries to pursue his agenda for a few more turns before bringing the exchange to an end.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has demonstrated that there is little interactional space for negotiating information in the social encounters examined. The linguistic data has shown that the responses immigrants are given are concise, routinised and uninformative. Information seekers resort to a variety of strategies, such as repeating key words, showing their lack of understanding, exposing inconsistencies in the information provided and making personal appeals, to find out more precise details on their individual applications. However, the service compliance turns that state bureaucrats produce sound like lines taken out of a script which is routinely enacted. Enquirers' local attempts at going beyond these "scripted" interactions fail. In the minute-to-minute unfolding of interactions, public officials have to deal with the many contradictions inherent in their situated social position. They need to safeguard institutional interests, but as individual speakers, they want to save face. They exploit the existing situational asymmetries to exert their power and (re)direct the interaction towards more a favourable stance. The pragmatic analysis of speakers' contributions shows that participants' interactional rights and obligations are constructed as unequal. Bureaucrats can afford not to pick up on implied requests, and they can refuse to answer specific questions. Besides, they can strategically manipulate the definition of their own professional role to serve their local needs. By contrast, enquirers are, for example, not given the chance to talk to more informed bureaucrats. Their moves are scrutinised. They are held accountable for inconsistencies in their reports and for whatever actions they perform that seem to subvert a strictly defined moral order. The following chapter presents a detailed analysis of bureaucrats' practices of control. These entail the close regimentation of social, interactional and linguistic spaces.

8

Regimented spaces

The present chapter focuses on the examination of the various forms of social control wielded by institutional representatives in service communication. A number of facets of their interactional behaviour and discursive productions are examined. None of them is directly concerned with the process of transmission of information, which was amply analysed in the previous two chapters. Bureaucracies are powerful instruments of social control. They regulate the organisation of social life and the distribution of individuals' rights and obligations. Governments exert their power through state bureaucracies. In the sphere of foreign immigration, the degree of social control exerted by national governments is evident. Through the implementation of specific immigration laws, governments decide who is legally accepted into the country and on what conditions. A residence and/or work permit gives immigrants social visibility. They start to exist in official statistics, and most importantly, acquire a range of rights which were denied to them as non-registered immigrants.

With regard to the social control exerted by public institutions, its specific instantiations at the site examined were presented in detail in Chapters 6 and 7. The most significant form of control concerned the enforced restrictions on the information to be provided to immigrants. In Chapter 7, the discursive strategies devised by bureaucrats to manage the tension between offering a good service and maintaining a positive self-image on the one hand, while exerting institutional power by withholding information from clients on the other were examined. The goal of the present chapter is to go beyond the institutional domain to focus on the individual dimension of power and control. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which individual bureaucrats exploit their linguistic resources and situational powers to construct closely regimented social, moral and linguistic spaces in which immigrants' behaviour is constantly monitored and subject to evaluation. The present chapter concentrates on three features of bureaucrats' discursive

productions, namely, the sequential management of interaction, choice of register and pragmatic expectations, and language alternation practices.

Defining a social and a moral order

Bureaucrats' behaviour and actions at the site investigated are defined by their attempts to control the social order of the office. Bureaucrats also aim to become the keepers of a moral order which constitutes the backdrop against which immigrants' behaviour is evaluated. One of the most salient features of officials' control is their strict management of space. Immigrants' behaviour in the office is controlled at all times. Control is exerted primarily by door staff, but officials play a prominent role too. Immigrants are only allowed into the office when they are close to being served; otherwise, they are made to wait in the street. Once inside, they are requested to sit on a bench (see floor plan on page 117) until their number is called. Deviations from this prescribed order of things frequently occur. Enquirers who have still not been called approach the counter. This infuriates officials, who utter unmodulated commands and prohibitions. Eventually, some of these turn into threats. Officials' choice of words indexes the structure of domination which informs their practices and which they routinely implement. The complete absence of face saving strategies defines and constructs their dominant position. There is no need for them to refrain from being seen as impinging on their interlocutors' freedom of action. The following example (Example 8.1) illustrates how an official tries verbally to exert control over his interlocutors' management of public space.

Example 8.1[1]

01	*B09:	0.
	%act:	presses button to serve following enquirer.
02	*B09:	sesenta tú tienes el sesenta?
	%tra:	sixty do you have number sixty?
03	*B09:	0.
	%act:	presses button again.
04	*B09:	sesenta y uno!
	%tra:	sixty one!
05	*B09:	espera # tú tienes el sesenta y uno?
	%tra:	wait # do you have sixty one?

[1] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_05.doc.

06 → *B09: pues esperaos allá hasta que salga el sesenta y dos.
%tra: so wait there until sixty two comes out.

07 *ENQ: 0.
%act: hands document over to B09.

08 *B09: sólo uno?
%tra: only one?

09 *ENQ: tres más.
%tra: three more.

10 *B09: dámelos.
%tra: give them to me.

11 → *B09: aquí no puedes estar -. tú no tienes número -, fuera de aquí.
%tra: you cannot be here -. you don't have a number -. get out of here.

12 *MEM: <éste xxx número yo soy con él> [?].
%tra: <this xxx number I am with him> [?].

13 → *B09: no estás con él -. ## no estás con él -, ## fuera.
%tra: you're not with him -. you're not with him -. out.

14 *B09: diecinueve de mayo todavía no está -. once de mayo todavía no está -. quince de
15 mayo todavía no está -. sólo tenemos hasta el diez de mayo.
%tra: may nineteenth is not yet ready -. may eleventh not yet ready -. may fifteenth not ready yet -. we only have until may tenth.

[...]

At the beginning of this encounter, the official B09 tries to elucidate who is to be served (line 02). He assumes it is the turn of a pair of individuals waiting by the counter but his guess is proven wrong. When he finds out that it is not yet their turn and even though they hold the following number, he tells them to move away from the counter ("*pues esperaos allá hasta que salga el sesenta y dos*" [so wait there until sixty two comes out]). The official even specifies where they have to wait (*allá* [there]). While B09 is serving his interlocutor, another person approaches the counter. In line 11, he is told in a clearly authoritarian way that he cannot stay by the counter. He does not have a number, and thus he is commanded to leave the place. When this person (MEM) tries to justify his presence by claiming that he is accompanying somebody, the bureaucrat bluntly rejects his presentation of reality ("*no estás con él*" [you are not with him]). B09's insistence on MEM's not having a number is related to another reason why door staff and officials have such an investment in controlling immigrants' conduct in the office: to prevent people from jumping the queue. Institutional representatives' most immediate objective is to try to preserve the rights of information seekers who spend long hours queuing up. Less evident is their attempt to define a strict moral order in the office. This is the discursive justification that one of the officials provides for not serving somebody:

Example 8.2[2]

01 *B09: esta gente está aquí esperando en la calle desde las tres de la mañana para que le
02 miremos y está haciendo cola en el sol y tú acabas de llegar y no tienes número -.
03 no te lo voy a mirar.
%tra: these people have been here waiting in the street since three o'clock in the morning to have [their applications] checked and they have been queuing up in the sun and you've just arrived and don't have a number -. I'm not going to check [your file].

The official constructs his turn in such a manner that the moral "meanness" of his interlocutor is made to stand out. This is achieved by highlighting the harshness of the circumstances surrounding enquirers' waiting conditions by means of skilful dramatic strokes: "*desde las tres de la mañana*" (since three o'clock in the morning) and "*haciendo cola en el sol*" (queuing up in the sun). Yet there is a more profound sense in which officials find enquirers' cheating behaviour reprehensible. It is reprehensible because it works to undermine bureaucrats' sense of authority. It is not bureaucrats but immigrants who seem to be "in control". This appears inadmissible to them as officials in a clearly asymmetrical relationship of power but also, in a wider sense, as members of the host society. It is a pervasive societal ideology that immigrants are entitled to act only within the limits defined by the local population (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Any attempts to act in what may be perceived as transgressing those limits, like trying to build a mosque in an "inappropriate" area of the city will be condemned by the host population.[3]

When an enquirer persists in "subverting the authority" of the bureaucrat, the state official's commands may turn into outright threats, as exemplified in the extract below (Example 8.3). In this case, the bureaucrat's position of authority is reinforced by threatening his interlocutor with some kind of police action.

Example 8.3[4]

[...]
01 *RES: *on està* -? *li han canviat el* +...
%tra: where is he -? have they swapped the +...
02 *B10: +^ *aquest sí* -. *han canviat el número o algo així* -. mira verás uno **ready** uno

[2] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C)_05.

[3] This is what happened in the town of Premià de Mar, located not far from Barcelona, in 2002. The Muslim community had bought a plot of land in the centre of town to build a mosque. Although they had all the permits required, they could not start building the mosque due to the opposition of the neighbours.

[4] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_07.doc.

03 te ha toca(d)o!
%tra: +^ this one yes -. they have swapped numbers or something like that -. look one ready one your turn!

04 *B09: *este portava un paper d'un pakistaní* +/.
%tra: this one had an application by a Pakistani +/.

05 → *B10: +^ *aquest ha canviat el número a un no sé qui i ara li he perdut l'altre* -. y
06 está ya medio ficha(d)o!
%tra: +^ this one has swapped numbers with I don't know who and now I have lost his other one and he is halfway to getting himself a police record!

[...]

In the encounter from which the excerpt is taken, there is some confusion as regards immigrants' turn numbers. In lines 05 and 06, B10 explains that some information seekers have swapped numbers. The "morally subversive" nature of the action is highlighted by the official's threat that the police has the immigrant's record already (line 06). This is of course symbolic, as no real action is taken. An interesting feature of B10's turn is language choice. The official employs Catalan to answer my question, and then switches over to Spanish to utter his threat. The symbolic and instrumental use of language choice to delimit different social spaces is explored in detail in the final section of this chapter. Resorting to threats of physical violence is the ultimate means whereby officials' power is exercised. According to Sarangi and Slembrouck (1996:59), implicit in bureaucratic procedures is a strong disciplinary dimension. At the office examined, discipline is enforced in the most explicit manner.

Example 8.4[5]

01 *B09: como te vea venir por aquí llamo a la policía.
%tra: if I see you here again I'll call the police.

The role of the police is not negligible in ensuring law and order in the office. Policemen guard the door at all times and keep a permanent eye on the queue. Their presence is meant as a deterrent for agitators. Threats of future police action may also be invoked to prevent enquirers from submitting forged documentary evidence (see Example 8.5 below). The effectiveness of the threat lies in the exploitation of immigrants' fears of deportation.

[5] Comment taken from tape OFFICE(C)_01.

Example 8.5[6]

01 *B10: esto esto esto está toca(d)o -. # esto está manipulado -. este ocho no es éste -. #
02 esto si te lo cojo va a ir a la policía -. # este ocho no es este ocho.
%tra: this this this is changed -. # this has been messed with -. this eight is not like this one -. # this if I take it it'll go to the police -. # this eight is not like this other eight.

Bureaucrats' attempts at regulating the social and moral space of the office extends to different aspects of immigrants' conduct and even their way of dressing. In Example 8.6 below, for example, the enquirer is asked to account for his absent-mindedness. His number (twenty-five) has already been called. Implicit in the official's question is the dual assumption that the enquirer's behaviour has violated what would be "appropriate conduct" in this setting, namely, that enquirers must be attentive to numbers called, and that the official has the prerogative to hold him accountable for this breach of conduct. In the subsequent example (8.7), the official (B10) even feels licensed to criticise his interlocutor's dress.

Example 8.6[7]

01 *B09: hola.
%tra: hello.

02 *ENQ: hola.
%tra: hello.

03 *B09: número?
%tra: number?

04 *ENQ: veinticinco.
%tra: twenty five.

05→ *B09: dónde estabas?
%tra: where were you?

06 *ENQ: eh ech eso: chaval lo que dice # no sé +...
%tra: uh ech that mate what he says # I don't know +...

07 *B09: espera.
%tra: wait.

[...]

Example 8.7[8]

01 B10: y cuando vuelvas dentro de dos semanas trae el pasaporte sí y una camiseta con mangas también.
%tra: and when you come back in two weeks' time bring your passport and a shirt with sleeves.

---

[6] Extract taken from transcript OFC06_01.doc.

[7] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_06.doc.

[8] Comment taken from tape OFFICE(C)_02.

As has been shown, officials' attempts to control what goes on in the office concern the management of space, but also immigrants' behaviour, actions and ways of dressing. As for time, it was mentioned in Chapter 7 that bureaucrats' information practices involved attempts to regulate the frequency of immigrants' visits to the office. Enquirers' way of proceeding affects officials' own well-being, as immigrants' repeated visits enlarges the number of people to be served every day. To prevent enquirers from not following their recommendations, officials may resort to uttering verbal prohibitions, as in Example 8.8, or they may reprimand enquirers severely if there is evidence of their unlawful conduct (Example 8.9).

Example 8.8[9]

[...]

01	*B09:	en tres semanas te enviaremos una carta para que vengas con las fotos a poner las huellas.
	%tra:	in three weeks' time we'll send you a letter so that you come with your photographs to have your fingerprints taken.
02	*EN2:	carta [?].
	%tra:	letter [?].
03	*B09:	tres semanas.
	%tra:	three weeks.
04	*EN1:	tres fotos no?
	%tra:	three photographs right?
05 →	*B09:	sí lo pone en la carta que recibirá -. hasta que no tenga la carta no puede venir.
	%tra:	yes it's in the letter that you'll receive -. you mustn't come until you get the letter.

[...]

Example 8.9[10]

[...]

01 → 02	*B09:	*este és del cinc de maig -. va vindre el dia vint i dos -, li vam dir que s'esperés tres semanes -, i el vint i vuit torna a estar aquí.*
	%add:	RES
	%tra:	this one is from May fifth -. he came on the twenty second -, we told him to wait for three weeks -, and on the twenty eighth he is back here again.
03 → 04	*B09:	en trámite -. <**three more weeks** -. **three weeks** -. **three** -. **no one** -. **no two** -. <**three**> [>]> [=!shouting].
	%tra:	being processed -. <**three more weeks** -. **three weeks** -. **three** -. **no one** -. **no two** -.<**three**> [>]> [=!shouting].
05	*ENQ:	<**okay**> [<] **o o okay** <**two**> [?].

[...]

[9] Extract taken from transcript OFC08_10.doc.

[10] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_03.doc.

In lines 01 and 02, we are allowed an insight into how unacceptable the official finds his interlocutor's behaviour. The bureaucrat makes a backstage comment addressed to me in which he underscores the fact that the enquirer has subverted the established social order by contravening the official's directive. The frontstage consequences of ENQ's subversive conduct can be seen in lines 03 and 04. The official repeats, shouting this time, that the enquirer must wait three weeks and not one or two to come back to the information office. It must be noted that B09's allusion to ENQ's inappropriate behaviour is only indirect. The official does not contextualise his own talk. It is likely that the enquirer may have perceived his interlocutor's aggressive interactional conduct as gratuitous and non-motivated. To conclude this section, an example is presented of how officials' perceived failure to control enquirers' behaviour creates tension in the office.

Example 8.10[11]

[...]

01 *EN2: sí perdón quiero preguntar por qué dice xxx.
%tra: yes excuse me I want to ask why you say xxx.

02 *B09: es él.
%tra: it's him.

03 *EN2: sí sí yo sabe # pero uh por qué dice **this** papel es en en trámite xxx.
%tra: yes yes I know # but uh why do you say this paper is being processed xxx.

04 *B09: qué?
%tra: what?

05 *EN2: en trámite que se dice para todos # en trámite para:: <# tres semanas> [>]
%tra: being processed what is said for everybody # being processed fo::r <# three weeks> [>].

06 *B09: <si están en trámite> [<] en
07 tres semanas como <mínimo> [>] es para ver si ya está cambiado o no.
%tra: <if they are being processed> [<] in three weeks at least is to see whether it has changed or not.

08 *EN2: <para qué> [<]?
%tra: <for what> [<]?

09 → *B11: pero tú dónde estás allí o aquí?
%tra: but where are you here or there?
%add: EN2

10 → *B11: claro si le estoy atendiendo yo B09 es que!
%tra: of course because I am serving him B09 come on!
%add: B09

11 *B09: *pero me diu que em vol fer una pregunta i m'ha preguntat que per què quan dic* en trámite *dic* tres semanas.
%tra: but he says he wants to ask me a question and he has asked me why when I say being processed I say three weeks.

[11] Extract taken from transcript OFC08_07.doc.

12 → *B11: pero tú estás aquí o estás allí?
%add: ENQ
%tra: but are you here or there?

13 *ENQ: no (a)quí.
%tra: no here.

14 → *B11: pues vigila el bolso de tu:: <#> [>] de la señora si no +...
%tra: then keep an eye on you:r <#> [>] on the lady's handbag or +...

15 *ENQ: <señora> [<].
%tra: <wife's> [<].
[...]

The service seeker in this stretch of interaction, that is EN2, was being served by the official B11. In the course of their interaction, the official needs to move away from the counter for some reason. EN2 takes advantage of this situation to try to obtain more information from another official, namely B09. When B11 comes back and finds them interacting, she gets annoyed. She interrupts them by means of a question addressed to the service seeker asking him to decide by which official he is being served (line 09).[12] Her next utterance is addressed to her colleague B09. She blames him for the enquirer's disorderly conduct (line 10). Her use of the final "*es que*" (come on) indexes that she expected her colleague to know better. B09 retorts to her implicit accusations of unprofessional conduct by appealing to his discursive obligations (line 11). He has been asked a question and has the civil obligation to respond. B11's accusations grow weaker. She asks the service seeker the same question as previously and he responds again by stating that she is still his service provider (line 13). Since it becomes apparent that the enquirer has not attempted to engage in any activity that may subvert the order in the office, the official tries to identify some other aspect of his conduct that may be subject to criticism. She directs her attention to a handbag that is on the counter. The enquirer's carelessness is employed by the official to continue exposing her interlocutor's inappropriate behaviour (line 14).

Managing interactional organisation

All interactions in the corpus gathered have a very similar structure. Their sequential organisation was already described in Chapter 4. Few departures from this stable

[12] Note the use of the impersonal place adverbial "here" or "there" to avoid personalising the enquirer's choice.

organisation can be found. The reason is that officials exert a tight control over the unfolding of exchanges. They routinely implement a specific sequencing of interactional episodes which in some aspects may diverge from enquirers' expectations. These expectations are based on stored knowledge in the form of cognitive schemata acquired through engagement in similar type of social activities. The extent to which officials are aware of how the specific sequential organisation imposed diverges from enquirers' background knowledge is arguable. One of these features of sequential organisation concerns the way in which request and compliance turns are ordered. It is common practice in service exchanges that requests are made one at a time (see Ventola 1987). Once the first request has been complied with, a second request can be made, and so on.

By contrast, in the social setting examined, enquirers must make all their requests at the beginning of the exchange. It was explained in Chapter 5 that immigrants' handing over of applications to bureaucrats are interpreted as non-verbal service requests. These non-verbal moves prompt officials to start searching for the information required in the institution's database. Thus, asking immigrants to submit all the applications they bring along at the beginning of the exchange amounts to forcing them to produce all their service requests in one go. The official counts how many applications there are and starts checking them one by one. Responses are not provided all in one go, but right after the status of each application has been determined. Officials account for this practice by stating that it is a way to prevent enquirers from cheating. They claim that some enquirers get close to the counter when an acquaintance is being served and pass their applications on to him/her under the counter to have them checked at the last minute. They perceive this mode of conduct as unacceptable in what it represents as a symbolic subversion of their desire for absolute control over what is happening. Unless the symbolic dimension is brought into the explanation, it is difficult to understand how this practice is different from giving one's application to an acquaintance for checking before this person is being served.

More significant in terms of its consequences is the fact that officials are oblivious of the unexpected nature of this sequential organisation. As Bremer et al.

(1996) have shown, the less competent in the language of interaction a speaker is the more s/he will rely on global and general contextual features typical of encounters of the same sort. When a sequential organisation which contravenes speakers' expectations is established –especially if it is not metadiscursively explained or marked as exceptional in any way– participants may be at a loss to understand what is going on. Enquirers are likely to go away feeling they have been treated in an arbitrary and/or unfair manner. This works against the image of rationality and objectivity a state organisation ought to project. The fact that the reasons which explain their interlocutor's behaviour are obscure to enquirers may engender feelings of mistrust towards the institution. The wider the perception that the institution is engaging in dubious practices, the more legitimate "subversive" enquirer attitudes may become.

Example 8.11 is revealing because it contains participants' metadiscursive comments on the sequential development of the interaction. The enquirer's turns give us insights into the organisational structure he assumes (see line 04). This is radically different from the officials' desired conversational organisation. As can be seen in line 05, it is the official who determines how to proceed. The language he employs in his turn leaves no doubt as to who –in his perception– holds the upper hand. Especially worth noting is his use of the *tienes que* (have to) verbal structure indicating obligation, and of the conditional sentence "*si no me lo das ahora no te lo miro*" (if you don't give it to me know I won't check it), whereby he states very plainly what the consequences will be of enquirer's non-compliance. This strategy is effective in ensuring obedience in that the consequences envisaged are against the interest of the enquirer, who is there precisely to have his application checked. Subordination to official's dominant position is thereby guaranteed. Enquirers' participatory rights are severely constrained.

Example 8.11[13]

01	*B09:	sólo traes uno?
	%tra:	you're only bringing one?
02	*ENQ:	sí:: só sólo tengo esa [=! surprised tone] !
	%tra:	we:ll I on only have that one [=! surprised tone] !

[13] Extract taken from tape OFFICE(C) _07.

03 *B09: vale no si traes de algún amigo -, o de +...
%tra: okay I meant maybe you had one from a friend -, or +...

04 → *ENQ: ah ah no sí sí sí pero euh después se mira no +/?
%tra: oh oh yes yes but euh they are checked afterwards right+/?

05 → *B09: +^ sí pero tienes que dármelos ahora -. si no me lo das ahora no te lo miro.
%tra: +^ yes but you have to give them to me now -. if you don't give it to me now I won't check it.

06 *ENQ: vale.
%tra: alright.

[...]

The first two turns in this example are also worth examining. They show how it is possible for an enquirer to respond in the positive to the question of whether he has only one application for checking without implying that this state of affairs is valid for the whole interaction. Line 02 provides an insight into how the enquirer interprets the official's question in line 01, namely as referring to him as an individual applicant. This is why he reacts in a surprised manner to B09's question. ENQ's response indexes to what extent B09's framing of the encounter comes as unexpected to his interlocutor. It also suggests how carefully affirmative responses such as the one in line 02 have to be handled in interaction. They cannot be taken at face value. The enquirer in the previous example is skilful enough to use prosodic means like intonation to convey subtle nuances of meaning. It is his tone of surprise that forces the official to make the interpretive framing of his question more explicit in line 03. The mismatch in participants' schemata is brought into the open and clarified. Less skilful enquirers may be left wondering why they are shouted at and severely reprimanded by their interlocutors. Something akin to this hypothetical scenario is what happens in the following extract (Example 8.12).

Example 8.12[14]

01 *ENQ: hola buenas.
%tra: hi morning.

02 *B09: hola:.
%tra: hello:.

03 *ENQ: 0.
%act: hands application form over to B09

04 → *B09: sólo traes uno?
%tra: you're only bringing one?

05 *UUU: #0_1.

[14] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_15.doc.

06 → *B09: no traes de nadie más?
%tra: you're not bringing anyone else's?

@Situation: B09 checks status of ENQ's application in computer

07 *B09: en trámite -. tienes que [=! quick] **you have to wait three more weeks**.
%tra: being processed -. you have to [=! quick] you have to wait three more weeks.

08 *B09: entiendes?
%tra: do you understand?

09 *UUU: #0_1.

10 *ENQ: qué: **three week**?
%tra: what three week?

11 *B09: **yes**.

12 *ENQ: **wait**.

13 *UUU: #0_3.

14 *ENQ: mucho **wait**.
%tra: much wait.

15 *B09: qué?
%tra: what?

16 *ENQ: **three week** muchos sí.
%tra: **three week** many yes.

17 *B09: muchos!
%tra: many!

18 *UUU: #0_3.

19 *ENQ: pero otro:s # uh no problemo?
%tra: but othe:rs # uh no problem?

20 *B09: no lo sé -. # **they are looking for** [//] **i:f it is alright or don't** -. **I don't know**.
%tra: I don't know -. # they are looking for [//] i:f it is alright or don't -. I don't know.

21 *UUU: #0_6.

22 → *B09: mira mira mira mira !
%tra: look look look look!

23 → *B09: *la butxaca del davant*.
%tra: the front pocket.

@Situation: B09 takes application form

24 → *B09: más?
%tra: more?

25 → *B09: **you have more**?

26 → *B09: **you have another one**?

27 *ENQ: +^ **this is my my friend**.

28 → *B09: **you don't have any more**?

29 *ENQ: uh?

30 → *B09: **you don't have any more**?

31 → *B09: *he estat a punt de tornar-l'hi a repetir però he pensat no et passis*.
%add: RES
%tra: I've been about to repeat it again but then I thought don't overdo it!

32 → *RES: *no ho ha entès* !
%tra: he did not understand

33 → *B09: *ja* -! *com no hi havia vingut ningú per aquí* -. *si arriba a vindre algun amic d'ell no li*
34 *agafo*.
%tra: I know –! as there was nobody around -. if a friend of his had come I would not have taken it.
[...]

The enquirer hands only one application over to the official, who asks him twice whether he has any other applications for checking (see lines 04 and 06). The enquirer does not respond verbally to any of the official's questions. Although it is possible that ENQ provided a non-verbal response, the value of this type of answer as indicator of mutual understanding is weak. In spite of this uncertainty, the official moves on interactionally. In subsequent stretches of talk, the enquirer's command of both English and Spanish is shown to be extremely limited. When the enquirer feels that his first request has been satisfied, he produces a new application for checking. In lines 22-23 the enquirer directs my attention to the enquirer's behaviour. His repetitions of the verb *mira* (look) evoke an interpretive framework in which the bureaucrat believes he has caught the enquirer red-handed. That is to say, the official interprets the enquirer's actions as sneaky breaches in the mutual alignment established. Yet the way the enquirer behaves –taking out this new application from his front pocket– does not seem to indicate that he is trying to conceal his actions. Why is it interpreted in this way by the official and what does that interpretation index in terms of his perception of the enquirer group?

The official's interpretation makes sense if understood in the light of a generalised feeling of mistrust towards his interlocutors. This perception manifests itself in various ways in officials' discursive practices. In lines 22-23, the enquirer's conduct is interpreted by B09 as one more instance of an underlying pattern of enquirer lack of cooperation. In spite of all this, the official decides to check his interlocutor's new application, though not without trying to embarrass him beforehand. He asks him up to four times whether he has any other applications for checking. The officials' tone of voice is loud and his asking of the same information four times echoes a cross-examination session. The official himself acknowledges that he has overdone it a little bit (see line 31). In line 32 I try to explain the enquirer's behaviour by appealing to his lack of understanding of the official's suggested conversational organisation. Surprisingly, the official agrees with me (see

ja [I know] in lines 33-34), and then provides an account of why he has decided to check ENQ's new application.

Two elements must be mentioned here. Firstly, there is B09's agreement token. He is aware that the enquirer may not have understood but nevertheless interprets his conduct as intentionally subversive. Secondly, the question arises as to why the official provides an account of his actions. If he needs to justify himself it is because he perceives that I may question his equal and fair treatment of enquirers. Strict as he usually is with regard to service seekers' producing new applications in the late stages of the exchange, this time he is allowing the enquirer to have a new one checked. It is interesting to examine his justification. Although he agrees with me that the enquirer probably did not understand, non-comprehension does not enter into his decision making process. The bureaucrat will check the enquirer's new application out of generosity provided the right circumstances are met, that is, that the enquirer is by himself. This way, the official makes it clear that despite appearances, it is not the enquirer that controls the game but him. He makes it apparent that he could have acted otherwise had he wanted to. It is still he who sets the rules. Whether that involves holding an enquirer unfairly accountable for something of which he is ignorant does not enter into the picture.

The question of how legitimately actors can be held accountable for their actions when mutual understanding has not been ensured needs to be addressed. In this encounter it has been observed how ENQ's understanding of the official's question is dubious. The official himself acknowledges that, and yet he treats the enquirer's behaviour as intentionally subversive, even if there is no evidence in that direction. The official's behaviour calls into question the extent to which participants' assessment of their interlocutors' intentions and motivations takes into account their local discursive productions. The official brings about an institutional frame of reference in which ENQ's actions are not interpreted in the light of what is available in the interaction but rather in the context of pervading institutional ideologies about client behaviour.

Another example of how few chances of participation in conversational management enquirers are allowed is provided by the ensuing extract (Example

8.13). Any attempts to depart from officials' routine sequencing of conversational episodes are immediately thwarted. The following interaction starts off with the enquirer's service request. This is an unusual request, as the enquirer is not interested in the status of his application. He has already been granted a work permit, but there seems to be a problem with the Foreigner Identification Number he was given in a previous interaction. In broken Spanish he formulates his demand for service (lines 01 to 03). The official does not align himself with the enquirer's framing of the encounter. In fact, he ignores the enquirer's request completely and proceeds by asking how many applications EN1 wants to have checked. By means of this question, the official imposes his own judgement of relevance and pursues his own interactional agenda.

Example 8.13[15]

01 →	*EN1:	hola perdón uh él dice que él tienes el la informe **letter** pero él voy a la: # oficina
02		de: seguridad él dice que falta la aquí número -. voy a la otra vez ahí o hablar
03		que dame correcto número -. número éste # falta la número este esto no correcto.
	%tra:	hello excuse me uh he says that he have the the report letter but he go to the: office o:f security he says that faulty the here number -. I go there again or talk that you give me the correct number -. number this # faulty the number this this not correct.
04	*B09:	a ver tú cuántos traes?
	%tra:	let's see how many are you bringing?
05	*EN2:	tres.
	%tra:	three.
06	*B09:	uno do:s tres.
	%tra:	one two:: three.
	%add:	talking to himself
07	*B09:	a ver éste es éste?
	%tra:	let's see is this this one?
08 →	*EN2:	xxx este número no -. malo.
	%tra:	xxx this number no -. bad.
	@Situation:	B09 checks status of first application in computer
09	*B09:	a ver *noranta quatre nou sis*.
	%tra:	let's see ninety four nine six.
10	*B09:	este número está malo ¡ *aquesta correcció* ?
	%add:	EN2/himself
	%tra:	this number is bad and this correction?
11	*B09:	*ah està malament mira*.
	%add:	RES
	%tra:	oh it's wrong look.
12	*B09:	*lo que hi ha és un expedient més*.
	%add:	himself
	%tra:	there is one file too many.
13 →	*B09:	**the letter uh is not yet sent** -. **you have to wait three weeks for the letter** ,,

[15] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_05.doc.

14		**okay**?
15	*EN2:	**okay**.
16 →	*B09:	+^ **this is the right number**.
17	*EN2:	sí vale gracias.
	%tra:	yes okay thanks.

[...]

It must be noted that the enquirer's attempts at formulating his service request are ignored by the official twice. Neither his first request (lines 01 to 03) nor his second attempt at making his needs explicit (line 08) is not acknowledged. This demonstrates the extent to which enquirers are allowed to intervene actively in the ongoing development of the interaction. My final remark concerns the format of the official's service compliance turns (lines 13 to 16). He provides the specific piece information he has been requested only at the end (line 16). Judgements of relevance are again controlled by the institutional representative. By ordering the information he provides in the way he does, the enquirer is not seen as determining the development of the interaction in any way. As is common practice, the bureaucrat provides his routine response first and then whatever "exceptional" piece of information has been requested.

Backstage remarks and practices of negative categorisation

This section undertakes a detailed pragmatic analysis of the discursive productions of one of the officials working at the organisation examined, namely B10. The most pervasive characteristics of B10's turns are his use of a very informal register, especially in his choice of words and forms of address, and the abundant "backstage" comments he makes on his interlocutors. These comments are significant for two reasons. First, they tend to contain stereotypical negative characterisations of immigrants' actions and behaviour. These processes of categorisation represent B10's attempts at defining and regimenting a moral order in the office. Secondly, they are not made "backstage", but "frontstage", that is, they usually get inserted into the development of the interactional event. It should be noted that this particular use of language is not comparable in any way to the manner in which other officials observed in this and related settings make use of

language. The motivations, effects and consequences of B10's discursive behaviour are spelt out in what follows.

B10's idiosyncratic choice of linguistic register is exemplified by the unusual ways in which his interactions with immigrant enquirers start. The forms of address he uses index, conventionally, a social relationship of close familiarity between participants. This is clearly not the relationship existing between B10 and his interlocutors. Service encounters in this institutional setting are enacted as first time exchanges, that is as interactions taking place between strangers who meet only for the purpose of exchanging information.[16] The degree of social distance existing between interlocutors is high. Forms of address indexing lack of solidarity between speakers would be expected. Instead, B10 employs a range of lexical choices which anchor the exchange –as it were– in a contextual field of social relations which has nothing to do with his actual perception of the situation. The analysis of his backstage comments reveals that he conceives of the social relationship existing between him and his interlocutors as of clearly asymmetrical nature. His understanding of the social field of institutional communication at an immigration office is contained in the extract below (Example 8.14). This brief exchange between myself and B10 was motivated by the official's insistence on placing my microphone on the service counter. I tried to discourage him, but to no avail. In line 01, he defends his idea by arguing that the sound quality of the recordings will be better if the microphone is placed on the counter. When I retort by saying that immigrant information seekers may complain (about the fact that they are recorded), he responds by challenging my perception of the situation. In his view, enquirers do not have any rights. They are not in a position, he says, to complain about anything. Such is the power differential that defines social relations in this field. Officials

[16] The use of the word "enacted as" is intentional here. It may not be the first time enquirers interact with a particular bureaucrat, but the latter insist on avoiding becoming acquainted with enquirers. In that vein, B09 produces the following comment after transcript OFC01_08.doc.

*B09: *i que jo li havia dit que portés lo passport i ara el portava però com allí no estava apuntat si hagués sigut jo este matí li hagués posat setze del sis o si no que vingue* el amigo *i que m'ho demostri* ***però a la majoria ni els miro****!*

%tra: and that I had said to him that he should bring his passport and now he was bringing it but since it was not noted down there if he had been here his morning I would have written sixteenth of June if not he can ask his friend to come and prove it but I don't look most of them in the face [so I won't recognise him anyway].

(boldface is mine)

make decisions and immigrant enquirers have to accept them, even when they violate their right to confidentiality of service with the administration.

Example 8.14[17]

[B10 places mike on counter].

01 *B10: *sí home així se sentirà millor.*
%tra: listen this way you'll hear it better.

02 *RES: *potser algú es pot queixar ,, no* ?
%tra: somebody might complain ,, don't you think?

03 *B10: *tu creus que estan en disposició de queixar-se* ?
%tra: you think they are in any position to complain?

There is evidence, thus, to claim that, by using informal terms of address, the official is not trying to challenge the routine implementation of bureaucrat-client communication as unequal in many respects. He does not attempt to bring about a socially close relationship which enables enquirers to participate more actively in the process of information exchange. Rather, the official manipulates speakers' pragmatic expectations on the solidarity axis to cause bewilderment to his audience, both addressees and bystanders. He deliberately flouts conventions of language use to create a playful atmosphere that enables him to distance himself from the detached, impersonal mode of behaving he is expected to adopt as a public bureaucrat, and from a job he finds dull and unmotivating. However, this manipulation of conventional language use is one-sided; it is the exclusive prerogative of the official. Secondly, flouting of conventions is made possible due the asymmetrical distribution of linguistic resources among speakers. Most enquirers do not have the command of Spanish that enables them to comprehend the talk being addressed to them. If they understand what is being said, they usually lack the resources to be able to challenge the way in which they are categorised and socially positioned by their interlocutor. In addition, their limited command of Spanish is likely to interact with their perception that challenging a public official may be detrimental to the outcome of their application.

The official takes advantage of this structural asymmetry to bewilder his audience, but most significantly, to make demeaning remarks on enquirers'

[17] Excerpt taken from tape OFFICE(C)_03.

circumstances, and social and linguistic behaviour. These backstage comments go beyond what might be considered a playful mode of talk and become offensive characterisations of immigrants' talk and actions. B10's instances of his idiosyncratic language use fluctuate between the playful subversion of pragmatic expectations and his attempts to exert social control by foregrounding negative features of immigrants' behaviour. In addition to immigrants, his colleague B09 is the target of B10's regular mocking comments. It is revealing of B10's construction of the world that, whenever B09's talk refers to some inappropriate aspect of immigrants' behaviour, B10 uses his backstage remarks to echo and reinforce his colleague's repressive social actions. The following examples illustrate B10's idiosyncratic use of language. Each of the expressions employed evoke a particular social scenario, in which the recreation of specific voices adds new and complex layers of meaning to his talk. B10 regularly appropriates for himself the voices of different figures of authority, while simultaneously positioning his immigrant interlocutor in a clearly subordinate role. In what follows, I explore the connotations, as well as the processes of social categorisation, these expressions index. Example 8.15 shows B10's use of the term *chato* (dear). This form of address is only employed in informal situations among very close friends, between partners or in the context of buying and selling at a market.[18] Its use in this context sounds odd, if not inappropriate. In my interpretation, the speaker is not trying to promote a closer relationship with his interlocutor than would be expected. Rather, *chato* is part of B10's language games whereby the official attempts to provoke his audience, real or imagined, by subverting some of the socio-pragmatic conventions at play.

Example 8.15[19]

01	*EN1:	por favor.
	%tra:	please.
02 →	*B10:	+^ tú qué quieres chato?
	%tra:	+^ what do you want dear?

[...]

[18] In that context, sellers may want to establish a close relationship with buyers in order to create an atmosphere of solidarity that boosts sales.

[19] Extract taken from transcript OFC06_01.doc.

The initial turns in the extract below (Example 8.16) contain another display of B10's playful interactional mode. In this case, the service exchange involves B10 and an immigrant enquirer of Chinese origin. In line 02, the official greets the enquirer very emphatically. I remember I got the impression that they knew each other. When I later asked the official, however, he disconfirmed my guess. To B10's particular intonation of the greeting device *hola* (hello) –clearly resembling the intonation one would use when bumping into an acquaintance one has not seen for a long while– B10 adds the use of the informal question "*qué hay*?" (what's up?). The official is, again, playing with language conventions and speakers' expectations. As was pointed out earlier, an outsider to the setting could interpret the official's moves as trying to create a friendly atmosphere. Enquirer-official communication becomes more conversational, and thus, potentially less "bureaucratic". This can even provide opportunities for the enquirer to participate in the interaction on more equal terms. However, a close analysis of subsequent talk reveals how under the official's conversational flair hides a ridicule of the enquirer's linguistic abilities which draws on stereotypical constructions of immigrant identity. In this case, conversationalisation is yet another strategy of social control.

Example 8.16[20]

01	*ENQ:	hola.
	%tra:	hello.
02 →	*B10:	hola:: [=! emphatic]!
	%tra:	hello:: [=! emphatic]!
03 →	*B10:	qué hay?
	%tra:	what's up?
04	*ENQ:	es eh para +...
	%tra:	it's uh for +...
05 →	*B10:	pala qué -? pala qué?
	%tra:	what fol -? what fol?
06 →	*ENQ:	ma español sólo un poco.
	%tra:	ma spanish only a little.
07 →	*B10:	poco español -? y cómo te las apañas en el restaurante?
	%tra:	little spanish -? and how do you manage in the restaurant?
08	*ENQ:	+^ sí chino xxx.
	%tra:	+^ yes chinese xxx.
09	*B10:	uh huh.
10	*B10:	qué para mí -? qué es para mí -? para mí.
	%tra:	what for me -? what is for me -? for me.

[20] Extract taken from transcript OFC06_03.doc.

11	*ENQ:	ser eh +...
	%tra:	be uh +...
12	*B10:	inglés?
	%tra:	english?
13	*B10:	hablas inglés?
	%tra;	do you speak english?
14	*ENQ:	español poco.
	%tra:	spanish little.
15	*B10:	y inglés?
	%tra:	and english?
16	*ENQ:	**english is** <**small**> [>] [?].
17	*B10:	<**english**> [<].
18 →	*B10:	menos -. habla chino sólo.
	%tra:	less -. speaks chinese only.
19	*B10:	www.
20	*PEN:	www.
21 →	*B10:	qué me traes # chinín?
	%tra:	what are you bringing me little Chinaman?
22	*B10:	a::h -! esto vas allí vas allí.
	%tra:	o::h -! that you have to go there have to go there.
23	*ENQ:	dónde?
	%tra:	where?
24	*B10:	a las mesas # de allí.
	%tra:	to the tables # there.

[...]

In line 04 the enquirer is trying to formulate his service request. He seems to experience some difficulties, which the official makes fun of in line 05. In particular, he mocks his pronunciation of the preposition *para* (for). In the official's caricature of the enquirer's linguistic abilities, the enquirer pronounces "*pala*" instead of "*para*". I myself could not hear the "l" sound in the enquirer's productions. The official seems to be drawing on stereotypes to construct his interlocutor as a non-competent speaker. Contrary to what his colleague B09 does, B10 deviates from the routine sequencing of events rather frequently. Yet B10's deviations do not serve to allow enquirers greater chances of participation. Instead, his frequent side sequences enable B10 to make all sorts of offensive remarks about his interlocutors. In the example under examination, the official's ridiculing of the enquirer's speech forces him to avow that his knowledge of Spanish is limited (see line 06).

In this particular context, confessions of linguistic incompetence are especially face damaging. Command of the majority language has a symbolic value in that it is ideologically treated as indexing the immigrant's will to integrate into the recipient

community. Since this is an immigration office, what is at stake is precisely whether a given individual should be given the chance to become a regular member of the host society. By exposing the enquirer's linguistic inabilities, B10 undermines whatever positive self-image ENQ strives to present. The official's ensuing turn (line 07) draws again on stereotypical images of Chinese immigrants (i.e. working at a restaurant), as the official was in reality unaware of ENQ's professional occupation. In fact, it is not until line 21 that B10 examines the documents ENQ has for submission. By stereotyping the enquirer's pronunciation of Spanish sounds and assuming he works at a Chinese restaurant, the official foregrounds ENQ's ethnicity as the key defining trait of his identity. ENQ is categorised first and foremost as a Chinese immigrant who follows the same mode of conduct as his fellow countrymen. His right to a distinct individual identity is symbolically denied to him.

Lines 12 to 18 contain another side sequence initiated again by the official, who tries to find out whether his interlocutor speaks English or not. It may seem like a language negotiation sequence, although it is not. The official's command of English was deficient and he was eager to avoid using this language whenever possible. His interest in the enquirer's language competencies may be motivated by my presence there, as he knew I was interested in enquirers' language use. As can be seen in the extract, B10 does not miss the opportunity to expose his interlocutor's inadequacy again: not only does ENQ not speak Spanish but he does not speak English either. As a global language, the use of English can be read as symbolising the possibility of communication with individuals from different sociolinguistic backgrounds. The official makes his final statement in line 18: "*habla chino sólo*" (he speaks Chinese only). Two features of this turn are worth noting. One is the official's emphasis on "*sólo*" (only) in "*chino sólo"* (Chinese only). The second element is the official's use of the third person singular. This qualifies B10's turn as evaluative metatalk on ENQ's words. It is significant that the negative characterisation of ENQ in "*chino sólo*" is not undertaken as an aside, but gets inserted into the flow of conversational interaction. This is a regular characteristic of B10's behaviour, as the examples below will illustrate.

Before completing the analysis of this extract, it is important to bring the form of address the official uses in line 21 to close attention. He employs the word "*chinín*" (little Chinaman) to refer to his interlocutor. Apart from the offensiveness of the term, I want to remark on how the enquirer is positioned by his interlocutor. The use of the diminutive form is highly revealing. This form is only used when addressing kids or small pets. By employing it, the official positions his interlocutor in a parent-child relationship, where the enquirer is the "weak" party who needs to be protected and taught how to behave. He recreates the voice of a figure of authority, and assumes a clearly condescending attitude towards his interlocutors. Far from being exceptional, the official's use of diminutive forms when talking about his interlocutors is quite pervasive in his discursive productions. See, for instance, his use of "*caritas*" [little faces] in Example 8.17 below.

Example 8.17[21]

01	*B10:	y vosotros [/-] mira mira mira estos mira qué espectadores que tengo -! xxx mira qué caritas ponen!
	%tra:	and you [/-] look look look at these look at the spectators I have -! xxx look at their little faces.

A similar type social relationship is enacted through the official's use of the term "*campeón*" (literally champion, ace) in the ensuing extracts (Example 8.18 and 8.19). It is significant that this term appears twice in our corpus, which again indicates a high degree of regularity in the official's behaviour. As a term of address, "*campeón*" is mostly directed at small children, in particular boys, by fathers. It may also be heard in banter among young male friends. The similarity with previous exchanges makes us think it is the former social relationship rather than the latter that is evoked. As regards its contents, "*campeón*" conveys the idea that there is some real or imagined challenge the child must face and that his father believes he will rise to it. The patronising tone of the expression is evident.

Example 8.18[22]

01	*B10:	trámite también venga campeón!
	%tra:	being processed too there you go ace!

[21] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_04.doc.

[22] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_02.doc.

Example 8.19[23]

01 *B10: +^ todo trámite <# campeón> [>]!
%tra: +^ they are all being processed <# ace> [>]!

The second type of interactional conduct mentioned above was B10's frequent backstage remarks on enquirers' behaviour and talk. According to Goffman (1959), it is common for members of a team who are presenting a performance frontstage to go backstage and derogate the audience in a way that is inconsistent with the face-to-face treatment given to them. In service occupations this may include ridiculing, caricaturising and criticising customers. As we have seen in Example 8.16, this is precisely what the official does to the Chinese immigrant. The crucial difference is that the official makes these comments while interacting face-to-face with the enquirer. Clearly, he is not interesting in presenting a performance to his audience. Goffman (1959:4) argues that when an individual enters the presence of others s/he will modify his/her activity so that it conveys an impression that it is in his/her interest to convey. I would add that that will be so, only if s/he either values the others in any way or wants to avoid the social sanctions that might derive from his/her inappropriate behaviour. These two ideas are intimately related. Sanctions are only effective if they are detrimental to the speaker's interests. One of these interests may be to foster a good social impression, that is to present a positive self-image to one's interlocutor. This will only be a social goal if the impressions one's interlocutor may receive are valued in any way. Thus, sanctions are only understood as such if there is the perception that the actor who displays the sanctioning behaviour is legitimised to do so. Legitimisation tends to come from positions of speaking which are socially recognised as "hegemonic".

The way in which B10 acts in his service communication with immigrants displays that he shows complete disregard for the service impression fostered. As was stated earlier, his often verbally offensive behaviour can pass mostly unnoticed because of enquirers' lack of linguistic competence. The official knowingly draws on that structural asymmetry to act in the way he does.

[23] Extract taken from transcript OFC02_04.doc.

The following extracts illustrate B10's constant use of backstage comments. For Goffman, backstage conduct among colleagues is "one which allows minor acts which can easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present" (1959:128). Among these he cites "playful aggressivity" and "inconsiderateness for the others in minor but potentially symbolic acts". Backstage is the social space for non-service relaxation. But it is also a space where equal social relations are actualised, where individuals step out of their social roles, where "playful aggressivity" can be retorted to. To embed the same type of behaviour in unequal relationships of power where participants are structurally constrained to not act freely works to reinforce their subordinate social position. The different layers of meaning and implicatures contained in B10's turns are examined in detail. In Example 8.20, the official describes the granting of a permit as a matter of good luck, as if the procedure whereby decisions on entitlements are made could be likened to a lottery. The official's comments do not work to sustain the image of objectivity and rationality a public institution ought to project. In addition, there is a sense in which the official's remarks may construct the enquirer as a potential cheater. If the bureaucratic process is a lottery, then it is possible for an applicant who does not fulfil the requirements to be given legal residency in Spain. Implied in the official's talk is the idea that the enquirer may not have met those requirements. Any degree of immigrants' control over the situation is metaphorically and symbolically taken away from them.

Example 8.20[24]

01 *B10: concedido éste-. fíjate has tenido suerte!
%tra: this one is granted -. you've been really lucky!

The implications in Example 8.20 below index again a negative categorisation of enquirers. I shall focus on the turn in line 04, in particular on B10's remark "*que amigos que sóis!*" (you are all such good friends!). The official's talk comments on ENQ's previous turn (line 03), where the enquirer puts forward a particular description of the world. The enquirer's claim to reality is not believed by the official who nevertheless does not have evidence to the contrary. He challenges

[24] Turn taken from transcript OFC05_02.doc.

B10's description only indirectly by means of an ironic remark. The official's remark is not intended to be answered. Rather, it belongs to the realm of the backstage, where officials work at discrediting enquirers' words. The official conveys the idea that he does not believe a word of what the enquirer has just said, thereby constructing him as a liar.

Example 8.21[25]

[...]

01	*B10:	de quién es éste?
	%tra:	whose is this one?
02	*B10:	de quién es?
	%tra:	whose is it?
03	*ENQ:	es de ami [//] mío amigo.
	%tra:	it's from a fri [//] a friend of mine.
04 →	*B10:	amigo no -? qué amigos que sóis!
	%tra:	friends right -? you're all such good friends!

[...]

The same negative categorisation informs the official's discursive behaviour in Example 8.22. In this encounter, however, B10 goes beyond making ironic comments and provokes the enquirer by asking him openly whether his documents are forged. For the first time in the extracts examined so far, the enquirer faces to his interlocutor's challenges and insists on his presentation of reality.

Example 8.22[26]

01	*B10:	buenos días dígame.
	%tra:	good morning how can I help you?
02	*ENQ:	traigo falta.
	%tra:	I am bringing my missing [documents].
03 →	*B10:	es lo mismo que éste a que sí!
	%tra:	it's the same as this one I bet!
04	*ENQ:	sí.
	%tra:	yes.
05	*B10:	lo mismo!
	%tra:	the same!
06 →	*B10:	todos habéis ido: <#> [>] al mismo médico # al mismo aboga(d)o # os ha
07		cobra(d)o lo mismo con el mismo médico: -, os entró a todos una diarrea de narices
08		o qué?

[25] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_02.doc.

[26] Extract taken from transcript OFC06_04.doc.

	%tra:	you've all been <#> [>] to the same doctor # to the same lawyer # he charged you the same with the same docto::r -, did you all come down with a hell of a diarrhoea or what?
09	*ENQ:	<eh sí > [<] [=! laughing].
	%tra:	<uh yes> [<] [=! laughing].
10 →	*ENQ:	pero pruebas # esto de:: esto seguro.
	%tra:	but evidence # this from this insurance.
11 →	*B10:	pero qué trabajáis todos en la misma empresa?
	%tra:	but do you all work for the same company?
12	*ENQ:	sí esto de mutua.
	%tra:	yes this from medical insurance.
13	*B10:	mutua de la empresa.
	%tra:	the company's medical insurance.
14	*ENQ:	para +...
	%tra:	for +...
15 →	*B10:	no será falso esto?
	%tra:	this wouldn't be forged by any chance?
16 →	*ENQ:	no esto no falso no -. # esto original.
	%tra:	no this not forged no -. # this original.
17	*B10:	xxx.
18	*B10:	ya está pues.
	%tra:	alright then done.

The first significant turn is in line 03. The official claims to be able to predict the enquirer's behaviour (note his final "*a que sí!*" [I bet]). The implicature is that all enquirers are liars trying to cheat the procedure by submitting forged documentation. His interlocutor responds with a simple "yes", not picking up on the official's implied accusation. The bureaucrat keeps insisting on his strategy but this time the tone of his talk becomes downright offensive (lines 06 -08). The enquirer keeps responding in a calm manner, insisting that his documents are valid (line 10). Finally, the official voices his suspicions openly (line 15). He exposes the enquirer by accusing him of submitting forged documents. Once again, the enquirer asserts the validity of his papers. The official has no choice but to accept the enquirer's documents. The interaction ends there. One aspect to be pointed out is that the official's provocative behaviour is gratuitous. It is not up to him to make decisions on entitlements on the basis of the documentary evidence presented. His job is to take in enquirers' documentation; yet this does not stop him from asserting his powerful position and trying to exercise social and moral control over his interlocutors by repeatedly constructing them as morally reprehensible individuals.

It was mentioned earlier that B10's comments may occur as echo remarks on his colleague B09's interactional contributions. Sometimes, as in Example 8.23, B10

simply mocks his colleague's talk. This contributes to sustaining the atmosphere of playfulness that B10 recreates to relieve the boredom of his job.

Example 8.23[27]

01 *B09: **yes but now it's okay okay** -? **but not** concedido -. **wait two or three weeks but okay**.
%tra: yes but now it's okay okay -? but not granted -. wait two or three weeks but okay.

[...]

02 → *B10: **not** concedido.
%tra: not granted.
%com: speaker puts on an english accent

At other times, B10 employs his backstage remarks to reinforce his colleague's reprimanding tone (see line 04 in Example 8.24 below). Particularly illuminating of his perception of the social world he inhabits is his appeal to physical force in Example 5.11, reproduced below as Example 8.25 (see in particular line 09).

Example 8.24[28]

[...]

01 *EN1: sí está aquí -. ay!
%tra: yes it's here -. oops!

02 *B09: trae el pasaporte:.
%tra: bring the passport:.

03 *B09: deprisa!
%tra: quickly!

04 → *B10: deprisa leche!
%tra: quickly damn it!

Example 8.25[29]

[...]

01 *B09: uhm `maintenant` #0_1 esto `quel` número?
%tra: uhm now #0_1 this which number?

02 *B09: esto el número del # ordenador.
%tra: this the number in the # computer.

03 *EN1: ah ordenador #0_3 vale [=! soft].
%tra: ah computer #0_3 okay [=! soft].

04 *EN2: entonces yo amigo.
%tra: and now I'm friend.

[27] Extract taken from OFC02_06.doc

[28] Extract taken from transcript OFC05_07.doc.

[29] Extract taken from transcript OFC01_03.doc.

05 *B09: <amigo> [=! shouting] -? te he dicho uno -? uno -? uno sólo -? <nadie más> [>1] -?
06 no amigo -? no nadie -? no -. sólo uno -. pues sólo <uno> [>2] -. adiós.
%tra: <friend> [=! shouting] -? I have told you one -? one -? only one -? <nobody else > [>1] -? no friend? no nobody -? no -. only one -. then only <one> [>2] -. good bye.

07 *EN2: <yo amigo> [<1].
%tra: <I friend> [>1].

08 *EN2: <vale> [<2].
%tra: <okay> [<2].

09 → *B10: *au* -. i ara cuando salgas que te den un viaje *a fora*.
%tra: right -. and now when you leave I hope they give give you a good beating.

Language negotiation and language choice

The issue of language choice at the immigration office investigated is complex. It requires examination of both the institutional and the interactional orders. Some of the institutional conditionings affecting patterns of language use have been examined in previous chapters (see pages 123-124 in Chapter 4). They will be briefly taken up again in this section. The analysis presented here concentrates on the most significant features of language choice in this setting, especially in so far as they contribute to creating spaces of exclusion, and constraining immigrants' discursive behaviour. A large number of phenomena, which fall outside the scope of this dissertation, are left unaddressed.

One significant aspect on a structural level concerns the use of Spanish and Catalan. They both have the status of official languages in Catalonia. Their distribution varies considerably depending to a large extent on the social domain investigated. In the specific domain of Spanish state institutions, Spanish has traditionally been the dominant language of communication, both in spoken and written communication. To my knowledge, it continues to be the most frequently employed language in writing, although some institutions like the *Agencia Tributaria* (Revenue Office) have made an effort for quite a few years now to have all their informative leaflets and forms in both languages. By contrast, written communication in the institutional field of *extranjería* (immigration) takes place

exclusively in Spanish. The reason has to be found in the nature of the institution's clientele, who are not expected to know Catalan.[30]

In the different offices belonging to the Spanish Immigration Service I observed, the number of employees who were regular speakers of Catalan and those who were regular speakers of Spanish was roughly equal. Most of them would follow the norm of *linguistic etiquette* (Woolard 1989) which is generalised in the Barcelona area. That is to say, regular speakers of Catalan would speak Catalan among themselves but Spanish when addressing regular Spanish-speaking colleagues. The latter would normally employ Spanish with everybody, including me.[31] The language I employed to introduce myself was always Catalan. This is also the language I used during my interview with Mr Puig, the person who gave me permission to carry out my research. Regular Catalan-speakers would always talk to me in Catalan.

In the specific office analysed, I employed Catalan from the very beginning. When Mr Puig phoned the manager to inform her about my project, they conversed in Catalan. I used this same language in my first meeting with her. When she first took me to the information section to meet her employees she also addressed them in Catalan. Three of the four employees were regular speakers of Catalan. The language of communication among them was Catalan. The fourth employee was a regular speaker of Spanish. The other three would speak to him in Spanish, although they tended to interact very little.

What can be observed from my linguistic corpus and the ethnographic information I was able to gather is that Catalan is the language of the "in-group", consisting of fellow colleagues and the researcher. Spanish, the language of the State, is the main language adopted by institutional representatives for interacting with clients. Catalan is used to talk about immigrant enquirers, but it is never used to talk *to* them. Spanish is employed for that purpose. For the service providers, the actors in the exchanges studied (i.e., immigrants, researcher, colleagues) belong to

[30] However, the number of Spanish or Catalan agents who I observed seeking some kind of service at the different immigration offices in Barcelona was not negligible.

[31] There were only one or two exceptions to this rule. Some regular speakers of Spanish would address me in Catalan. As I said, they were the exception rather than the rule.

different social spaces. Language choice is employed to create spaces of inclusion and exclusion. These spaces reflect the different value service providers attach to the different languages. The service encounter creates a symbolic barrier between the immigrant client and the service provider. Catalan is never used by enquirers to communicate with officials. Only on one occasion does an enquirer employ Catalan. This use is illustrated by Example 8.26. This example illustrates the social spaces constructed for the different actors in the service encounter. EN1, a North African man, is an extremely fluent speaker of Spanish. He goes to the office to accompany his sister (EN2), who has applied for legalisation. He addresses officials in Spanish. Throughout the exchange he employs a variety of strategies to establish rapport with officials and even with myself. He tries to make small talk by remarking on the large number of people waiting to be served. At one point, the computer system breaks down. Then the stretch of interaction shown in the excerpt below takes place:

Example 8.26[32]

01	*B09:	bueno pues *a veure si sortim*.
	%tra:	well let's see if we can get out of here.
02	*B10:	*ara a més s'haurà bloquejat i un merder* !
	%tra:	now it's also going to be stuck and we'll be in a mess!
03	*B10:	se han estropeao!
	%tra:	they've broken down!
	%add:	EN1
04 →	*EN1:	*i què ha passat* ?
	%tra:	and what's happened?
05	*B09:	<pues a ver si vuelve> [>] +...
	%tra:	<let's see if it comes back on> [>] +...
06	*B10:	<los de www> [<] cuándo tocan allí no sé qué aquí se jode.
	%tra:	<those at www> [<] whenever they touch something there they fuck things up here.
	%com:	street where central office is located

Catalan is the language employed by B09 and B10 to interact (see lines 01 and 02). This choice ratifies membership within the service providers' group. In line 03, B10 switches over to Spanish to address EN1. He belongs to a different social space. What is significant about this encounters is that, in line 04, EN1 uses Catalan to address B10. He produces an information-seeking question. His unexpected use of

[32] Extract taken from transcript OFC01_07.doc.

Catalan, the "in-group" language, and his earlier attempts at small talk lead us to think that, rather than being really concerned with what has happened, EN1 uses his question as a means to establish rapport with his interlocutors. It is significant that EN1's use of Catalan is not acknowledged or taken up either by B09 or B10, reinforcing his earlier exclusionary practice. Rather, in line 06, B10 responds to the information-seeking aspect of the enquirer's question in Spanish. Note the use of his usual colloquial tone, examined in the previous section.

It has been mentioned that at an institution representing the Spanish state, Catalan is employed as the in-group language among officials. This language practice enters into conflict with the language practices of the institution, which employs Spanish exclusively. Official labels for different administrative procedures, as well as names of documents are coined in Spanish. Rather than translating them into Catalan, officials preserve the Spanish terms, resulting in code-switched utterances which index the different social orders entering into their production.

Spanish is the official language of the institution; Catalan is only a backstage language. Enquirers' languages have some testimonial presence: leaflets are published in a few foreign languages and translators of a couple of them are employed to work as service providers.[33] By contrast, knowledge of foreign languages is not a requirement for employment with the Spanish Immigration Service.[34] Enquirers' perception that Spanish is the legitimate language to employ is illustrated in the following comments by Hussain (see lines 11-13 and 15). Note that in his talk not speaking Spanish is equated with not speaking at all (see lines 8 and 9).[35]

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[33] However, it is difficult for enquirers to get to know that a given official is for example a specialist in Arabic. Officials' specific linguistic competencies are not made public information in the setting investigated.

[34] It would be interesting to examine the extent to which this institutional policy has an influence on officials' decisions as to language choice in local discursive practice.

[35] This way of referring to not speaking Spanish is not exceptional. I heard it used several times in the setting investigated. It was always employed by enquirers.

Example 8.27[36]

01 *RES: vale -. y si tú no entiendes algo que te dicen -, eh # por ejemplo qué haces
02 preguntas -? o:: <mira no> [>] entiendo me lo puedes repetir o me lo
02 puedes explicar o no?
%tra: okay -. and if you don't understand something they tell you -, uh # for example what do you do do you ask -? or <please I don't> [>] understand could you repeat that or could you explain or you don't?

04 *HUS: <no porque> [<].
%tra: <no because> [<].

05 *HUS: no porque cuando así preguntas ell [///] dicen por ellos tráelo una persona lo que
06 sabe hablar -. por ello lo que esta gente <que está ahí> [>].
%tra: no because when you ask the [//] say bring a person that can speak -. it's them the people <that are there> [>].
07 *RES: <ah sí::> [<]?
%tra: <really> [<]?

08 *HUS: sí -. es circas circas lo que hay circas mira si hay alguien que sabe hablar -, y
09 llamas ellos.
%tra: yes -. it's near near that's near see if there is anybody who can speak -, and call them.

10 *RES: ah pero ellos no te lo explican.
%tra: oh but they do not explain.

11 → *HUS: sí -. si no hay nadas no te dicen -. te dicen oyes habla su idiomas hablas español
12 dicen que ah vale no sabe nadas viene para aquí -. no sé para qué vienes -.vale
13 pero esa persona si xxx vayas -. no hacemos nada.
%tra: yes -. if there is nothing they don't say -. they say listen speak your language speak Spanish they say oh okay you know nothing you come here -. I don't know what you come for -. okay but this person if xxx go -. we do nothing.

14 *RES: o sea si no hablas español ellos consideran que que es tu problema no?
%tra: so if you don't speak Spanish they think it's it's your problem right?

15→ *HUS: sí.
%tra: yes.

16 *RES: no no se esfuerzan para explicarte +...
%tra: they don't make any effort to explain +...

17 *HUS: no no no porque ellos tienen que escribir hija -. que oye si no sabes -, escribes oye
18 toma llévalo hablalo +/.
%tra: no no no because they have to write it dear -. listen if you don't know -, write listen take it talk it over.

Because no minimum standards are required by the institution, officials' foreign language competencies are variable. The official B11 speaks French very fluently due to a period of residence in France. By contrast, her knowledge of English is restricted to a few key words. Her colleague B10's command of English is better than B11's, but still very limited. I never heard him speak French but I would guess he was able to understand and speak it minimally. As regards B09, he is employed as a translator of Arabic. He can speak classical Arabic and has some command of the variety spoken in Iraq, but he is totally unacquainted with Moroccan Arabic, the

[36] Example taken from the interview with Hussain (lines 1040-1056), contained in Appendix C.

variety employed by the majority of his interlocutors.[37] As for English, he is able to communicate quite fluently with his interlocutors, but his range of structures and vocabulary is small. His grammatical accuracy is also rather weak. When asked about their competencies in English, both B09 and B10 admit that they are limited. However, they both point out that their interlocutors' command of English is even more limited. This is part of a reconstructed conversation between B10 and myself:

Example 8.28

01 *RES: *B10 però tu parles anglès no* ?
%tra: but you speak English 010 right?

02 *B10: *poc poc molt poc*.
%tra: little little very little.

03 *RES: *ja però pel que necessites aquí sí no* ?
%tra: yes but it's enough for your needs here right?

04 → *B10: *sí perquè ells encara el parlen pitjor que jo* !
%tra: yes because they speak even worse than I do!

In ensuing talk, the official complains that it is usually very difficult to understand what enquirers are trying to say in English. He is referring to enquirers of South Asian origin, who are almost the only group to employ English to communicate with bureaucrats. I point out that this is due to their accent, which is different from ours. The official disagrees with my perception of the situation and, as in the example above, attributes comprehension difficulties to their poor competence in this language. This is the reconstructed interaction between us:

Example 8.29

01 *B10: *és que costa molt entendre'ls* !
%tra: it is very difficult to understand them!

02 *RES: *és clar, és que tenen un accent diferent* !
%tra: of course because they have a different accent!

03 *B10: *no és que no en saben gaire* !
%tra: no the problem is they know very little English!

[37] His lack of command of Moroccan Arabic made him feel totally inadequate. This may explain why the use of Arabic in the interactions gathered is very restricted. B09's view of his inadequacy is contained in the extract below. The official was requested to appear on TV to give an institutional message in Arabic but refused to do so.

*B09: *imagina't per la tele* [utters a few words in Arabic] *and tots els marroquins ha ha ha* !
%tra: imagine me on TV [utters a few words in Arabic] and all the Moroccans going ho ho ho!

Enquirers' perception is radically different from officials'. For them, communicating in English is almost impossible due to officials' lack of competence. In Hussain's account, South Asians are blamed by officials when communication difficulties arise. Officials state they cannot understand enquirers because of the latter's little knowledge of English. Yet in Hussain's view it is officials' poor command of this language that hinders mutual understanding.

Example 8.30[38]

[...]

01 → *HUS: dicen que normalmente es porque ellos tampoco de gente de España no sabe hablar
02 inglés -. por esto dicen oye tú qué está hablando que yo no entiendo nadas no tú
03 no sabe inglés tampoco -. si ellos no saben -. esto no que él otra persona no sabes -.
04 lo que está diciendo sabes oyes ah vale!
%tra: they say that usually it's because they either people from Spain cannot speak English -. this is why they say listen what are you speaking I don't understand anything no you cannot speak English either -. if they can't -. this is it not that somebody else can't -. the one that's speaking can hears that okay.

05 *RES: ah en realidad o sea los de aquí no saben pero dicen a los de tu país ah tú no sabes.
%tra: oh okay so in fact people here cannot [speak English] but they tell people from your country oh you don't know.

06 *HUS: tú no sabes de qué no entiendo nada de lo que tú quieres decir -. porque primero
07 hablan inglés estos estos no dicen con español.
%tra: you can't [speak English] I don't understand anything of what you're trying to say -. because first they speak English these these don't say in Spanish.

08 *RES: quién esto -? quién?
%tra: who does that -? who?

09 *HUS: <gente de aquí> [>].
%tra: <people here> [>].

10 *RES: <la gente que acaba de llegar> [<]?
%tra: <the people that have just arrived> [<]?

11 *HUS: no no gente de aquí -, primero preguntan tú sabes inglés -? si dicen sí +/.
%tra: no no the people here -, first they ask can you speak English -? if they say yes +/.

12 *RES: a la gente de tu país les preguntan siempre si saben inglés?
%tra: do they always ask the people from your country if they can speak English?

13 *HUS: no no por ejemplo un paisano mío -,.
%tra: no for example a fellow countryman -,.

14 *RES. sí::.
%tra: ye::s.

15 *HUS: llegas vayas esta oficina.
%tra: arrive go to this office.

16 *RES: sí::.
%tra: yes.

17 → *HUS: preguntas # o dicen español gente de aquí los que trabajadores están ahí
18 trabajandos este despacho -, ellos preguntan español -? no -. inglés -? dicen que
19 otra persona dice yes pero ellos dicen [/] preguntan un dos palabras lo que ellos
20 saben después hablandos después no hablan inglés -. habla español que él no sabe
21 nada inglés así diciendo siempres -. porque ellos no sabes -. pero después dice vale

[38] Extract taken from the interview with Hussain (lines 1126-1146), contained in Appendix C.

22 ya toma.
%tra: ask # or they say Spanish people from here the workers are there working this office -, they ask Spanish -? no -. English -? they say that another person says yes but they say [/] ask one or two words whatever they know afterwards speaking afterwards they don't speak English -. they speak Spanish he cannot speak English they always say -. because they don't know -. but afterwards they say okay right there you go.

[...]

In Hussain's last turn (lines 17-22), he describes officials' language behaviour in detail. He asserts that officials claim to be able to speak English but that they only know a couple of words. After uttering them, they quickly code-switch into Spanish. Later, it will be shown how accurate our informant's description is.

Due to their limited abilities in English, both B11 and B10 try to avoid employing this language as often as they can. This works to the detriment of those enquirers who are not competent in Spanish. For both officials the default language of interaction is Spanish. The following encounter illustrates B11's language practices.

Example 8.31[39]

01 *B11: eso qué es para entregar papeles o para mirar ordenador?
%tra: is this to submit documents or to check computer?

02 *EN1: xxx.

03 *B11: eh ?

04 *EN1: 0
%act: hands B11 some documents

05 *B11: te sacan aquí un montón de papeles y no sabes para qué.
%tra: they take out a pile of documents and you don't know what for.

06 *B11: es para entregar -? para mí -? ## sí?
%tra: is this for submission -? for me -? ## yes?

07 *ENQ: sí.
%tra: yes.

08 *B11: esto no está presentado -. esto no está presentado no tiene el sello.
%tra: this has not been entered -. this has not been entered -. it doesn't have a stamp.

09 *UUU: #0_3.

10 *B11: sello?
%tra: stamp?
%act: exemplifies word with her hands

11 *B11: resguardo con el sello?
%tra: copy with a stamp?

12 *EN1: sí sí sí.
%tra: yes yes yes.

13 *B11: tú tú lo tienes # tú?
%tra: you you have it # you?

[39] Transcript OFC01_12.doc.

14 *UUU: #0_2.

15 *B11: a ver ## la primera # primera vez?
%tra: let's see ## the first # first time?

16 → *B11: tú hablas inglés verdad?
%tra: you speak English don't you?
%add: RES

17 *EN2: <xxx> [>].
%com: talks to EN1 in his native language

18 *RES: <sí> [<].

19 *B11: qué es la primera vez que lo presenta?
%tra: is this the first time he presents it?
%add: EN2

20 *EN2: xxx.
%com: talks to EN1 in his native language

21 *EN1: eh::.

22 *B11: esto lo ha presentado alguna vez?
%tra: has he submitted this before?

23 *EN2: xxx.
%com: talks to EN1 in his native language

24 *EN2: eh nada.
%tra: uh nothing.

25 *B11: eh -? no lo ha presentado nunca -. le falta el sello como que ha entrado o que me lo
26 ha traído.
%tra: uh -? he has never entered it -. the stamp showing it has been entered or brought to me is missing.

27 → *EN2: xxx **want entry in registration** xxx.
%add: EN1

28 *EN1: no **but** eh xxx.

29 *B11: no -. es la primera vez porque ya veo que viene preparado con se [//] con las fotos y
30 todo ese tiene que:: tiene que hacer cuatro es que no tenías que haber cogido
31 número no necesitabas número -. el número es para mirar por ordenador.
%tra: no -. it is the first time because I can see that he has everything ready with the pic [//] with the photographs and everything this one has to he has to make four you didn't have to take a number you needed no number -. the number is to check with the computer.

32 *EN2: xxx.
%com: talks to EN1 in his native language

33 *B11: dile que haga los cuatro impresos o si quiere puede hacer fotocopias pero a lo mejor
34 → ahora está cerrado ya -. que haga los [//] estos cuatro igual # cuatro iguales **the**
35 → **same** -. **four the same okay** -? y los presentas allí en las mesas # aquí no allí #
36 → <**okay**> [>] ?
%tra: tell him to fill in the four forms or if he wants he can make photocopies but it might be closed already -. he needs to do the [//] these four of the same # four of the same the same -. four the same okay -? and you enter them there at the tables # not here there # <okay> [>] ?

37 *EN1: <**okay**> [<].

38 *EN2: xxx.

39 *B11: eh -? sí -? pues allí -. todo allí ,, vale?
%tra: uh -? yes -? okay there -. everything there ,, right?

@End

The official is trying to find out what enquirers' service request is. EN2 tries to formulate their request in English (line 27). B11 does not seem to understand. At last, she resorts to the information she is able to obtain visually from the documents enquirers are carrying out to infer what their needs are. The official does not code-switch into English, as she does not speak this language. In one of her final turns, she displays her limited competence by using some of the few pivot words she knows in English. She adds them to her turn to facilitate enquirers' understanding. This official does not claim to know English. She uses gestures and Spanish to communicate because these are the resources she has available. This is another example of how pervasively the institutional order bears upon the interaction order of local linguistic productions.

The language practices of the other official, namely B10, are fairly different. Apart from Spanish, the only other language he employs with enquirers is English. This happens only occasionally. Unlike his colleague B11, he claims he can speak English. As has been shown in Example 8.28, he even claims his competence in this language is higher than the competence of his interlocutors. In local discursive practice, however, he makes every effort to avoid using English. As will be seen in the following examples, his code-switches into English have to be explicitly requested by his interlocutors. When that happens, he switches into that language but reverts to Spanish as soon as he can.

Example 8.32[40]

01	*B10:	to:dos todos -. venga.
	%tra:	a:ll all of them -. come on.
02	*EN1:	0.
	%act:	hands applications over to official
03	*B10:	trae -! cuarenta -. trae:.
	%tra:	come on -! forty -. give them to me.
04	*EN1:	no -. esto esto no esto.
	%tra:	no -. this this not this.
05	*UUU:	esto sí y esto también.
	%tra:	this yes and this as well.
06	*B10:	esto no.
	%tra:	this on.
07	*EN1:	esto sí.
	%tra:	this yes.

[40] Extract taken from OFC05_01.doc.

08 *UUU: xxx.

09 *B10: mayo no:.
%tra: not May.

10 *EN1: no?
%tra: no?

11 *B10: mayo no: -. # mayo no tengo # mayo no.
%tra: not Ma:y -. May I don't have # not May.

12 → *EN1: **not yet**?

13 → *EN1: **computer** sí -. # **please**.

14 *B10: no:: éste éste sí -. éste no -. éste no.
%tra: no this this one yes -. not this one -. this one no.

15 *B10: éste no.
%tra: this one no.

16 *B10: ya estamos aquí cuarenta tí:os # empujando en la barra a ver si nos metemos en la
17 calle siguiente # # <cojones ya> [=! putting on an Andalusian accent] !
%tra: here we're forty mates already # pushing at the bar see if we get to the next street ##
bloody hell [=! putting on an Andalusian accent] !

18 *B10: *bue:no* -! *d'aquí cinc minuts torno a cridar* !
%tra: right -! in five minutes I shall be shouting again !

@Situation: B10 is checking status of ENQ's application

19 → *EN1: **speak english** -. **speak english** sí?
%tra: speak English -. speak English yes?

20 → *B10: venga: **speak english.**
%tra: oka::y speak English.

21 *B10: qué?
%tra: what?

22 *EN1: 0.
%act: indicates he wants to ask a fellow countrymen to help him

23 *B10: sí sí.
%tra: yes yes.

24 *B10: uno eh?
%tra: one right?

25 *B10: éste -. uno -. uno-. tú pa(ra) (a)llí -. uno.
%tra: this one -. one -. one -. you move over there -. one.

26 *EN1: uno.
%tra: one.

27 → *B10: **the last day you can check in computer are ten of may**.

28 *EN2: **may**?

29 *B10: **ten** # **of may**.

30 *EN2: xxx**.**

31 *B10: **seven seventeenth**.

32 *B10: **after one week** ,, **okay**?

33 *EN2: **yes** xxx **after one** <**week**> [>] -. **after one**?

34 *B10: <ai>!

35 *B10: <**after**> [<] **one week today no**.

36 *EN2: <una> [<]?
%tra: <one> [<]?

37 → *B10: éste trámite.
%tra: this one being processed.

38 *EN2: tramite.
%tra: being processed.
%com: stresses word on second syllable

39 *B10: +^ ya le puedes ir contando lo que es tramite.
%tra: +^ you can start telling them what being processed is.
%com: stresses "tramite" on second syllable.

40 *EN2: cómo trámite?
%tra: what being processed?

41 *EN1: qué karó?
%tra: what mate?
%com: enquirers start talking in Punjabi to each other but their conversation is not audible
[...]

In this example, the enquirer's evident lack of understanding of what is going on interactionally (lines 04 to 11) together with his use of English in lines 12 and 13 do not prompt the official to negotiate or change the language of interaction. The enquirer is finally forced to make his linguistic request explicit (line 19). The official responds with a reluctant "*venga*" (okay). His reluctance is indexed by his lengthening of the last vowel in this word. The enquirer indicates that he wants to ask an English-speaking friend to help him communicate with the official. Significantly, this negotiation takes place in Spanish and not in English. Interaction between EN2 and the official starts off in English, as requested (line 27). Yet the official takes advantage of the first occasion in which EN2 uses Spanish, even though the only word he utters is *trámite*, to code-switch back into this language. The conversation then proceeds in Spanish. The official's linguistic behaviour is not guided by a desire to facilitate communication with his interlocutors. On the contrary, his own "needs" are made to prevail. Using Spanish involves less effort for him. Besides, as has been illustrated in previous sections, he can exploit the linguistic asymmetry existing between him and his interlocutors to exercise his social control. Example 8.33 illustrates the same practice again. After being asked to translate a word into English (line 04), B10 provides this translation (line 05), and continues in Spanish (line 08). This official's mode of behaviour in relation to language choice seems to be the rule rather than the exception and fits exactly into Hussain's description in Example 8.30. What is significant about this example is that B10 is the official who claimed in Example 8.28 that his linguistic skills in English were "adequate" because immigrants' abilities were more limited.

Example 8.33[41]

01	*B10:	concedido éste -. fíjate has tenido suerte.
	%tra:	this one's granted -. you've been lucky haven't you?
02	*ENQ:	éste?
	%tra:	this one?
03	*B10:	concedido.
	%tra:	granted
04 →	*ENQ:	pero en inglés [?] ?
	%tra:	but in English [?] ?
05 →	*B10:	**accepted**.
06	*ENQ:	**accepted**?
07	*B10:	hu.
08 →	*B10:	de quién es éste?
	%tra:	whose is this one?
09	*B10:	de quién es?
	%tra:	whose is it?
10	*ENQ:	es de ami [//] mío amigo.
	%tra:	it's from a fri [//] a friend of mine.
11	*B10:	amigo no -? qué amigos que sóis!
	%tra:	friends right -? you're all such good friends!

The remainder of this section is devoted to the examination of B09's language practices. Holding a university degree in Arabic, this official is the most language minded of all. On several occasions he makes comments on his interlocutors' linguistic practices. He is aware that his South Asian interlocutors pronounce some English sounds in a particular manner[42]. He tries to incorporate his interlocutors' phonology into own his linguistic productions to facilitate mutual understanding. This interest also motivates him to experiment with language. At one point he finds out that the temporal phrase "three weeks more" is easier for enquirers to understand than the grammatically correct "three more weeks" and decides to use the former. In spite of his linguistic awareness, there are a few elements in B09's linguistic behaviour which work to hinder rather than facilitate service communication. One of these elements is his rather uncreative use of code-switching. By "uncreative" I mean that he tends to stick to the monolingual norm, whereby only one language of interaction is used at a time. He produces frequent

[41] Extract taken from OFC05_02.doc.

[42] Especially /w/ and /θ/ sounds, which South Asians pronounce /v/ and /t/ respectively.

inter-turn but very few intra-turn switches.[43] By contrast, his interlocutors may employ up to three languages[44] in their turns to get their message across (see encounters OFC05_09.doc and OFC07_01.doc).[45] It is difficult to know in which encounters more creative code-switching practices on the official's part would have facilitated mutual comprehension; yet it is not far-fetched to think that they could have.

One reason to explain interactants' divergent practices as regards code-switching may be that enquirers are more aware of their limited abilities and therefore mobilise all their linguistic resources to make themselves understood. They have a bigger investment in successful communication than enquirers do. However, this alone falls short of providing a complete explanation of this phenomenon. Long-standing linguistic ideologies and/or different linguistic habitus (Bourdieu 1991) may account for it. As it is well-known, code-mixing involving English is well-rooted in the linguistic practices of South Asians but non-existent in our sociolinguistic context.

The second element to be pointed out is the non-negotiated character of B09's language choices. It is fairly impossible to define regularities in his patterns of language choice. He tends to choose Spanish to communicate with enquirers, except when his interlocutors are of South Asian origin. With South Asians, he often employs English as the language of interaction. In fact, he tends to starts off talking to them in English, although this is not always the case. He frequently also chooses Spanish in the initial stages of the interaction. His choices do not seem to be rationally motivated or follow a regular pattern.

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[43] This is of course if we exclude turns containing the word *trámite*, which, as was said in the previous chapter, is always uttered in Spanish.

[44] See transcript OFC04_08.doc.

[45] The languages South Asian enquirers employ bear the traces of their migration trajectories. Many of them speak Italian or French, languages they are unlikely to have learnt in their countries of origin. Particularly interesting is the case of a South Asian enquirer who speaks English with a German accent (see transcript OFC03_01.doc). He is a particularly articulate enquirer and is also quite fluent in English. His German accent indicates that migration seems to be opening up the possibility for enquirers to have access to valuable communication resources like English. One no longer seems to need to go to an English-speaking country to acquire these resources.

More significant than the language the official chooses to start with is the way in which the interaction proceeds. Explicit language negotiation sequences (Codó i Olsina 1998) are infrequent.[46] Significantly, most of them (66%) are initiated by enquirers, and not by bureaucrats. By and large, lack of uptake is the most frequent "method" used by information seekers to show the inappropriateness of bureaucrats' linguistic choices and attempt to change the language of interaction. In view of officials' restricted use of explicit language negotiation sequences, it could be hypothesised that language negotiation takes place in an implicit way. That is to say, officials interpret enquirers' linguistic choices for their turns as displays of linguistic preference and converge to them. By and large, the analysis of the data disconfirm this hypothesis. This is what was referred to before as the non-negotiated character of language choice. Admittedly, lack of convergence can partly be attributed to the frequent breaks characterising the encounters under analysis, but not exclusively. Implicit language negotiation sequences demand that participants be highly attuned to the needs of their interlocutors and monitor their own linguistic productions closely. Routinisation and lack of interactional synchrony, which are the defining traits of these service interactions, work against these demands. Nowhere is routinisation more evident than in the request compliance turn. This turn tends to have a standard code-switched format no matter what the established language of interaction is. This routinised practice is illustrated by the example below.

Example 8.34[47]

01	*B09:	hola.
	%tra:	hello.
02	*ENQ:	0.
	%act:	hands copies of several application forms over to B09
03	*B09:	éste nada -,.
	%tra:	this one no -,.
	%act:	goes through applications first
04	*B09:	éste todavía no -,.
	%tra:	this one not yet -,.
05	*ENQ:	éste no?
	%tra:	not this one?
06	*B09:	hola::!
	%tra:	hello::!

[46] There are only nine in the whole corpus.

[47] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_01.doc.

%add: unknown

07 *B09: vamos por el tres de julio.
%tra: we've got until July third.

08 *ENQ: a ver xxx cinco de julio.
%tra: let's see xxx July fifth.

@Situation: B09 checks status of application

09 → *B09: en trámite -, **three weeks more**.
%tra: being processed -, three weeks more.

10 *EN1: perdón pero esto muchos # día!
%tra: sorry but this many days!

11 *B09: sí -. # en el ordenador en trámite -. yo.
%tra: yes -. # in the computer being processed-. me.
%act: shrugs his shoulders

12 *EN1: [=! laughs].

[...]

The whole interaction takes place in Spanish except for the service compliance turn (line 09). For no apparent reason, the official produces a code-switched utterance in Spanish and English. As was pointed out earlier, the frequent breaks in the interaction motivated by officials' searching routines facilitate switches in the language of interaction. An extreme case is presented in the following extract:

Example 8.35[48]

01 *ENQ: 0.
%act: hands copies of application forms over to B09

02 *B09: éste todavía no está faltan dos o tres semanas para que esté aquí.
%tra: this one is not available yet in two or three weeks it'll be here.

03 *ENQ: **thanks**.

@Situation: B09 checks status of application

04 → *B09: éste está concedido -. # tienes pasaporte?
%tra: this one is granted -. # do you have a passport?

05 *ENQ: sí.
%tra: yes.

@Situation: B09 fills in an official form certifying work permit has been granted

06 → *B09: **in three weeks we send him a letter to come here with photos to fingers**.
%act: makes gesture indicating what he means by 'fingers'

07 → *ENQ: **thank you sir**.

@Situation: B09 checks status of following application

08 → *B09: éste está en trámite -. **three weeks**.
%tra: this one is being processed -. three weeks.

09 *ENQ: gracias.
%tra: thank you.

@End

[48] Extract taken from transcript OFC07_04.doc.

There are three breaks in this interaction. After each break a different language is chosen. Spanish is chosen after the first break (line 04), disregarding the enquirer's previous display of preference for English (line 03). The enquirer converges to the official's language by uttering the adverbial *sí* (yes) in Spanish (line 05). However, after the second break, English is chosen. The enquirer again converges to the language chosen by his interlocutor (line 07). After the third break the official starts off in Spanish again, although the routinisation of his responses leads him to switch back into English to provide the usual temporal adverbial phrase. The enquirer converges to his interlocutor's language for the third time. Enquirers seem to be more attuned to the linguistic displays of officials than vice-versa. This is surprising but not completely unexpected. It seems to be yet another example of the same underlying pattern: the non-negotiated character of the verbal exchanges under examination. The final example in this chapter shows the extent to which enquirers' accommodation to officials' language choice may be generalised practice.

Example 8.36[49]

01	*ENQ:	0.
	%act:	hands application forms over to B09
02 →	*B09:	**only one**?
03	*ENQ:	**no two** -. **only** <**it is not**> [>].
04	*B09:	<**where is**> [<]?
05	*ENQ:	**the name is** eh:: # <**twenty five**> [>].
06	*B09:	<**bring me**> **all the papers**.
07	*ENQ:	+^ **no only paper one**.
08	*B09:	**only one**?
09	*ENQ:	**one paper**.
	@Situation:	B09 starts checking status of applications
10 →	*ENQ:	usted bolígrafo o no me entiendes [?]?
	%tra:	you pen or you don't understand me [?]?
11	*ENQ:	por favor un boli -? un boli?
	%tra:	please a pen -? a pen?
	%add:	RES
12	*RES:	un?
	%tra:	a?
13	*B09:	qué?
	%tra:	what?
14	*RES:	boli?

[49] Extract taken from transcript OFC04_09.doc.

	%tra:	pen?
15	*ENQ:	boli sí -. # una.
	%tra:	pen yes -. # one.
16	*ENQ:	gracias.
	%tra:	thank you.

[...]

The information enquirer is initially addressed by the official in English (line 02). He responds in English as well, and the interaction continues in this language. However, we see how in line 10, the same enquirer addresses me in Spanish. When the official addresses him again, he employs English. As in the previous stretch of talk, the enquirer continues to use this language until the interaction is brought to an end. The enquirer's use of English does not seem motivated by his lack of competence in Spanish but by his perception of what the "appropriate" language of communication is. By accommodating to B09's choices, ENQ contributes to constructing official's interactional dominance.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has examined different forms of individual power, as exerted by public representatives at the public administration site investigated. The exercise of power at this setting draws upon situational and linguistic asymmetries and is related to attempts to construct a closely regimented social and moral order. These attempts are related to bureaucrats' controlled management of time and space, and to the ways in which they make regular negative assessments of different aspects of immigrants' behaviour. Officials lay down the rules of interactional conduct, both as regards the sequencing of activities and the choice of language, limiting their interlocutors' chances of participation in the development of these social events. They draw on structural asymmetries of power and language to mock their interlocutors and produce metacomments which portray them as cheaters and liars. These are but different aspects of the same routine representation of the social field in which these verbal interchanges are embedded. Through their practices, be they structurally conditioned or not, enquirers contribute to making officials' unequal order of relationships real. Public bureaucracies are instruments of social control, where bureaucrats are the vehicles and the executors of institutional power. But

there is an important individual dimension to bureaucrats' constraining behaviour which cannot be underestimated. This individual dimension is at the origin of citizens' feelings of frustration and powerlessness in their dealings with public administrations. When the public institution is an immigration office, and the client group is legally and to a large extent also socially non-existent, processes of domination and social control become amplified, and are more profound.

Conclusions

The present thesis demonstrates that the analysis of situated service communication in an immigration office allows revealing insights into some of the prominent themes in the current social debate. In Spain, the diversity brought about by the arrival of foreign immigrants is calling into question established modes of social conduct. Public institutions play a fundamental role in ensuring equal opportunities. However, the study presented shows that immigrants are not allowed spaces for negotiating a framing of social encounters that respects their fundamental rights and caters for their basic information needs. The talk studied is characterised by multilingual language use, where English emerges as the main language –after Spanish– used for the negotiation of relevant information as well as meaning.

The present thesis shows that language plays a fundamental role in the organisation of social life. The data excerpts provided demonstrate that it is through language use that the participation of certain speakers in the definition of the social arena is enabled or constrained. They also reveal that it is in local activities that social boundaries are created, and that feelings of discrimination and mistrust emerge. The importance of participants' linguistic skills is highlighted by the fact that the encounters examined are focused on the demand and provision of information. As a verbal service, information is given and obtained through linguistic means. The role of the bureaucrats in the process of information exchange is fundamental. This has brought the form and content of their discourse practices to the centre of the analysis. The ways in which they "package" information is shown to facilitate or complicate immigrants' processes of sense making.

The present thesis examines in detail the linguistic and structural features of social exchanges at an immigration office. One of the characteristics that stands out is the "discontinuous" nature of the interactions studied. They are discontinuous in different ways. On the level of linguistic productions, talk does not flow freely. This is due to immigrants' but also bureaucrats' limited abilities in the language or languages of communication. Periods of non-speech are frequent, and a few of the social activities in these exchanges, such as initiations, service requests, and

indications of non-understanding tend to be performed non-verbally. Other silent episodes have structural motivations, such as when the bureaucrat searches for the information requested in the computerised database. The progress of these service interactions is often also disrupted by the numerous brief exchanges that take place between bureaucrats and members of the public who approach the counter for various reasons. Insertion sequences and periods of non-speech produce discontinuity also on the level of language choice. The data shows that choices are unstable, as bureaucrats "lose track" of the linguistic code employed for interacting. This complicates enquirers' sense making processes. Finally, the service interactions presented are "discontinuous" on the level of social relations. The interactional space created is not harmonious, and social contact tends to be reduced to a minimum. On the one hand, bureaucrats make an effort to enact all encounters as "first-time exchanges". They refuse to establish ties of any kind with their interlocutors. On the other hand, during non-verbal episodes, such as when waiting for the computer to show the status of applications, social alignment is not maintained. Through the careful management of bodily posture and gaze, bureaucrats indicate to their interlocutors that they wish to keep the channel of communication closed.

Another characteristic of the interactions analysed is their striking similarity on both a structural and a linguistic level. Structural similarity indexes the tight control that bureaucrats exert over conversational management, where divergences from sequentially expected episodes are ignored until prior activities are accomplished. The two participant groups have unequal possibilities of participation in the construction of these interactional events. The similarity of linguistic productions is explained by the routinisation to which bureaucrats' service compliance turns are subject. These turns are the "core" of the exchange in terms of content and structural function. With regard to content, it is in these turns that information on the status of applications is offered. This is the main goal of the exchange. With regard to structural function, service compliance turns determine participants' subsequent discursive productions.

The process of information exchange is articulated around a few pivot words which bureaucrats produce and immigrants pick up. These lexical items are always produced in Spanish –even by information seekers with no knowledge of the language– and have an unstable meaning. They are the result of bureaucrats' process of reformulation of the information available to them as "insider" participants. The goal of officials' reformulation practices is to simplify the "technical" terms employed by the institution, and to avoid engaging in long processes of meaning clarification. This conflicts with immigrants' efforts to understand the procedure. The interview and interactional excerpts presented show that bureaucrats' messages do not make sense to immigrant information seekers, and that no effort is generally made by institutional representatives to ensure that their talk is understood by their interlocutors.

Bureaucrats' reformulation practices index their particular ideological conceptualisation of their professional duty as information providers. Their accounts do not problematise the ways in which the procedure is not made available to clients. What the procedural import of a particular administrative stage is, and where it stands in relation to the final outcome are hardly ever specified, since this would amount to acting "uninstitutionally". As institutional representatives, bureaucrats are expected to safeguard the interests of the institution by protecting it from public criticism. The data shows that bureaucrats' compliance turns have limited information value. The situation is compounded by the limited linguistic abilities in English or Spanish of many of the information seekers in the corpus. It is thus very difficult for them to be able to demand more specific details, or negotiate the meaning of the pivot words bureaucrats use.

Another major theme addressed by the present thesis is the ways in which institutional power and control are exerted in situated talk. This is illustrated by looking at a change in the institution's policy for providing information to its clients. This change has serious consequences for both immigrants and bureaucrats. Immigrants are no longer offered the opportunity to intervene in the legalisation process by submitting new documentary evidence that demonstrates their arrival in Spain by 1 June 1999. Since the institution ceases to inform them that the

documents submitted have not been accepted, they cannot provide new ones. Crucial information is withheld from immigrants, who get increasingly confused as to what the real status of their applications is.

This creates considerable tension in face-to-face communication, but also among colleagues in the office. Some bureaucrats refuse to implement the new policy, as it contradicts the very essence of their job. It also indicates a complete disregard on the part of the institution for their work. The institutional order of Spanish bureaucracy, traditionally tolerant of the uncommitted and individualistic attitude of its bureaucrats, facilitates the existence of different "fronts", that is, different presentations of reality. This is knowingly consented to by the managerial staff. The situation strains social relations in the office. Bureaucrats are forced to devise ways in which they can comply with the new guidelines while protecting their positive self-image. These strategies hinge on the redefinition of their professional role.

The study undertaken also focuses on immigrants' efforts to contest the information they receive. On a bureaucratic level, their struggles hinge on the submission of new documentary evidence. They try to make sure this new evidence meets the institution's requirements. Forging documents is one of the practices to which those who do not have valid certificates resort. On an interactional level, immigrants' interactional strategies to try to go beyond bureaucrats' ambiguous messages take various forms. To a large extent, their possibilities of contestation are limited by their deficient linguistic competence, but the data shows that challenging bureaucrats' responses is also a matter of individual will. Immigrants with restricted linguistic skills in Spanish and English are able to mobilise a number of discursive strategies to try to satisfy their basic information needs.

Service seekers may take up bureaucrats' pivot words and repeat them, or they may keep silent and signal lack of understanding to force their interlocutors to be more specific, and clarify the meaning of their talk. They may confront individual officials in a more or less direct fashion. Likewise, they may be more or less articulate in their attempts to expose inconsistencies in the information provided, and bring to light the malfunctioning of the institution. Some immigrant enquirers

adopt the attitude of professional clients who are familiar with the bureaucratic procedure. They try to go beyond bureaucrats' uninformative responses by putting forward possible causes for the delay of their applications and suggesting solutions. Finally, other immigrant enquirers resort to making personal appeals which aim to change the institutional footing of the exchange. They try to reframe talk by using a personal mode of talk which positions bureaucrats as individual actors rather than institutional representatives. This is their last resort to get a better service.

None of these strategies allows immigrants to obtain more information, negotiate meaning, or intervene in the unfolding of the exchange. The limits of what is possible for them to know are established beforehand. Information exchange is not negotiated but tightly controlled by the public official. Interactional dominance is more significant in that it draws on and takes advantage of immigrants' limited resources in the languages employed for communication. Bureaucrats employ their situational powers to exert tight control over the process of information exchange, and the sequential structuring of these social events. The discursive strategies which they mobilise to cope with the tensions generated by the conflicting demands made on them are varied.

In the process of information exchange, bureaucrats adopt strategies of ambiguity which hinge on the transmission of minimal and vague details. The change in the institutional guidelines for supplying information causes the suppression of the response requesting the submission of more documentary evidence. However, immigrants keep asking about that possibility. Bureaucrats try to remove all traces of it from interaction. They do so by "teaching" their interlocutors the new institutional meaning of the key word employed. They try to show to immigrants that their questions are no longer relevant. However, they are oblivious to the fact that understanding is not at stake. What immigrants want is to go beyond the passive stance the new guidelines enforce.

With regard to institutional accountability, bureaucrats refuse to pick up on implied requests and implicit challenges to avoid providing "insider" information on institutional arrangements and the procedure. Their main discursive strategy is based on a local redefinition of their professional role-identity. Rather than the "face" of

the institution, they portray themselves as mere "computer checkers". Their role is to transmit the information contained in the computer. They are thus unable to account for changes in the "reported" status of applications. At the same time, they manage to maintain a positive self-image as individual participants in the interaction. This strategy, which constructs them as mere "mouthpieces" rather than "spokespeople", highlights their subordinate and often helpless position within the institutional hierarchy. Bureaucrats' ambivalent position both as members of the institutional team and as individual actors who want to save face is indexed by their fluctuating use of personal pronouns. Institutional or inclusive "we" alternates with individual "I", which gets opposed to collective "they". Other strategies used to pre-empt immigrants' contesting moves are prosody and paralinguistics, which are brought into the interpretation of the extracts. Finally, to counter accusations of institutional arbitrariness, information providers may resort to uttering threats or blaming the client for problems or delays in the processing of applications.

While bureaucrats, by virtue of their position within the institutional hierarchy, are the executors of institutional power, there is an important individual dimension to their exercise of power. The analysis of the data shows how certain discursive practices by bureaucrats constrain immigrants' physical and interactional behaviour, and reinforce existing asymmetries of power. These practices of social control cannot be explained by referring to the institutional conditionings of bureaucrats' talk. They are located on the level of individual motivations, and concern the ways in which information providers as individual speakers enact the professional role of immigration officials. The extracts presented demonstrate how bureaucrats proceed in hegemonic ways, that is, they sustain and reinforce certain ideological representations of the social arena. In these representations, the relationship between bureaucrats and clients is characterised by its numerous asymmetries.

An essential aspect of the reproduction of social asymmetries is related to the characteristics of officials' interlocutors. The present thesis reveals that bureaucrats' practices of power go beyond controlling the interactional, social and physical spaces of the office. They are integrated into a wider project which includes the definition and close regimentation of conduct from a moral perspective. This

regimentation is accomplished through negative assessments of immigrants' behaviour, and in a broader sense, through discursive processes of negative categorisation in which one of the officials regularly engages. What is significant about these categorisations is their "overt" nature, that is, the fact that they get inserted into frontstage talk. This is made possible by the manifest linguistic asymmetries between participants which characterise these encounters. The bureaucrat exploits the lack of linguistic knowledge of his interlocutors to represent them repeatedly as morally reprehensible individuals.

The analysis of processes of negotiation and language choice throws light on the ways in which language is used to create social boundaries and constrain immigrants' possibilities of participation. The differentiated use of Catalan and Spanish creates distinct social spaces for bureaucrats and immigrants. Spanish is the language of Spanish bureaucracy and also the language in which immigrants are addressed. At the office investigated, Catalan functions as the language of the "in-group", which includes most information providers and the researcher. Even when immigrants make an effort to identify symbolically with the "in-group" by using its language, this code-switch is not taken up by officials. This is not necessarily a conscious choice. Specific ethnic groups become associated with specific languages. This association is maintained in bureaucrats' linguistic practices, even when the linguistic evidence available works to contradict it. This explains why the use of English to address the South Asian group tends not to be negotiated or dependent on immigrants' displayed language abilities, but largely imposed.

The use of English proves to be an important resource for South Asian immigrants who have no knowledge of Spanish to communicate with officials. However, immigrants' perception, which is borne out by the interactional data presented, is that the value of English is limited. The main reason lies in the linguistic ideologies underlying the institutional order of Spanish immigration offices. Knowledge of foreign languages is not a requirement to work for the immigration services. This explains the limited English skills of certain bureaucrats, and the fact that immigrants' linguistic capital is often rendered valueless. Another

factor that restricts immigrants' use of English is their particular accent, which is ideologically conceptualised by some officials as indicating lack of competence.

This thesis shows how the linguistic analysis of situated communication between immigrant clients and local bureaucrats at an institutional setting is essential in order to come to an understanding of the asymmetrical representation of ethnic relations underlying institutional and individual social practice in Spain. It also demonstrates how efforts to achieve the inclusion of immigrants' into Spanish society have to be made in all directions. Inclusion is only as real as it is perceived. Negative perceptions arise as a result of situated experiences of discrimination. Both the material and the symbolic dimensions of discrimination need to be addressed.

Further linguistic research in different institutional spaces is necessary to balance out the unequal construction of social relations depicted in this thesis. Communication among linguistically diverse speakers is possible if participants want to understand each other. The analysis of data from different social spheres will surely bring to light new social and discursive realities, and also more equal patterns of social relations. The full picture of diversity in contemporary Spain can then start to be drawn.

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