



Managing impartiality in French tourist offices: Responses to recommendation-seeking questions

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which French tourist officers manage impartiality in telephone calls when faced with recommendation-seeking questions (RSQs). Using Conversation Analysis and drawing on a corpus of 700+ telephone calls, it shows that, by typically avoiding conforming responses, officers resist confirming the evaluative element embodied in RSQs and, thus, avoid making recommendations. Instead, they opt to treat the questions as unanswerable in their own terms, a practice that may be deployed on its own or in conjunction with other practices such as supplying information that will assist callers in making their choices and/or constructing responses as contingent. Further, officers typically do not decline to make recommendations on institutional grounds and, through their choices of interactional practices, obscure the institutional restrictions under which they operate. Thus, the selection of nonconforming responses by tourist officers is shown to contribute to the maintenance of an impartial stance. Finally, the article addresses the notions of affiliation and alignment and shows that nonconforming responses are less disaffiliative than outright rejections.

Keywords

impartiality, recommendations, questions, nonconforming responses, evasion, institutional restrictions, tourist offices, affiliation, French, Conversation Analysis

1. Introduction

This article examines the ways in which representatives of tourist offices (hereafter officers) manage impartiality in telephone calls with their clients.¹ Impartiality (or neutralism) has been examined in news interviews (Clayman, 1988, 1992; Greatbatch, 1988; Heritage

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and Greatbatch, 1991), debate interviews (Emmertsen, 2007), small claims court hearings (Atkinson, 1992) and divorce mediation (Greatbatch and Dingwall, 1997). These studies show that the management of impartiality involves a restriction of interactional activities for the institutional parties and excludes forms of affiliative conduct that may be found in ordinary conversation.

For tourist offices (TOs), impartiality involves treating the services that they advertise in an equitable manner.² The overall purpose of tourist offices is to foster tourism within their respective geographical areas. To do so, tourist offices promote and advertise the services of their partners, that is, of those providers who have entered into a contractual agreement with the tourist office by paying an annual fee. This entitles providers to have their services advertised and promoted in tourist office listings and materials and to be mentioned in response to clients' queries. Although tourist officers are not socialized into impartiality in the same way as journalists and judges may be, in that there is no standard training prerequisite to work as a tourist officer, impartiality in tourist offices emanates from contractual and legal requirements.³ Under the terms of this contractual agreement, tourist offices must treat all partners in an equitable and impartial manner, with implications for a range of interactional activities (e.g. advising, evaluating, recommending, etc.) that may be restricted in practice, though not through formal policy. Although litigation is rare, contractual breaches may be subject to legal challenge.⁴

In the light of these contractual requirements, tourist officers face a dilemma when tourists seek recommendations about particular services, thus threatening the TOs' impartiality. Further, maintaining impartiality in TOs must be balanced with the need to maintain rapport with clients and with the TOs' other institutional goals, which include, amongst others, providing reliable information about their areas, processing bookings, organizing and managing guided visits, marketing, selling local goods, etc. Thus, officers must manage a range of conflicting demands, some of which potentially legislate against, or conflict with, what is needed to deliver effective customer service.

This article examines some of the ways in which officers manage impartiality in telephone calls when they are asked recommendation-seeking questions (RSQs). Following a brief section about data and methods, I show briefly that information-seeking questions (ISQs) are treated unproblematically before examining RSQs and their responses. In the final section, I address the issue of affiliation and discuss some of the ways in which the officers' responses enable them to balance impartiality and affiliation.

2. Data and method

This study draws upon a corpus of 700+ telephone calls between French TOs and their clients. The entire corpus was examined for instances of recommendation-seeking questions, and approximately half the corpus has subsequently been transcribed and analysed in detail. The analysis draws on Conversation Analysis, which entails a detailed empirical examination of the sequential organization of turns at talk and the actions they accomplish (Schegloff, 2007; Sacks, 1992). Turns are understood to be responsive to just prior talk and consequential for next turns (Sacks et al., 1974). How people produce and make sense of social action can be demonstrated through close examination of a turn's design, placement and interactional relevance. Transcriptions use the Jeffersonian system (2004).⁵

3. Information-seeking questions and recommendation-seeking questions

3.1. Information-seeking questions (ISQs)

Asking a question exerts a pressure and sets constraints on what the recipient should do next. Wh-Questions (WhQs) and Yes/No Questions (YNQs) constrain, to some degree, the responses that the tourist officers may give. YNQs invite a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (dis)confirmation, and WhQs project the type of formulation that should stand for the Wh- item (see Raymond, 2003 on type-conforming responses to YNQs).⁶ The expectation of a fitted response is heightened in this institutional context by the TOs’ role as information providers. In most calls, clients seek information and officers regularly provide it using type-conforming responses (excerpts 1 to 3).⁷

[1] [Chevalier HTO26.07.R1WS320052.CELR]

3 Clt: Excusez-/moi d’vous déran\ger j:e vous ap/pelle pou:reuh- >u:ne petite info qu’on
Sorry to disturb \you I: am /calling you fo:r uh- > a: little bit of info that I am

4 m’del\man:de< et je n’sais pas du tout. (.) .hh si le pont de [Name] on peut le
\a:sked< and I don’t know at all.(.) .hh whether the bridge of [Name] can be

5 traverser à vélo((hh)).(.) Est-ce que vous savez vo[u((hh))s].
crossed by bike((hh)). (.) do you know you((hh)).

6 Off: [°Alors #ui.# on peut le traverser
 [°Okay #yea.# it can be crossed

7 [à vé]/lo: et c’est gra\tui((hhh))t°
[by /bi]:ke and it’s free((hhh))°

At lines 3–5, the client asks with a YNQ if the officer knows whether bicycles are allowed on the local bridge. The officer confirms that they are with a ‘yes’ (*ui*) and a partial repetition of the prior turn, indicating further that there is no toll for bicycles.

[2] [Chevalier HTO 1.08.R2WS320121BR]

4 Clt: oui bon/jou:r = j’voulais sa/voir pour le marché noc/turne à ((Town name)) =
Yes he/llo:=I wanted to /know about the eve/ning market in ((Town name)) =

5 Off: =/oui:
 =/ye:s

6 (0.2)

7 Clt: .h i commence à /quelle heure,=
.h it starts at /what time uh,=

8 Off: =>alors c’est le mercredi /s((h))oir à part((h))ir de d((h))ix-sept \heures,<
 =>so it’s (on) Wednesday /eveni((h))ngs fro((h))m fi((h))ve \pm,<

Here, the client enquires with a WhQ about the time the night market begins (line 7). The starting time, along with the day that the market is open, is provided in the next turn.

Where the information is not available, the officers also respond unproblematically with the dispreferred type-confirming 'no'. In extract 3, the question is framed as to whether the officer *knows* the price of a particular service, which enables the tourist officer to provide a 'don't know' type response in the form of a type-confirming 'no' (*non*) that is nonetheless responsive to the question in the way in which it was framed.

[3] [Chevalier HTO1.08.DWB0039BR]

52 Clt: /d'accord. (0.1) .hh et vous savez combien ça coûte
/right. (0.1) .hh and you know how much it costs

53 la location ou[:
the rental or: [:

54 Off: [du tout du tout. Hein. Non non.
[at all at all. Uh. No no.

In sum, ISQs regularly receive straightforward answers that meet the grammatical constraints that the questions exerted.

3.2. Recommendation-seeking questions (RSQs)

In contrast, RSQs regularly do not receive such fitted answers. Officers who are asked RSQs typically avoid producing type-confirming responses. What distinguishes RSQs from ISQs is that the former embody an evaluation or a presupposition that a particular provider is recommendable.

[4] [Chevalier HTO 25.07.R1WS320137CYR]

Clt: = >(DON) LE↑QUEL EST L'↑PLUS SYMPA
= > (SO) ↑ WHICH ONE IS THE NICEST/COOLEST

[5] [Chevalier HTO-28.07.R1WS320192CER]

Clt: =alors >[ch'] voulais sa\oir< vous m'conseillez l'que:l.
= so >[I] wanted to \know< you recommend /advise whi:ch one (for me),

The evaluative element is embodied explicitly in the question when the latter includes an assessment (excerpt 4), and implicitly when the question includes a presupposition that one provider is recommendable above others and, therefore, better (excerpt 5). A type-confirming response would confirm the evaluative element embodied in the question. Thus, type-confirming responses are problematic for officers who operate under the constraint of institutional impartiality.⁸

Further, RSQs also make a recommendation sequentially relevant, which ISQs do not. In other words, a response fitted to the RSQ is not just an answer to the question. It is also a recommendation. Generally, RSQs are not prefaced with 'I wonder if' or such like.⁹ Their non-prefaced format not only displays their speakers' treatment of them as

non-contingent, but also constructs the callers as being entitled to what they are requesting (see Curl and Drew, 2008, on contingency and entitlement in requests). Further, these questions do not orient to the officers' ability to provide the response. '*Pouvez-vous/pourriez-vous*' (can/could you), '*seriez-vous en mesure de*' (are you able to) do not occur in RSQs. The absence of such an orientation and of prefaces suggests that the format of RSQs may be connected to an orientation to the role of TOs as information providers. It may also be related to the RSQs' relationship to the reason for calling. RSQs are systematically not the reason for calling. They do not occur in the anchor position or as the first item of business (Schegloff, 1986). They systematically occur after the reason for calling has been dealt with. They are, to an extent, a 'bonus' and their sequential position does not impede the satisfaction of the reason for calling. The design of RSQs suggests that callers orient to the provision of the information requested as being within the officers' remit and as something that they (the callers) are entitled to. This only serves to reinforce the fact that the very act of questioning claims a lack of knowledge about the matters enquired about on the questioner's part, a gap in knowledge and information that the question claims can be filled by the answerer (see Heritage and Raymond, in press). Thus, the grammatical, sequential and interactional parameters are strongly tilted towards the provision of the recommendations that the clients seek. Yet the officers avoid producing type-conforming responses that could be heard as recommendations.

4. Not answering the question

Various ways of not answering questions have been investigated, including 'answering more than the question' in medical history-taking (Stivers and Heritage, 2001: 151) and small court hearings (Atkinson, 1992), using alternative descriptions to avoid 'what the question asks' in cross-examinations (Drew, 1992: 490), the selection of non-conforming responses to Yes/No interrogatives as a means of managing misalignments between speakers (Raymond, 2003), question evasion in political news interviews (Bull, 1994; Bull and Mayer, 1993; Clayman, 1993, 2001; Harris, 1991) and parliamentary debate (Rasiah, 2009). Responses to RSQs display a range of ways in which the officers evade the questions. Although Clayman (2001: 406) treated evasion as 'actions that are treated as inadequately responsive by the (. . .) participants', here 'evasion' and 'resistance' are used broadly to refer to responses that depart from the question, its terms or agenda, since they are not systematically treated as 'inadequately responsive'. Responses to RSQs are instances of what Stivers and Hayashi (2010: 1) call 'transformative answers' with which recipients 'retroactively adjust the question posed to them'.

5. Responses to RSQs

In this section, I examine responses to RSQs. I show that tourist officers regularly avoid producing conforming responses to such questions. Since structurally, YNQs and WhQs prefer a 'yes' or 'no' or a specific item standing for the Wh- item, the selection of a non-conforming response displays the answerer's treatment of the question as problematic (see Raymond, 2003). Nonconforming responses reset the grounds or premises under which the question may be answered and the response understood. Stivers and Hayashi

(2010: 1) identify a question's design and its agenda as the two main targets of transformation. Here, the officers' responses typically operate on the RSQs' agendas. The avoidance of conforming responses enables the officers to resist both the presuppositions embodied in the questions and the constraints set by their terms. I propose that it is in producing nonconforming responses resisting these presuppositions and constraints that the officers maintain an impartial stance. In what follows, I show that officers systematically treat RSQs as unanswerable and use a range of practices that result in the officers avoiding making recommendations, whilst not doing so on institutional grounds.

Although officers systematically treat RSQs as unanswerable in the ways in which they are posed, a range of unanswerability accounts for not providing the preferred recommendations that are being sought may be involved. One type of unanswerability account involves treating all providers as equally good. In excerpt 6, following a request for available hotels for the coming weekend and the provision by the officer of the names and phone numbers of three places, the client asks the officer to recommend the hotel that is nicer/cooler (line 119).¹⁰

[6] [Chevalier HTO25.07.R1WS320137CYR]

- 119 Clt: = >(DON) LE↑QUEL EST L'PLUS SYMPA DES TROIS
 = > (SO) ↑ WHICH ONE IS THE NICEST/COOLEST OUT OF THE THREE
- 120 MAR↓LIN: BELVEDERE OU MANET<
 MAR↓LIN: BELVEDERE OR MANET<
- 121 Off: >Bah ce sont trois hôtels de charme hein= donc les troi(h):s<
 >Well they are three hotels with charm uh= so all th(h)ree:
- 122 sont vraiment sym- sont vraiment bien.=¹¹
 are really coo- are really nice.
- 123 Clt: = >D'accord. Ils sont près du po((h))rt?<
 = > Right. They are near the harbour((h))r?<

The format of the RSQ embodies a presupposition that one of the hotels is nicer and invites one name. It receives instead a nonconforming response that describes all three hotels as equally nice, the officer treating 'sympa' (nice/cool) as pertaining to the style of the places (hotels with charm) rather than to their quality. The response adjusts the question by resisting its presupposition that one of the hotels is nicer. In doing so, the response treats the question as not answerable in the way in which it was posed, the 'bah' (well) evidencing its non-straightforwardness (see Schegloff and Lerner, 2009 on non-straightforward 'well' in English). Although the officer treats all three hotels as equally nice, this is not done 'neat'. It is prefaced by a description of the three hotels as having charm. This preface provides epistemic grounds for the selection of a nonconforming response. It supports the resistance embodied in the response and resets the grounds upon which the response is forthcoming. The interactional advantage of prefacing is that they may restrict the potential for pursuit that an unprefaced nonconforming response may engender. In sum, the evaluative component of the question is not confirmed, and the selection of a nonconforming response enables the officer to avoid making a recommendation based on interactional rather than institutional grounds.

The treatment of the question as unanswerable may be done implicitly, that is, without officers actually declining to make recommendations, as in the previous example, or more explicitly (excerpt 7) when officers treat the providers being discussed as incomparable and the question as not warranted. Here, the client has called to enquire about available accommodation for the upcoming weekend. She enquires, unsuccessfully,¹² about the facilities differentiating two- and three-star accommodation and asks for names of hotels in both categories (not shown). She is given one name in each category and seeks a recommendation (line 196).

[7] [Chevalier HTO 15. 03. WS320134V3BR]

- 196 Clt: .hh d'accord. .h a/lors ENTRE CES DEUX-/LÀ: lequel vous me recommanderiez.
.hh right. .h /so BETWEEN THESE TWO: which (one) would you recommend.
 (1.2)
- 197 Off: Bah- c'est pas des hô/tels de même catégo/ri:e donc je peux pa:a:s répondre à une
Well- they aren't ho/tels in the same catego/ry: so I ca:nno:t answer a
- 198 question euh:: comme ce↑la: . h
question uh :: like ↑tha:t .h ((exasperated tone))
- 199 (0.5)
- 200 Off: Donc c'est un peu plus /cher: hein pour le Drapeau \Blanc = ce::: c'est
So it is a little more /expensi:ve uh for the Drapeau \Blanc = i:::t it's
- 201 un hô/tel de cha:rme,
a hotel with cha:rm,
- 202 (1.2)
((the client then asks what the tariffs are for the Drapeau Blanc))

The RSQ invites the name of one of the hotels. It embodies a presupposition that one of the two hotels is recommendable and, thus, better. The formulation of the question also introduces the notion of agency with the subject pronoun 'vous' (you) and verb 'recommander' (recommend) and, with it, the presupposition that the officer can make such a recommendation. The response resists the embodied presupposition that one hotel is recommendable on the basis that, being in different categories, they are not comparable and do not enable the officer to answer the question (lines 197–8). With the dysfluency on 'a question uh:: like ↑tha:t', the pitch increase on '↑tha:t' and the exasperated tone, the response serves to construct the client's question as unreasonable or flawed. The failure to answer is built as the product of the question being flawed (a question uh:: like ↑tha:t), resulting in the officer's inability to promote this 'flawed' course of action.¹³ This extract displays a practice described by Clayman (2001: 423) in news interviews, which consists in a recipient attacking the question, thus 'deflect[ing] the discussion away from the substance of the question and toward the manner in which it was raised'. Interestingly, although the difference in categories enables the officer to avoid providing a type-conforming response, it also endows her response with a presupposition of its own (had the hotels been in the same category, she would have been able to compare them and

make a recommendation). Having constructed the question as embodying a flawed or unreasonable course of action, the officer uses this very difference in hotel categories to construct herself as reasonable rather than obstructive (had the hotels been similarly categorized, she could have answered the question), even if somewhat perniciously. With no uptake by the client, she provides an informing about one of the hotels (lines 200–1), leading the client to request tariffs for that hotel before enquiring about the quality of the hotels (not shown). Thus, by treating the question as flawed and attacking it, the officer locates the source of the problem in the form of the question itself rather than in any institutional constraint that may be operational in the tourist office. In so doing, she avoids a) answering the question, b) addressing the presupposition that officers can make recommendations and c) making a recommendation. In both cases above, the officers treat the RSQs as unanswerable and avoid accounting for the evasion and non-recommendation as a matter of institutional constraint.

Whilst officers may simply treat RSQs as unanswerable on grounds of (in)comparability, leaving callers to derive for themselves the fact that recommendations will not be forthcoming, they may also deploy this type of unanswerability in conjunction with other practices. In excerpt 8, the client has requested the names of boat companies running tours to the local bridge, a key landmark. She is given three names and phone numbers, the last one of which she knows (line 29).

[8] [Chevalier HTO-28.07 R1-WS320192CE]

- 27 Off: [Et (.) la] jolie Man:chë, .hhh
[And (.) the jolie Man:chë, .hhh]
- 28 (0.2)
- 29 Clt: Ah j'le connai:s c'ui-là. (.) On fai[:të] :: chu pas
Oh I know: it that one. (.) In fa:[ct uh]:: I'm not
- 30 Off: [ah]
[oh]
- 31 Clt: touri:s chuis journali:ste, = alors >[ch'] voulais sa\oir< vous
a touri:s I'm a journa
- 32 Off: [oui,]
[yes,]
- 33 Clt: m'conseillez l'que:l
recommend /advise whi:ch one (for me),
- 34 (0.2)
- 35 Clt: ha[hehh
ha[hehh]
- 36 Off: [*euh[::* (b-)]
[*uh[::* (w-)]

- 37 Clt: [.hh \$pa':]ce qu'en fait j'fai-\$ (.) hhe heh[h
[.hh \$cu:]z in fact I'm doin-\$ (.) hhe heh[h
- 38 Off: [*euh:: on peut pas vraiment >en
[*euh:: we can't really
- 39 cons[eiller] ↑un< = donqueuh: ils pro\posent
>reco[mmend] ↑one< = so uh: they \offer
- 40 Clt: [n:on.]
[n:o.]
- 41 Off: tous les deux, .hh >euh la même< prestation, >si vous voulez- < aller sous le pont
both of them, .hh >uh the same< service, > if you like-< going under the bridge
- 42 d'((name)), passa:gë du pont et remontée d'la ((river's name)),
of((name)), cro:ssing uh under the bridge and going upstream on the ((river's name)),
- 43 (.)
- 44 Clt: ptk /mo[uais,]
ptk /my[eah,]
- 45 Off: [.hh]h les commentaires se: se re\joignent aus/si[((h))]
[.hh] the commentaries a:re are ↓similar /too[((h))]
- 46 Clt: [Bon((h)).]
[Goo((h))d.]
- 47 Off: parce qu'y parlent t((h))ous les ↓deu::x, d'la pê:: [:che, d'la-]
because they talk ↓bo::th of th((h))em, about fi::[:shing, about the-
(6 lines deleted about the actual number of boat companies, starting in overlap
with line 47))
- 54 Off: = H[ein c'est diffi:ci:]le hein, c'est des an[ciens p]êcheurs les =
=u[h it's diffi:cu:]lt uh, they are former fishermen the=
- 55 Clt: [.hhh] [↓Oué]
[.hhh] [↓yeah]
- 56 Off: = troi:s °donqueuh:°
=three: (of them) °so uh: °
- 57 (.)
- 58 Clt: ↑d'accor:d
↑Ri:ght
- 59 Off: °y sont t[rè::s°
°they are very::°
- 60 Clt: [>C'est des]pêcheurs les troi:s = y s[ont] tous
[> they are fishermen the three: of them= they a[re] all

- 61 Off: [ou.i.]
[ye:s.]
- 62 Clt: les trois /sympa:s,< (.) .hh[hh]
three (of them) /ni:ce,< (.) .hh[hh]
- 63 Off: [/m:ouai:s] voilà:: [donqueuh:;] (en/un-) l'un
[/M:yea:h] that's i::t. [so uh:;] (in/one-) one
- 64 Clt: [donqueuh:;]
[so uh:;]
- 65 Off: ou l'au/trë hein.
or the o/ther uh.
- 66 (0.3)
- 67 Clt: °/Okay.°
°/Okay.°
(0.2)
((the client then asks whether the tours are run daily))

At lines 31–3, the client identifies herself as an institutional party (a journalist) before producing an RSQ that embodies a presupposition that one of the providers is recommendable and that the officer can make such a recommendation. It invites a company name as a response, which it does not receive. Following a beat of silence (line 34), the client produces a post-completion stance marker (Schegloff, 2007), laughter (line 35), that displays delicacy and possible trouble resistance (see Jefferson, 1984), and orients to the possible inadequacy of her question for this recipient. Following the officer's incipient dispreferred response (line 36), the client launches an account, still delivered as delicate, which she cuts off in favour of laughter (line 37). It is at this sequential point of trouble and insistence that the officer rejects the presupposition that officers can make recommendations by orienting to an inability to recommend one particular provider (lines 38–9). The officer first treats the RSQ as seeking a recommendation/evaluation. Her response is ambiguous, upon its production, as to the underlying reason why a recommendation cannot be made, although inability rather than unwillingness is suggested through '*on peut pas*' (we can't). Her subsequent elaboration (second TCU of lines 39–41) disambiguates this by providing an overt reason for not answering the request for recommendation (they offer the same service). The inability to answer the question is also hinted at in the prosodic delivery (emphasis and pitch rise) of the '↑*un*' (↑one) and is further modulated by the adverb '*vraiment*' (really). The prosodic delivery of '*un*' (one), in particular, makes the declination hearable not as a generic inability to recommend, but as an inability to recommend *one* provider in *this* particular case, which is accounted for by the subsequent elaboration (because they offer the same service).¹⁴

Unlike the previous cases where the officers provided a type of unanswerability account that was sufficient for callers to infer that no recommendations would be made, in this case having first oriented to the RSQ as seeking a recommendation/evaluation and having displayed an inability to recommend *one* provider in *this* particular case,

the officer proceeds with supplying information about the services being discussed that will enable the caller to rank and select the best provider for herself. The move to information giving is displayed in lexical choices such as the use of the infinitive ‘*aller*’ (to go/going) and nouns ‘*passage*’ (crossing) and ‘*remontée*’ (going upstream). The information provided also accounts for the officer’s inability to make a recommendation, since the description that she provides casts the companies as equivalent (they offer the same service), specifies why one cannot be recommended (similar experience and service and all equally good) and culminates in an upshot ‘So uh: one or the o/ther uh’ (lines 63–5).¹⁵ Similarly to excerpt 6, this case instantiates the practice of casting all providers as equivalent and thus not discernible from one another. Again, this is not done ‘neat’, but is prefaced by a description of the services offered that is used as grounds for supporting the question evasion. In sum, the nonconforming response resists making a recommendation, but does so through the display of practices that operate in conjunction with one another. The inability to provide a recommendation is mitigated by the provision of materials that can assist the client in making a decision.

Another type of unanswerability account can be observed in an additional practice that officers deploy for managing impartiality and avoiding making recommendations to RSQs. On occasions, the officers do mention the name of a provider in response to RSQs. In such cases, they maintain an impartial stance by selecting nonconforming responses that enable them to manage their responses as contingent. In excerpt 9, the client has called to enquire about hotels available for the forthcoming weekend. He is given three names and contact details and issues an RSQ (lines 85–7).

[9] [Chevalier HTO 24.07R1WS320097CYR]

85 Clt: ↓D’ac[cord. .h s]ur les trois que vous v’nez d’m’e citer là l- celui qu’a
↓Rig[ht. .h out of the three that you have just listed now w-the one that has

86 Off: [° (- - -) °]

87 Clt: l’plus de charme ou qui est l’plus sympa c’est l’quel_i
the most charm or that is the coolest/nicest it’s which one_i

88 (0.8)

89 Off: °Bon /alo:rs euh::° (3.6) ((types on keyboard)) °Bah ça dépen::d euh::° c’que vous
°well /so: uh::° (3.6) ((types on keyboard)) °well it depen::ds uh::° what you

90 \recherchez, (0.1) .hh vous me ↑di qu’ vous avez un- (.) un enfant_i
\are looking for, (0.1) .hh you ↑tell me that you have a- (.) a child_i

91 (.)

92 Clt: Euh oui:: un: un bébé oui.
Uh ye::s a: a baby yes.

93 Off: Oui. Alors madame Tarchet a un équip’ment pour les bébés,
Yes. So Missiz Tarchet has facilities for babies,

94 (0.8)

95 Clt: N'accord,
Right,

96 Off: Euh:: que n'ont pas les autres hein.
Uh:: *that the others do not have uh.*

97 (0.2)

98 Off: Donc >c'est vrai que ça s'rait p'têt plus
So > *it is true that it might be more*

99 pratique< euh[:
practical/handier< uh :[:

100 Clt: [*Ouais.* Ça peut ê[t pra]tique ouais.
[*Yeah.* *it may be handy/practical yeah.*

101 Off: [pour vous_i]
[for you_i]

102 (0.4)

((the client then enquires about what the hotels have in common, complaining that it is difficult to make a choice over the telephone))

Following a 0.8 second pause after the RSQ, the officer resists the presupposition that one of the hotels is nicer or has more charm by resisting the constraint to provide the name that was made conditionally relevant. In avoiding the production of a type-conforming response, she resists making a recommendation. She builds her response as non-straightforward and as contingent (lines 89–90), first, upon information available on the computer and, second, upon the client's personal preference '°well it depen::ds uh::° what you are \looking for', subsequently shifting the question's agenda from a place that is nice to one that has baby facilities (line 93). What follows then is to be understood by reference to this contingency. The mention of one venue (Missiz Tarchet's) as part of an informing is produced by virtue of it being contingently fitted to the client's circumstances (having a baby, which he mentioned earlier in the call) rather than by reference to its being nicer. A gap and a minimal acknowledgement token (lines 94–5) suggest that the relevance of that information is not immediately clear to the client who orients to it as in progress, prompting the officer to emphasize the contrast with the other places (they do not have baby facilities – line 96) and the relevance of *this* informing for *this* client (it may be handier for him: lines 98–101). This is done through an assessment, which is agreed with and receipted with another assessment downgraded from 'handier' to 'handy' (Pomerantz, 1984). Thus, the nonconforming response allows the officer to avoid making a recommendation, whilst marking the mention of a particular venue not as a recommendation, but hearable as contingent upon the clients' circumstances.

Excerpt 10 comes from the same call as excerpt 7 earlier. As noted, the client has failed to obtain the recommendation she wanted. At line 367, she issues another RSQ about accommodation types.

[10] [Chevalier HTO15.03.WS320134V3BR]

367 Clt: = d'accord. .hh EUH:: A/LORS EUH:: en- entre euh::: euh cha:mbre d- de: d'hôtes et
=Right. .hh UH:: /SO UH:: be-between uh::: uh Bee: and- Bee: and

368 hô/tel: euh:: .hh euh vous r'comm[andez quelque chose pl]us
ho/tel: uh:: .hh uh you recomm[end something more

369 Off: [bah après:::s]
[well afte:::r]

370 Clt: particulièremen:t ou euh:ç
particular:ly or uh:: ç

371 (0.2)

372 Off: .hh >bah après< c'est plus indépen/dan:t °la cham:bre /d'hôtes hein.°
.hh > well afte< it is more indepen/den:t °the Bee: and /Bee uh. °

373 (0.2)

374 Clt: *n'/d'a*cco(h))rd.
*n /ri*gh((h))t.

375 (0.2)
(the client pursues the matter of independence by asking whether guests are free
to come and go as they please in B&Bs)

The question is produced as a declarative inviting a confirming 'yes'. It is marked as delicate and prefers the name of one type of accommodation: hotel or B&B.¹⁶ The declarative format of the turn claims greater access to the information asked about than an interrogative, and thus embodies more strongly the speaker's presupposition that the officer can recommend one accommodation type in its own right, which the nonconforming response resists. The officer's response declines to favour either category of accommodation. At the point where what the turn is doing is recognizable (after the second syllable of '*recommandez*' (recommend)), the officer overlaps with '*bah*' (well), signalling the non-straightforwardness of what is to come, whilst the '*après*' (afterwards) projects that what follows is to be heard in the light of what has been discussed so far. Although one type of accommodation is mentioned (line 372), it is prefaced by an assessment which frames the rest of the response (it is more indepen/den:t). The reference to independence is predicated upon a preference that the client has expressed earlier in the call and to which she later returns. In other words, it constructs the selection of B&Bs as contingent upon the client's preferences rather than as a claim that they are better in themselves. However, the declarative format seeks a confirmation or denial. In this respect, it is suited to pursuits such as this because it 'restricts the terms within which [epistemic] rights may be exercised' (Heritage and Raymond, in press). Here, having previously tried to secure a recommendation, the client now seeks to constrain the terms within which the officer may address her question and to exert pressure on her to confirm a state of affairs that has been marked as presupposed by the format of the RSQ.

Excerpt 11 comes from the same call as excerpts 7 and 10 earlier. Having previously failed to secure a recommendation about accommodation on two occasions, the client has one last try (lines 387–9).

[11] [Chevalier HTO15.03.WS320134V3BR]

- 387 Clt: d'ac\cord [.hh mai::s] vous a/vez: = je sais pas = des ra/pports de d'autres
 \Right. [.hh bu::t] you /ha:ve= I don't know= re/pports from other
- 388 Off: [(-)]
- 389 Clt: tou/ristes qui vou:s vous qui privilè/gient un endroit plutôt qu'un autre,
 tou/rists who you: you who prior/itize a place rather than another,
- 390 (0.4)
- 391 Clt: .hh[h ((breathing))
- 392 Off: [en termes d'héberge↑ment? =
 [in terms of accommo↑dation ?=
- 393 Clt: = oui((h)).
 =ye((h))s.
- 394 (0.3)
- 395 Off: .hh oh on a tou:t euh:: ↓type de clien/tèle hein= y en a qui pré/fèrent les hô/tel::s
 .hh oh we have every: uh:: ↓type of clien/tele uh=there are those who pre/fer ho/tel::s
- 396 °d'autres les: cha:mbres /d'hôte:s euh:°
 °others Bee: and /Bee:s uh: °
- 397 (0.1)
- 398 Clt: /d'accord = donc y a /pa:s un: particulièrement qui soit euh
 /right = so there is /no:t o:ne particularly that might be uh
- 399 recomman/da:bles eu[h]:
 recommen/da:ble u[h]:
- 400 Off: [n:an. (.) [nannan.]
 [n:o. (.) [nono.]
- 401 Clt: [.hhh] d'ac\c((h))ord bon.
 [.hhh] \righ((h))t good/okay.

At lines 387–9, the client uses a declarative formatted RSQ. Again, by claiming a degree of access to, and knowledge of, the matter being enquired about, the selection of a declarative format seeks further to constrain the terms of the response (Heritage and Raymond, in press) and invites confirmation or denial, in the first instance. In the event, the gap (line 390) followed by the officer's other-initiated repair (line 392), which disrupts the progressivity of the sequence and allows a type-conforming response to be bypassed, operate as pre-rejection or at least project an upcoming dispreferred response.

Either type-conforming response is problematic for the officer. ‘No’ alone would be hearable as abrupt and accountable. It could also be heard as treating the client’s RSQ as enquiring purely about the existence of reports. A stand-alone ‘yes’ would clear the way for a question about which particular place(s) are preferred. The officer’s response (line 395) does not deny that the office has reports from other tourists. Rather, it treats the question as one whose answer is contingent upon the fact that different people have different tastes. This contingency serves to treat the RSQ as unanswerable and to decline to make the recommendation that the client is leading up to, the delay at line 394 and the ‘oh’ preface displaying a problem with the question’s relevance, appropriateness or presupposition (Heritage, 1998). The officer’s response embodies an outcome that the client is left to derive for herself: if there are clients who like all sorts of places, then no one place is recommendable (lines 398–9), an understanding confirmed by the officer. The client acknowledges this confirmation and eventually gives up trying to secure a recommendation. It is interesting to note that, as the caller pursues recommendations throughout the call, the format of her pursuits is sensitive to the sequential environment of rejection and resistance that has developed so far. Her attempts go from a request for a recommendation in which both a course of action is openly lexicalized (‘recommend’, in excerpt 7) and a presupposition that this is a suitable course of action is embodied to declaratives that attempt to restrict the terms of the responses.

As we have seen, officers who receive RSQs typically avoid producing the type-conforming responses that would constitute the recommendations that the clients seek. Clayman (2001: 423) noted that, in political news interviews, ‘the most notably benign practice involves refusing to answer AS A MATTER OF GENERAL POLICY’ (emphasis in the original). The above cases show that typically tourist officers do not use policy as grounds for refusing to make recommendations. The officers generally do not invoke, *in the first instance*, institutional constraints as a reason for not producing sequentially-relevant recommendations.¹⁷ Neither do they use evasion to close the sequences. Instead, whilst they fall short of making recommendations, they can be heard to do work to speak to at least some of the terms of the questions by providing material that may assist the clients in making choices. The next excerpt illustrates just what a fine line the officers tread in attempting to speak to at least some of the terms of the RSQs. Generally, both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ conforming responses are avoided in RSQs. The next excerpt is the only case that receives a type-conforming response (line 112). It will be shown, however, that its occurrence is mandated by its sequential position following an attempt (that backfires) by the officer to characterize a venue in the client’s terms. The client has enquired about B&B accommodation for the coming weekend for approximately 120 euros per night, which the officer equates with a superior category. The officer gives the client a list of names and tariffs in a lower category, not making it entirely clear that nothing remains available in the superior category (data not shown).

[12] [Chevalier HTO24.07.VN960 DW0A0010CY]

92 Clt: Et en catégo*ri*e euh: .h supérieu*re*;
And in a .h superior category: uh::ç

93 (.)

- 94 Off: Beh écoutez là je n'en ai plus *en::* en catégorië:: largement supérieure non.
*We'll listen at the moment I no longer have any *in::* in a largely superior category no.*
- 95 (0.4)
- 96 Clt: (>Pas du[tout<])
 (>Not at [all<])
- 97 Off: [LA LA j'dirai que le le::: le supérieur ça va être peut-être::
RIGHT NOW RIGHT NOW I'd say that the the:: superior (one)
it's going to be maybe uh::
- 98 hhi: ((display of trouble))¹⁸ °euh:: ° ça va peut-être Le Marché
hhi: ((display of trouble)) °uh:: °it is going to be maybe uh the Marché
- 99 aux fleurs éventuellemen:t,
aux fleurs possibly:,
- 100 (0.5)
- 101 Clt: D'a[ccord.]
Ri[ght.]
- 102 Off: [Ou-ou /les deux épis] aux (Gîtes) de France oui.
 [or- or /the two crowns] with the (Gîtes) de France yes.
- 103 Clt: D'accord.
Right.
 (0.1)
 ((6 lines deleted about how clients can make sense of the crown system))
- 110 Clt: D'accord. Okay. *Et euh:: * donc le Marché aux fleurs c'est mieux. C'ça,
*Alright. Okay. *And uh::* so the Marché aux fleurs it's better. That's it,*
- 111 (0.8)
- 112 Off: .hhi ((display of trouble)) Non: je peux pas vous dire ça directement
.hhi ((display of trouble)) No: I can't say that to you directly
- 113 c'est-c'est-c'est- j'dirais que c'est une catégorië médium plus.
it's- it's- it's- I would say that it is a medium plus category uh.
- 114 (0.7)
- 115 Off: V[oilà.]
Th[ere you go.]
- 116 Clt: [D'accord.]
 [Right.]

At line 92, the client pursues availability in a superior category. When the officer rejects this with a time- and situation-specific account (line 94), the client pursues with a 'not at

all' (line 96). Line 96 is hearable as insistent by virtue of its being the third time that the client has attempted to secure that information. At this point, instead of reiterating her rejection, the officer attempts, in a situation-specific manner 'right now right now', to construct one of the available places as what might constitute 'superior'. Throughout, she displays delicacy and trouble and constructs this particular B&B not as objectively superior, but tentatively with the mitigators '*peut-être*' (maybe) and the TCU-final adverb '*éventuellement*' (possibly) as the one that, in this case, out of those listed, may constitute what is superior. Her response is recipient-designed. It is not to be heard as an official recommendation, but as an attempt to fit what is available at that moment to the terms of the client's enquiry. Nonetheless, at line 110, the client produces the understanding he derived from *her* qualification: other places are not contenders; the *Marché aux fleurs* is better, which he invites her to confirm. Unlike in other cases, after a delay, the officer produces a type-conforming dispreferred 'no'. This 'no' is not produced as a separate TCU, but is followed by an elaboration. It rejects the question's answerability, and the subsequent elaboration within the same TCU ('I can't say that to you directly') constitutes the 'no' as a declination to make the recommendation that the client is seeking. The officer's response serves to put on the record that the mention of the *Marché aux fleurs* is not an official recommendation, but an attempt at accommodating a client in the context of his pursuit. The delay, the 'no', the inbreath and the adverb 'directly' (lines 111–12) all contribute to marking that the officer's response is treating the client's RSQ as not answerable with a recommendation. The inclusion of 'directly' implies that the officer could say it, just not openly, and whilst the remainder of her turn hints at institutional constraints and the restrictions they impose on what she can say, why she cannot say it remains unarticulated. Her incipient assessment 'it's- it's- it's-' (line 113) is abandoned at the place where the characterization would arise in favour of inserting a repair 'I'd say that'. This insertion and the use of '*je*' (I) serves to construct what follows as *her* characterization/judgement rather than the TO's, a stance that she takes up at the beginning of the turn (line 112) with a strong display of difficulty. Nonetheless, she attempts to treat her characterization as objective or impartial through the use of an objective category (medium plus category). In a classification system that only has low, medium and superior levels, the creation of this new category (medium plus) is hearable as an attempt to align with the client's project by treating his question as a technical issue. In sum, the use of a dispreferred type-conforming response is accounted for here by virtue of the RSQ (done as a request for confirmation) having been derived from the *officer's* prior talk. Her attempt to address his query by reference to his terms of interest (superior category) gets her into hot water. She is left to salvage the situation by rejecting the understanding that her efforts constituted a recommendation.

6. Receipt of evasive answers

The practices described here are not equally effective in having the clients collaborate in not pursuing the matter. Treating RSQs as unanswerable by casting all the providers as equivalent appears to be the most effective way of making a pursuit more difficult. It serves to invalidate the question and claims that it is unanswerable in its own terms. This practice offers two main interactional payoffs. It claims that

there is not a recommendation to be made here and, thus, that a pursuit is not likely to yield the response being sought. Further, it offers the possibility of sequence closure by providing the client with a degree of reassurance that all the providers are suitable. Where clients' questions have been explicitly topicalized as flawed or unreasonable, the officer, in effect, claims that the questioner's behaviour in asking the question was inappropriate and that the client's project will not receive satisfaction. Such a response is likely to deflect any *immediate* attempt to pursue the recommendation. However, this does not preclude the client having another try later on in the call with a pursuit couched in different terms, a pursuit, of course, standing as evidence of the non-fittedness of the answer to the RSQ. Conversely, constructing responses as contingent appears to be the strategy most open to pursuit. This may be because, in contingently fitting their responses to the client's circumstances, the officers prioritize and claim, at times incorrectly, one of a set of circumstances as more significant for the client. In these cases, the client may pursue by complaining (excerpt 9) and/or topicalizing the contingent matters that the officers have selected to build their responses (excerpts 9 and 10).

7. Discussion

In this section, I focus upon the relationship between officers' responses to RSQs and affiliation. Drawing upon Stivers's (2008) distinction between affiliation and alignment in storytelling, I use alignment here to refer to whether an action is the sequentially appropriate or projected one, and affiliation to refer to whether participants take the same perspective as, or agree with, their co-participant's stance. RSQs make conditionally relevant a recommendation, which none receives. In sequential terms, the responses that they receive are disaligning because they specifically do not produce the second pair part action that the questions had projected (recommendation). Further, they do so specifically by resisting both the presuppositions and the evaluative element embodied in the questions. As previously mentioned, the maintenance of a neutralistic stance in some institutional settings involves the restriction of some activities. In this corpus, the disaligning nature of officers' responses is not only associated with the maintenance of impartiality, it is also specifically institutionally mandated because the institutional constraint of impartiality restricts the range of responses that the officers can give to RSQs. Specifically, the nature of the restriction is one that discourages the occurrence of a fitted response. Making a recommendation is simply not an interactional option available to officers, if they are to meet institutional requirements of impartiality. In this sense, a restriction on the production of an aligning response to a particular action is an institutional feature of tourist office–client interaction, and one way in which institutional constraints operational in tourist offices are talked into being.

That officers' responses are disaligning and do not provide the sequentially relevant preferred action is not to say that they are disaffiliative, or at least not entirely disaffiliative. Whilst not producing the recommendations that the clients seek, most of the accounts that the officers provide for not answering RSQs are nonetheless cooperative with the clients' aims in asking RSQs and seeking recommendations. Further, the officers' responses avoid using the most blocking or final of grounds for

not making recommendations: policy or institutional constraints. Since the latter is an option and its use has been shown in other institutional settings where there are restrictions on interactional activities (see Clayman, 2001; Danby and Emission, forthcoming), the officers' selected responses are less disaffiliative than the alternative. In other words, in producing such responses, the officers avoid the more disaffiliative outright rejections, whilst simultaneously avoiding the affiliative, but institutionally discouraged, preferred recommendations.

8. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the responses that tourist office representatives give to clients' recommendation-seeking questions and shown that the officers typically avoid producing type-conforming responses. In so doing, the officers reject the presuppositions embodied in the questions, avoid aligning with the evaluative element that the questions embody and resist making recommendations. Thus, in the light of the institutional constraints that require an equitable treatment of all providers, the selection of nonconforming responses contributes to the officers' maintenance of an impartial stance. Such responses enable the officers to treat RSQs as unanswerable in their own terms. This may be done singly or in conjunction with other practices, such as supplying information that will help the caller to rank and choose the most appropriate service or by constructing responses as contingent when the mention of a name is vulnerable to being heard as a recommendation.

Typically, tourism officers do not draw upon institutional constraints as grounds for avoiding recommendations. In fact, the range of accounting practices that tourist officers deploy obscures the institutional reality under which they operate. Whilst it is easy to understand that eschewing litigation and not being held accountable for clients' choices may be external reasons for tourist officers avoiding making recommendations, the officers' selection of specific accounting practices that do not make the institutional requirement of impartiality transparent to clients is more readily accountable by reference to their socio-relational import. Selecting accounting practices that emphasize providers as equally good, or that cast officers' responses as contingent upon the clients' preferences, enables tourist officers to maintain rapport with the clients by broadly cooperating with the latter's aims and displaying broadly a more affiliative stance than references to policy or institutional constraints would achieve. This is essential for an organization whose overall role of promotion of their respective geographical areas means that TOs are involved in a range of activities and services (providing information, managing bookings, etc., as mentioned in the introduction) and in the management of conflicting demands, some of which potentially legislate against, or conflict with, what is needed to deliver effective customer service. Thus, the selection of broadly cooperative practices in dealing with RSQs both enables tourist officers to accomplish socio-relational work by attempting to balance the institutional constraint of impartiality with the social need to maintain rapport with clients, and reflects the interactional work tourist officers accomplish in the service of maintaining social solidarity and avoiding conflict.

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Notes

1. The term 'client' is used to reflect the tourist offices' views of their interactions with callers as service encounters.
2. Services may include accommodation (B&Bs, hotels, etc.), venues (restaurants, museums, cheese factories, etc.), excursions (e.g. boat trips), events, etc.
3. Training, where it occurs (being budget dependent and often accessible only to permanent staff), is in the shape of short (usually one or two days) one-off workshops dealing with generic topics such as customer service, assertiveness, answering the phone, etc.
4. Interestingly, tourist officers report their suspicions about some telephone enquiries that, they suspect, are made by, or on behalf of, providers with a view to assessing how the tourist office handles enquiries about their particular services.
5. A number of symbols differ from the Jeffersonian system. / marks a less marked intonational rise than ↑, \ a less marked intonational fall than ↓. 'ë' indicates that the 'mute e' (schwa), commonly not pronounced in French, has been pronounced. '#' indicates ingressive speech. All names have been changed and remain untranslated. Transcription symbols feature in the translation line only to assist the reader. Where possible, the translation lines retain some of the syntactic features of the French language.
6. Although some WhQs can 'set the parameters of response more broadly' (Heritage, 2003: 68), the systematic selection of '*lequel*' (which) in RSQs and the sequential position of RSQs set narrow terms of response (typically a name).
7. Clients may also call to complain, provide information, make/cancel a booking, seek advice, tell stories, have a chat, etc.
8. The position of the pronoun '*lequel*' in RSQs may well have implications for the type and placement of responses that RSQs receive. This issue will be addressed elsewhere.
9. '>ch' voulais sa\oir<' in # 5 is not a preface. Its use as a preface would require a move forward of the wh- item (*lequel*) '*je voulais savoir lequel vous me conseillez*' (I wanted to know which one you recommend). Further, the speed of the delivery, the prosodic fall on '*savoir*' (to know) and the emphasis on '*vous*' mark 'ch' voulais sa\oir' as stand-alone.
10. Prior to line 119, the client had asked a question. The officer begins to answer, but pauses. The client then steps in with loud volume (line 119) to show that the current question is now to be addressed.
11. The informal term '*sympa*' refers to something nice, pleasant or cool. The repair on it may have to do with the informality of the term.
12. 'Unsuccessfully' because the client is unhelpfully told that a three-star category is higher than a two-star one.
13. This might account for the use of '*je*' (I) rather than '*on*' (we).

14. This is the only case in the corpus in which an officer overtly orients to an inability to recommend a provider. However, the officer does not proceed with sequence closure. Instead, she provides further information, suggesting that she orients primarily to the caller as her client rather than as an institutional party. Further, the invocation of an inability may have more to do with the sequential environment in which the client's insistence/pursuit has materialized (coming, as it does, after a display of trouble and an incipient account) than with the client's institutional identity.
15. Throughout this section, the participants collaborate in the joint construction of the providers as equivalent, which enables the client to summarize the officer's response (lines 60–2) and the officer to close the sequence with an upshot that 'loops the loop' initiated at line 39.
16. It could be viewed as a pre-request leading up to a request (which?) if the pre receives a go-ahead (yes) (Schegloff, 2007). It could also receive a 'yes X' if the recipient pre-empts the projected request.
17. 'In the first instance' because officers may conceivably resort to this practice, even if no instance occurs in this large corpus.
18. The 'hhhi' at lines 98 and 112 are inbreaths produced through closed teeth that display trouble/difficulty.

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