“If you wanna be polite to the customer, speak English to the customer in America:” Analysis of Customer Service and Metapragmatics of Politeness in Language Discrimination

Emily Reynolds

Department of Linguistics, University of Colorado Boulder

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Chase Wesley Raymond, Ph.D.

Thesis Advisor

Department of Linguistics

Jeremy Calder, Ph.D.

Honors Council Representative, Linguistics

Department of Linguistics

Christine Macdonald, Ph.D.

Outside Reader

Program for Writing and Rhetoric

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1.0 Introduction

As a researcher, one of my primary concerns is how I can use my skills to advance social justice and support historically marginalized and oppressed peoples. This research, my contribution to the expansive goal of dismantling oppressive systems, aims to do exactly that by exposing how these oppressive systems function on a smaller scale. Taking a conversation analysis approach, I analyze real interactional data from the forthcoming Corpus of Language Discrimination in Interaction (CLDI) (Raymond et al., submitted), on which I am a collaborator and co-author, to uncover new patterns about language discrimination as it occurs in the real world. The source of this data, the CLDI, is described in a forthcoming paper by its authors as:

> "an open-access data corpus produced by a group of scholars aiming to better understand and address forms of linguistic violence in everyday life. The interactions in the CLDI, comprised of videos drawn primarily from institutional security cameras and private citizens' cell phones, show individuals being harassed in some way for the language they are speaking or otherwise endorsing while sharing public space (e.g., at a store or restaurant, in a public park or parking lot)." (Raymond et al., submitted)

In other words, the corpus contains dozens of videos (and corresponding transcripts) of spontaneously-recorded interactions that occurred in a public space, each of which involves language discrimination—a simple example is someone overhearing another person speaking Spanish and instructing them to speak English instead (although there is great diversity in the corpus, and many cases unfold differently from this example). While I chose to work with interactional data from the CLDI through a very specific analytical framework, this work has far-reaching implications for anyone who might have a vested interest in the enactment of discrimination across contexts.

What makes the CLDI such a valuable tool for studying interaction is the fact that it is the first of its kind—nowhere else have naturally-occurring interactions involving language discrimination been compiled in a corpus like this. Having this naturally-occurring data is invaluable for investigating how language discrimination is enacted in the real world, and studying interaction from this perspective hasn't been an option for social scientists until recently, thanks to our ability to upload media to the internet and share it via social media. It is possible that some readers may have personal experience as bystanders, or even as more direct participants, in instances of linguistic violence within their lifetimes, but even so, those moments live only as memories after they transpire. Now, with the ability to watch recordings of real-time, spontaneous interactions, researchers like myself have a crude window into the 'real world' of interaction without having to be physically present at each distinct interaction in order to observe them.

As a collaborator and co-author on the project, I have spent many hours both gathering and analyzing CLDI data, and have thus become familiar with the corpus in its entirety and multiplicity. I consider this access to be a great responsibility, and especially because my work within the CLDI is motivated by a desire to do right by those who have been targeted in these types of interactions, on- and off-camera. This familiarity with the data, borne out of many hours of work, led to a natural progression of inquiry, and in designing this project, I took a bottom-up approach to developing a research question by first examining the contents of the corpus at an even greater level of detail and by subsequently seeking out patterns. Outside of my existing commitments to finding and transcribing new data, I watched each video and read each corresponding transcript multiple times over, highlighting and annotating anything that stood out as unusual, particularly salient, or noticeably patterned. By not prescriptively writing a research

question in the earliest stages of this project, patterns in the data were able to inspire questions organically and inform my trajectory moving forward.

The first pattern I became interested in was the frequent usage of politeness terms. I found this pattern to be striking due to the vitriolic nature of the data, and this motivated me to make detailed notes of each instance of politeness across all cases. Most of these were simple utterances like "please," "thank you," and "sir/ma'am." However, I also noticed many complex, metapragmatic references to politeness—these took the forms of commands, like "don't be rude[1]," and observations, like "that's not very nice[2]" and "you are extremely rude[3]." I found these to be especially interesting due, once again, to the situational context of the data in the CLDI. My folk understanding of politeness (Ide & Ehlich 2005) struggled to account for why politeness was so frequently topicalized during active discrimination, and I became interested in uncovering whether there was a particular situation or sequence of events that triggered the metapragmatic discussion of politeness (talking about politeness itself).

It was the search for this trigger that led me to consider the effects of the customer service environment. The CLDI contains an abundance of data taking place in customer service settings, and a strong overlap exists between this setting and the types of metapragmatic allusions to politeness that I had identified. Not only that, but I began to notice that references to politeness in customer service settings often interacted with typical customer service roles (like customer and service provider) in meaningful ways.

This observation ultimately set me on the path to exploring the intersection of three interactional strategies and factors within the wide scope of language discrimination and public interaction: language discrimination, invocations of politeness and metapragmatic negotiations of

[1] See CLDI_005 and CLDI_014
[2] See CLDI_056 and CLDI_022
[3] See CLDI_020 and CLDI_044

morality, and the customer service environment. Each of these is a powerful tool at the disposal of interactants, and their specific combination creates a potent cocktail of both individual language policies and larger social expectations. Ultimately, studying this intersection gives us insight into how people manipulate the normative environment of customer service and how perpetrators can utilize social expectations regarding politeness to become more forceful oppressors. Through this research, I aim to demonstrate how the customer service institution, in general, is a *particularly* amenable context for individuals to discriminate by accessing the various institutional roles and social norms available to them. However, the process of uncovering strategies for violence will also identify particularly salient strategies for those experiencing discrimination and their allies to resist it in these settings.

2.0 Background

This analysis necessarily marries at least three disparate areas of research: language ideology (and how it is enacted through language policy), politeness, and customer service. Each of these areas has a rich and complex history of study, much of which is important to review; however, what follows is not meant to be a comprehensive summary of the nuances of each field. I am more interested in identifying those aspects which are necessary and relevant for understanding and analyzing the data presented here. The purpose of this paper is primarily to show how the enactment of these topics is negotiated and managed together by participants, often simultaneously, in the context of real interaction. This is a very pragmatically-based approach, and privileges the interpretations of the participants in cases where their definitions and negotiations diverge from theory.

Further works may wish to expand on the influence of any one area of research or frame an analysis that privileges a differently-oriented perspective. For now, we will briefly cover language ideology and language policy, linguistic politeness, and customer service roles, as well as a few other relevant concepts.

2.1 Language ideology and language policy

The concepts of *language ideology* and *language policy* are central to understanding the views that participants express and the choices they make while interacting with others. *Language ideologies* are "morally and politically loaded representations of the structure and use of languages in a social world," (Woolard 2020: 1) which influence what an individual or group of speakers believes are appropriate ways to use language. Appropriateness, of course, differs depending on social situations and the identities of other participants. Stemming from language ideologies, *language policy* is:

> "a complex sociocultural process [and] mode of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power. The 'policy' in these processes resides in their language-regulating power; that is, the ways in which they express normative claims about legitimate and illegitimate language forms and uses, thereby governing language statuses and uses" (McCarty 2011: 8).

Put differently, language policies are the mechanism by which language ideologies are enforced, and this may be done in a variety of ways. Language policy enforcement mechanisms can be overt (with explicit rules on how or how not to use language) or covert (with rules that may influence language use indirectly but don't reference language), and language policies can be created and enforced on any level from national governments to individual actors. In fact, as

implied in the above quote, anyone can attempt to enforce a language policy; their degree of success depends on how much power they have over those they are attempting to control.

In the cases featured in this analysis, language policies are generally formed on the level of the individual, with individuals attempting to police the linguistic behavior of other individuals. Especially in public spaces, "...this invites examination of what resources people use, and which social roles and identities these putative strangers make interactionally relevant, as they negotiate language policy in such public environments." (Raymond et al., submitted: 10). This analysis will answer these questions as they apply to customer service environments, specifically.

2.2 Linguistic politeness and metapragmatics

As will be shown in greater detail in the sections that follow, a common way that participants attempt to enforce language policies (especially within customer service contexts) is by making *metapragmatic* claims about politeness. Politeness seems to be a salient evaluative framework for many participants, and the field of politeness has received much attention from scholars of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and related fields. Many comprehensive histories of the study of linguistic politeness have been written[4], most of which reference seminal works by Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1977), Leech (1977, 1980, 1983), and Brown and Levinson (1987). Additionally, Goffman's concept of *face* (1967) was expanded by Brown and Levinson (1987) to include definitions of both *positive* and *negative* face. *Positive face* is the desire to be well-liked, and *negative face* is the desire for autonomy (Brown & Levinson 1987). The actions one takes to control one's face (called 'facework') are thought to motivate the usage of politeness in interaction.

[4] For examples, see Bax & Kádár 2012, Elich et al. 2008, or Lakoff & Ide 2005

This paper is concerned not just with politeness and facework, though, but with the *metapragmatics* of both politeness and impoliteness (jointly and independently of each other). This focus on im/politeness aligns closely with Eelen's (2001) work, which treats impoliteness as equally important to politeness and the listener as equally important as the speaker in the co-creation of im/politeness. The metapragmatic element is concerned with the "meta" level of language. In taking a metapragmatic approach, we choose to focus on the "reflexive awareness on the part of participants in interactions, and observers of interactions, about the language that is being used in those interactions" (Haugh 2018: 619)—in other words, how participants talk about im/politeness, demonstrate orientations to im/politeness, and/or otherwise show their awareness of the use of im/polite language. This investigation into the metapragmatics of im/politeness in corpus data is fairly unique, even more so when considering the unique nature of the CLDI data. Haugh (2018) similarly explores metapragmatics in corpus data, but unlike this paper, does not focus on meta-language about politeness or public interactions specifically. Understanding how participants negotiate im/politeness through metapragmatic talk is one of several important contributions to the field that this research offers.

You'll notice that at this point, I still have not defined what *politeness* and *impoliteness* are, despite using both terms frequently. This is because the participants in the data do this for me. Because my approach takes a pragmatic, functionalist perspective to im/politeness theory, I treat politeness as a discursive, contextual negotiation, not as a set of diagnostic criteria which must be met. This follows in the tradition of scholars like Erving Goffman (1982), who has been credited with the idea that the function of politeness is to maintain the social order, and Gino Eelen (2001) whose theory of im/politeness posits that politeness and impoliteness form out of adherence to or rejection of cultural normativity, and that this process is dialogic. This approach

allows us to treat im/politeness as essential elements of social interaction, inseparable from culture and context. This contrasts with the popular understanding of politeness as an unnecessary courtesy that speakers opt-in to:

> "In contrast to the Western folk etymology of the term, which usually equates politeness only with the icing on the cake of social interaction, current theories of politeness see it as basic to human interaction. Following the Goffmanian tradition, politeness thus becomes essential to the production of social order, and a precondition of human cooperation" (Ehlich et al. 2008: 255)

As stated previously, one of my first questions when I initially examined data from the CLDI was why participants would concern themselves with policing politeness in interactions framed around language discrimination—it seemed peripheral to me, even illogical. This view resolves that question by asserting that politeness in interaction is always relevant, regardless of how 'polite' the overall situation appears to be from a folk perspective, because facework and the co-construction of norms are essential to productive interaction. What this does not explain is when, why, and how participants choose to *metapragmatically* reference politeness—this remains a central question to this paper.

To be clear, politeness in this analysis is explicitly defined by the participants themselves through metapragmatic talk, so there is little need for subjective interpretation of what the participants considered 'polite' and 'impolite.' For the purposes of the analysis, politeness is what the participants claim, contest, and negotiate it to be, and their definitions are the definitions that become relevant for the interactants in the context of the interaction. We can instead attend to the questions of when, why, and how metapragmatic references to politeness serve the interactants.

2.3 Enactment of customer service roles

Another goal of this research is to uncover articulations of power as they manifest within what I've labeled as a *customer service context*, which is any interactional context occurring within the physical environment of an institution offering goods or services to customers. Within a customer service institution, certain archetypal roles are enacted, making up what Lipkin & Heinonen (2022) call an "ecosystem" of actors that includes "the focal customer; focal provider; other providers; co-customers; peers, family and friends; and strangers." We see these roles enacted in the CLDI cases, where usually "peers," "family & friends," and "strangers" are subcategories of the larger "customer" or "provider" categories. Generally, anyone present in the customer service context automatically assumes a role relative to the other individuals present—by existing in a store (or restaurant, gas station, etc.), one is either a customer or a service provider. Understanding the differential power, actual or perceived, that accompanies these roles is key to understanding how individuals feel empowered to discriminate against others in customer service contexts.

Agents representing the customer service institution—like managers and employees—derive their power from both hierarchical roles within the organization (Rucker et al. 2011) and from their expertise as trained representatives of the institution (Bourdieu 1985). Managers, in particular, occupy a greater position of power due to the internal hierarchical structure (Georgesen & Harris 1998), which is made salient by references to manager power within the data. However, the power and authority of service providers is underemphasized in the literature, which tends to instead focus on the power customers hold and how that affects other

actors within the service ecosystem[5]. Abboud et al. (2023: 3) define *customer power* as "customers' perceived ability to exert their will over other actors, resources, and themselves to achieve desired outcomes from their interactions;" power itself is often described as *asymmetric* access to material resources (Rucker et al. 2012; Sembada et al. 2016). Customer power is further divided into "objective" and "subjective" components, the former being a reflection of the material resources available to the customer and the latter being the customer's own perception of their power, regardless of the actual availability of resources (Abboud et al. 2023). *Provider power* seems to be defined only in response to customer power, including those situations in which a service provider may sanction unruly customers. In such cases, scholars such as Kashif & Zarkada (2015: 672) encourage institutions to "pay respect and complete organisational support to frontline staff working in high contact service firms to cope with misbehaving customers;" however, direct recommendations to undermine customer power such as this are rare. Additionally, most research tends to study the relationship between customer power and firms at large, not the relationship between customer power and provider power (Abboud et al. 2023; Sembada et al. 2016).

Modern firms are even encouraged to empower their customers further as a best-practice to increase customer wellbeing, as seen in this recommendation to "monitor customer power and explore means of enhancing the wellbeing of their customers through strategies designed to increase customer power, thus, reducing negative customer engagement and avoiding detrimental impact on customer wellbeing" (Abboud et al. 2023). This does not account for the fact that in general, highly empowered individuals have been found more likely to dehumanize others (Lammers & Stapel 2011), act in their own self-interest (Maner & Mead 2010), and act

[5] See Abboud et al. 2023, Gong & Wang 2023, Harris & Daunt 2013, Harris & Reynolds 2003, Kashif & Zarkada 2015, Menon & Bansal 2007, Rucker et al. 2012, Sembada et al. 2016

unethically (Kennedy & Anderson 2017). Despite these findings, the negative effects of highly empowered customers on individual employee wellbeing has only been explored by a few scholars (Harris & Daunt 2013; Harris & Reynolds 2003; Kashif & Zarkada 2015), who have found that customer misbehavior caused negative "physiological, cognitive, and attitudinal" effects in employees (Harris & Daunt 2013). However, these effects do not seem to be driving any changes in power dynamics or interactions.

By analyzing the case studies from the CLDI, we find examples of how highly empowered customers can cause distress and harm to employees of those institutions that enable and encourage this empowerment, and can identify how customers exploit the asymmetrical distribution of power to enforce language policies.

2.4 Other relevant concepts

In doing this analysis, it is also useful to employ Silverstein's (2003) concept of *indexical order* and Eckert's (2008) expansion of indexical order into the *indexical field* in order to understand how interactional participants interpret linguistic features as indexes (signs) of non-linguistic traits. Silverstein coined the indexical order to describe how language users both inherit semiotic meaning from past uses of language and create new meaning by applying that language in a new context. In doing so, language users reinforce significance and expand definitions so that "this creative indexical effect is the motivated realization, or performable execution, of an already constituted framework of semiotic value" (Silverstein 2003: 194). Therefore, when participants within the CLDI produce cliches that signify cultural meaning, like "the customer is always right," they both reinforce the existing meaning of "the customer is always right" while also expanding its cultural meaning by enacting it in a unique social context.

Through this process, “the customer is always right” takes on a new meaning in situations concerning language choice in a customer service context.

Eckert (2008) expanded the idea of the indexical order into the indexical “field” by arguing that even the existing meanings that speakers draw upon are fluid and interrelated with other meanings. This idea is useful for thinking about how associations are made between language and complex social and cultural phenomena like gender, race, and class—all of which are made relevant in CLDI interactions. These identifiers are not only associated with superficial characteristics, but also with moral valence, and participants may also construct “rights and responsibilities associated with those identities” (Raymond & Heritage 2006: 681). In fact, participants may even assume a duty to be what Reynolds (2015) called an “agent of the social order” in response to the identities of others in the interaction. This is where the enactment of language policies comes into play, and participants enforce moral or social order by policing language.

It is critical that we understand both those who tend to assume this role of “agent of social order” and those whom they target so that we can “interrogate how the ‘rights and responsibilities associated with those identities’ [Raymond & Heritage 2006: 681] are locally instantiated, contested, and defended through the use of concrete practices in interaction” (Raymond et al., submitted). It is for this reason that the contextually-rich, spontaneous interactions of the CLDI provide an excellent backdrop for investigating politeness as a tool for enforcing language policy.

3.0 Data & Methods

This analysis follows the conventions of conversation analysis (CA), which utilizes data "collected from everyday life settings to analyze and describe members' methods of order." (Ten Have, 2004). In this case, this "everyday" data is housed within the Corpus of Language Discrimination in Interaction, the format of which I have briefly mentioned but will now elaborate upon. Within the corpus, each video and corresponding transcript is referred to as a "case" and is referenced using the format CLDI_XXX, where the x's represent a uniquely-identifying number. These videos are sourced from the internet, especially via social media, and are added to the corpus with the owner's permission (whenever possible).

While the corpus contains a wide variety within its dozens of videos, it also maintains some criteria for admission. Some of the criteria are explicit within the descriptions above; for example, there must be some form of language discrimination explicitly present within the recorded context of the interaction, and the videos must be publicly available. Other criteria include that the videos must contain naturally-occurring (unscripted) speech and that the audio and video must be undoctored and generally uninterrupted (in other words, no curated news-style footage where segments are omitted or spliced). For the purposes of this analysis, the transcripts will serve as proxies for the 'real' data, the videos. It's important to remember, though, that transcripts are always abstractions of the original videos.

In order to understand the data presented in this analysis, there are a few key conventions of the CLDI (and CA in general) to become familiar with. One of these is the structure of a transcript. CLDI transcripts do not contain timestamps, but do contain line numbers, which is consistent with the CA style of analysis. As for the structure of lines, only speech from a single speaker may occupy a single line, but an utterance may take up several. Transcripts also contain

symbols that indicate extra information about the way an utterance was produced, such as intonation, vowel length, overlapping speech, and many other features. Overlapping speech is indicated with square brackets, and is also visually aligned on the page; for reference, the rest of the conventions may be found in the Appendix.

Speakers are labeled with a unique, three-letter code that is consistent throughout a transcript, and there are several common labels that occur across transcripts and within this analysis. One of these is the 'challenger' (CHA) label, which is generally assigned to the participant who is enacting language discrimination. The 'target' (TAR) label is assigned to the participant who is being harassed by the challenger. These two labels are borrowed from Reynolds (2015). Participants may also be assigned a 'bystander' (BYS) label if they are neither the challenger nor the target, but are still active participants in the interaction. This does not necessarily mean that the bystander is neutral; we will discuss this further in the analysis section. Finally, there are a variety of other labels that serve to distinguish different interactional participants, especially after CHA, TAR, and BYS have already been assigned. Within this analysis, however, it is mostly these three principal labels that will be employed, and additional labels are described where they appear.

As previously discussed, the cases in this analysis were selected according to the presence of 1) metapragmatic references to 2) politeness, which 3) interact with the institutional norms associated with customer service settings in some meaningful way. Individual conceptualizations of what institutional norms really are varied greatly. An example of a case that matches this criteria is shown below in example (1) from CLDI_006[6]:

(1) CLDI_006 'You got it wrong'

20 CHA: if you wanna be polite to the customer, then you speak

[6] For the selected transcript excerpts, line numbers reflect those from the original CLDI transcripts.

21 english to the customer (.) in america

This utterance meets all three of the above criteria that I used for selecting cases: 1) the speaker makes a metapragmatic recommendation ("if you wanna be polite … then you speak English"; 2) this recommendation relates directly to politeness; and 3) the speaker connects their metapragmatic comment about politeness to their expectations for how typical roles in a customer service environment are enacted. This is an excellent prototypical example of the evaluative framework against which each case in this analysis was inspected for selection.

In contrast, a case that was not included in the analysis is CLDI_046. Extract (2) is shown below:

(2) CLDI_046 'Toronto Foody Mart'

17 CHA: [((shakes head)) ((points)) [If you're gonna work here,
18 it is the law, to know English.

This case is deceptively similar to CLDI_006, right down to the conditional phrase, but the reason that CLDI_046 was not included in this analysis is that throughout this case, the speakers make no reference to politeness, even though they explicitly connect language choice with workplace roles. The challenger in this case draws on other enforcement mechanisms for their language policy (i.e. the law), but politeness is not one of them.

An additional example of a case that does not meet the criteria for selection for analysis is CLDI_056, shown in extract (3) below:

(3) CLDI_056 'It's just not nice'

26 TAR: [to tell me not to speak Spanish? That's just th-
27 it's not n↑i↓ce.

Like CLDI_046, above, this case meets two of the criteria, but not all three. The target does make a metapragmatic observation about politeness and language use ("it's not nice"), and the interaction does take place in a customer service environment (a big-box store)—at first

glance, this might seem like a great case to include. However, because the participants don't engage with the institutional power of either the customer service setting or their roles within it, this case was not included in the primary collection for this analysis.

These examples of cases that were and were not included, based on selection criteria crafted through a bottom-up approach to the corpus, are included to illuminate the relevance of each prong of the criteria. It is the specificity of this intersection which makes the analysis worthwhile—each element (politeness, metapragmatic speech, and customer service contexts) can be wielded as an interactional tool by challengers, targets, and bystanders, and, as we will see, they become more powerful in combination. By situating ourselves within this intersection, we can begin to understand how to deconstruct this power as it applies to language discrimination.

4.0 Analysis

Metalanguage about politeness is one of the primary ways in which the moral order is managed in situations of linguistic discrimination; however, the strategic usage of politeness is enacted very differently depending on which institutional roles and identities participants are able to access within the customer service context. One of the most common situations in the selected cases is the customer-as-challenger and employee-as-target alignment, but a variety of permutations are also present in the corpus, and this analysis will examine many of them in turn. I will first show two instances of customers-as-challengers leveraging their institutional power against employees-as-targets, then I will present an instance in which the employee-as-target resists that power, followed by two cases in which bystanders become involved on behalf of the

employee-as-target. Finally, I will examine the unique manifestation of institutional roles when both the challenger and the target are customers.

4.1 When employees and customers face off

4.1.1 The customer-as-challenger

Consider example (4), taken from CLDI_006, which provides an excellent example of a challenger exploiting their institutional power as a customer in order to justify their discrimination. In CLDI_006, the challenger is a customer at a Mexican restaurant, and is confronting an employee (the target) about her usage of Spanish with a coworker. In the excerpt below, we can see the challenger drawing on both her role as customer and on claims about politeness to support her discriminatory complaints[7]:

(4) CLDI_006 'You got it wrong'

```
01  CHA:    (if/and) you got it wrong.
02  TAR:    ((speaking Spanish??))
03  CHA:    you know what?
04          (0.5)
05  CHA:    like
06          (0.2)
07  CHA:    im- im really glad you two can talk to each other in
08          whatever language it is that you're speaking
09          (0.4)
10  CHA:    but its really rude
11          (0.3)
12  CHA:    and if you wanna be po:lite to the customer
13          (1.1)
14  CHA:    okay
15          (0.2)
16  CHA:    If you wanna-
17          (0.3)
18  TAR:    [(                 )]
19  CHA:    [if you wanna- HEY  ]
```

[7] In this paper, I follow the practice used by Raymond, et al. (submitted) in the CLDI more broadly in referring to participants using pronouns which seem to align with their publicly-performed presentations of self. We recognize that this is a crude and imperfect method—however, the alternative which I considered (referring to everyone using "they/them/theirs" pronouns), would both complicate the analysis and sanitize the data of any potential interactional relevance of gender. Regardless, pronouns used may not match the gender identities of participants.

20 if you wanna be polite to the customer, then you speak
21 english to the customer (.) in america

As shown in lines 10-12 and 20-21, the challenger draws a clear connection between 'politeness' and language use, and rudeness is put in direct opposition to politeness. By the challenger's definition, polite behavior on the part of the employee necessitates the usage of English, and rude behavior is defined as speaking any language other than English. It's impossible to know from this data why the challenger has formed this particular language ideology, but looking at the ironic statement made by the challenger in lines 7-8, she appears to be uncomfortable with her inability to access (and therefore monitor) the content of the employees' Spanish-language speech. If this assumption is true, then we can further connect the customer's definition of politeness to expectations about the customer's ability to monitor the behavior of the employees, even when they are "offstage" (Goffman 1982), not directly interacting with the customer.

The challenger's act of defining how one must behave in order to be polite to the customer demonstrates even more than just the perceived right to access the employees' behavior at all times; it also asserts the customer's greater authority over the employee within the customer service setting. The challenger assumes that, as an employee, the target's ultimate goal is to please the customer—which she makes clear later by invoking "the customer is always right" in lines 51-52 (data not shown here)—therefore, the customer has the right, and perhaps even the obligation, to designate certain behaviors as inappropriate. This assumption and the expectations that follow it are not unfounded, given the attitude that firms take towards customer empowerment (Abboud et al. 2023). The challenger's claim is further strengthened when she ties it to the moral order in lines 10-21. In doing so, the challenger positions herself as not only an

authority on the customer service environment, but also as an agent of the moral order in general, and this authority provisions the right to enforce her standards of right and wrong.

We see similar exploitation of this assumed power in extract (5) from CLDI_017, in which the challenger is once again the customer, and the targets are employees of a pharmacy. In this case, the challenger very aggressively critiques the employees for speaking Chinese in the workplace, deriving her power to do so from her roles as both a customer and as a moral authority. An excerpt of the transcript follows:

(5) CLDI_017 'Speak English in Canada'

```
01  CHA: who do I complain about about her and that other guy
           (0.6)
02  CHA: speaking in Chin[- shut up (0.5) speaking in Chinese in front of me
03  PHA:                  [oh (        ) ((shakes head))
04         (0.6)
05  CHA : shut up (.) you're rude
06         (0.3)
07  CHA: speak English in Canada=
08  LIG: =(     [    )
09  CHA:        [rude as fuck
```

As before, in extract (4), the challenger's definition of politeness is explicitly tied to language use—'speaking Chinese' 'in front of' a customer is 'rude' and warrants complaint. One strategy that this challenger uses to enforce her personal language policy and understanding of moral order within the customer service environment is to ask for upper management, asking, "who do I complain about about her and that other guy speaking in … Chinese in front of me". Recognizing the differential power dynamics within the workplace, it is through this request that she draws a clear connection between language and appropriate customer service behavior. Speaking Chinese is framed as an offense potentially punishable by a more authoritative manager, who is expected to enforce the language policy of the customer in order to maintain moral order. This is paired with a more direct instruction to speak English, which demonstrates

that the challenger believes that she herself has authority over the employees and that her instructions have the power to elicit behavioral changes. The employees reinforce this claim to power by complying with her demands.

Accusations of rudeness seem to be an especially salient source of authority in this context. They are used to justify the challenger's interruptions of the employees (evident in the sequence of "shut up" followed by "you're rude"), and they punctuate her speech frequently throughout the interaction. Clearly, challengers are able to very effectively defend their discriminatory behavior by drawing attention to their social expectations for how they should be treated as customers and by associating the customer role with an implicit claim to moral authority. This effective power is unique to the customer service environment because challengers who are customers can also imply economic threats to the service providers, like the loss of business and/or threats of institutional sanction (e.g., reprimand from a superior). In this way, the power of the customer is made more tangible, and is often difficult for the employees to resist.

4.1.2 How the employee-as-target can leverage their customer service identity

As all-powerful as the customer-challenger may assert themself to be within the customer service context, there are cases in the CLDI in which the target draws upon their authority as a service provider within the customer service institution to retaliate against discrimination. We see this in CLDI_020, in which the challengers are two customers in a Burger King restaurant (labeled CHA and CUS), and the target is the manager of the restaurant. The beginning of the recording shows the customers and manager actively engaged in a discussion about the appropriateness of Spanish in the workplace. Early on, the customers establish their language

ideology, which is that politeness, in the service context, is associated with speaking English. They attempt to invoke institutional authority to enforce this as a language policy by threatening to report the target "to the manager" or "the head guy." The beginning of the interaction is shown in extract (6) below:

(6) CLDI_020 'Or whatever your language is (Puerto Rican Burger King Manager)'

```
28 CHA:   you're going to be reported to the manager (.) the head guy
29        that's coming in (in just       )=
30 TAR:   =actually (.) the head guy that came here (0.4) he's
31        (actually) cuban (0.3) I hate to (tell you this)
32        (.)
33 CHA:   he's what=
34 TAR:   cuban
35        (1.1)
36 CHA:   cuban ((said like "cue bean"))
37        (0.2)
38 TAR:   <cu:ban>=
39 CUS:   =cuban=
40 CHA:   =but that's okay (0.2) [he was speaking english [(    ) to us
41 TAR:                          [okay?                   [he also
42        speaks spanish [(          )
43 CHA:                  [very polite
44        (.)
45 TAR:   he also speaks spanish (      )
46        (1.2)
47 ???    it's very rud[e
48 TAR:               [it's- it's- it's gonna- it's gonna (     ) up
49        how (          ) is about- about b- about prejudism
50        (0.2)
51 CHA:   [I'm not (    )-
52 TAR:   [(            ) no that is [very prejudiced actually
```

As we can see, the customers excuse the fact that "the head guy" is Cuban (which might otherwise be a violation of what they believe to be acceptable in a customer service context; we will return to this point in the Discussion) by pointing out that he speaks English to them; this fulfills their definition of politeness, and is therefore socially acceptable. In response, the manager immediately corrects the customers, contending that their language policies (and their exceptions) are incorrect and prejudiced. In extract (7) below, the manager takes this a step

further by *redefining* politeness and rudeness on his own terms, connecting them to his previous accusations of prejudice:

(7) CLDI_020 'Or whatever your language is (Puerto Rican Burger King Manager)'

```
72 CHA:   [I'm not prejudiced=
73 TAR:   =yes you are
74        (0.2)
75 CHA:   (no I'm [not/oh my [god)
76 TAR:           [>yes you are< (.) [>have a great day<
77 CHA:                              [you're very ru:de
78        (0.4)
79 TAR:   no (.) (no) (.) ↑you were being rude by being prejudiced
80        (.)
81 CHA:   no I wasn't=
```

Notice how the reinforcement of the claim that the customers are prejudiced is immediately followed by "you're very rude." That connection allows the manager to engage with the customers in the moral domain, but on his own terms. In this way, politeness and rudeness are realized as dynamic and negotiable, something we haven't yet seen in the previous examples. The manager continues by pairing his moral claims with institutional authority, shown in extract (8):

(8) CLDI_020 'Or whatever your language is (Puerto Rican Burger King Manager)'

```
142 CHA:   yeah yeah (.)[(.)go back to mexico if you want- you want to=
143 TAR:                [I (      )
144 CHA:   =keep speaking spanish (0.3) go back to your mexican country-
145        country (0.4) your state (.) your country
146        (0.3)
147 TAR:   guess what ma'am (.) I'm not mexican (0.6) I'm not mexican
148        but you are being very prejudiced and I want you out of my
149        restaurant right now=
150 CHA:   =I'll finish my meal and then I'll [leave
151 TAR:                                      [>you know what< (.) I
152        will no- do- I'll- I'll do it for you ma'am I'll call the
153        cops ma'am (and having-) (.) have you (      ) test(ing) me
154        (0.4) it will be easier for me (and) be easier for your (ha-)
155        people like you (.) so IGNORANT (0.7) AND DISRESPECTFUL
156        (0.8)
157 CUS:   we aren't ignorant ((said like ingorich))
158        (.)
```

```
159 TAR:   you are very ignorant and disrespectful (0.3) have a great
160        day and get out of my restaurant
161        (0.2)
162 CHA:   don't worry we're [go[ing
163 TAR:                     [(go      )
164 CUS:                     [THIS ISN'T YOUR RESTAURA[NT
165 TAR:                                              [yes it is
166        ma'[am
167 CUS:   [it is not=
168 TAR:   =(and/ma'am) it is (.) actually (.) as a matter of [fact it
169        is
```

Here, the manager accesses his institutional authority in two ways: 1) by instructing the customers to leave "his" restaurant, and 2) by threatening to call the cops. This is a reversal of the customers' earlier attempt to punitively invoke a higher institutional authority ("the head guy"), and a sharp departure from the undisputed authority of the customer shown in CLDI_006 and CLDI_017. This strategy appears to be very effective at shutting down the discriminatory behavior of the customers; the customers leave the restaurant shortly after this excerpt.

CLDI_020 is especially interesting because of the contested definition of "politeness" and "rudeness" in the context of the restaurant. Initially, the customers define politeness by identifying a polite behavior, speaking English, and when the manager challenges this definition (and therefore the authority of the customers), they identify the manager's behavior as rude. The manager amends and challenges the customers' definition by defining rudeness in terms of the customers' language policy of rejecting Spanish language use. The evolution of politeness and rudeness are visualized in Table 1, below:

Table 1: Evolving Definitions of Politeness and Rudeness in CLDI_020

	Definition
First	CHA defines 'politeness' as 'speaking English' CHA defines 'rudeness' as 'speaking Spanish'
Next	CHA redefines 'rudeness' as 'challenging customer

authority’

Finally TAR defines rudeness as ‘being prejudiced’

This back-and-forth isn’t just for the sake of semantic clarity. As discussed, politeness is key to the maintenance of social order and expectations, as well as individual face. In this context, the negotiations of “politeness” and “rudeness” serve as a proxy for managing social norms surrounding more difficult, taboo topics, like linguistic discrimination and language policy in the public sphere. The act of negotiation is therefore the act of either asserting the right to do discrimination and enact discriminatory language policies, or the right to challenge discrimination. Each of these implicit claims draw on the moral order and ground themselves within the context of the customer service environment and the unique roles that it supports.

4.1.3 Bystander Intervention

The actions of the manager in CLDI_020 are so effective at countering the customers’ discriminatory enforcement of the moral order that it’s easy to imagine this strategy as a solution for a variety of customer service workers who may find themselves in similar positions. However, as previously mentioned, sometimes the fear of economic retaliation (like a bad review that leads to a loss of business, or retribution from upper management that leads to unemployment), or even threats to physical safety[8], might be enough to render the customer service worker effectively powerless against the customer-as-challenger.

Cases like these can lead to the intervention of a new actor: the customer-as-bystander. In these cases, other customers, previously uninvolved in the interaction as neither a challenger nor

[8] See, e.g., CLDI_025

a target, align themselves with either the challenger[9] or the target and intervene on their behalf (Joyce 2020; Joyce & Sterphone 2022; Ran & Huang 2019). These are not neutral bystanders, as the term often implies; the label 'bystander' only means that the individual was not overtly affiliated with either the challenger or the target at the beginning of the recorded interaction.

We see this shift from presumed neutrality to explicit polarity happening with an individual bystander in CLDI_022. In this case, the challenger is a customer at a nail salon, the target[10] is an employee, and the bystander chooses to align herself with the target towards the end of the recorded interaction.

From the very beginning of the recorded interaction, the challenger makes claims about what sort of language is appropriate in the service environment, and insists that in order for an employee to provide an appropriate level of service, they must speak English. As she makes her case, she turns to the other customers in the salon and asks, "who all agrees with that?" (line 20, not shown here).

(9) CLDI_022 'If they did something wrong'

```
136 TAR:    Give me a smile (at me).
137 CHA:    I don't think so::.
138 TAR:    Why you make a hard time for [yourself?]
139 CHA:                                [Not this ] fuckin time.
140 TAR:    (Holly) don't say that that nasty don't- that's not nice.
141 CHA:    You sound nasty. Your language sounds nasty it actually sounds
142         like you were bo:rn out of a fuckin hermit crab.
143 TAR:    We done. We done now we done now.
144 CHA:    Yeah we're done.
145 TAR:    Yeah do- don't- don't worry we done. We done communicating.
146         (3.5)
147 CHA:    It's a gross language and [frankly] yeah- if I wanna go to a nail
148         salon? I want them to talk English to where they can understa::nd
149         when I need a god damn top coat.
```

[9] For an example of a bystander aligning themself with a challenger, see CLDI_010.
[10] In the original transcript, the target/employee is labeled 'BLU.' Here, she is labeled 'TAR,' for ease of understanding.

The above section, excerpt (9), is where the label of 'nasty' is introduced to the discourse. 'Nasty' begins as a way of describing the customer's usage of explicit language, but is immediately co-opted as a way for the customer to express her condemnation of the employee's native language. From this point onward, 'nastiness' exists in the moral domain and is a salient term used by the participants to evaluate each other's language ideologies.

This shift coincides with the second invocation of 'nasty,' used in an interjection by another customer who has been recording the interaction (participant label CAM). Up until this point, this customer had been a mostly silent bystander, but she speaks up in line 162 (extract 10):

(10) CLDI_022 'If they did something wrong'

161 CHA: Learn your ABCs maybe one plus one [( )
162 CAM: [Um I have to say I think
163 you're being pretty nasty.
164 CHA: [I think she's being pretty nasty.]
165 CAM: [I have to say- no you.]
166 CAM: I think you're being pretty nasty.
167 CHA: I've only been here for like [a year.
168 CAM: [I don't give a shit how long you've
169 been here.
170 (0.8)
171 CAM: You're being [nasty.]
172 CHA: [AND I] DON'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT YOUR FUCKING
173 COMMENT.
174 CAM: I don't give a shit about you.
175 CHA: [I don't]
176 CAM: [You're bein] nasty.
177 CHA: NO. I'M NOT.
178 CAM: You asked my opinion a minute ago: and I'm tellin it to you. You
179 don't call em hermit crabs [you're] bein fuckin nasty.
180 CHA: [okay]

After the challenger insults the target's native language, the bystander aligns herself with the target by invoking 'nastiness' and using it to evaluate the challenger's speech. In doing so, the bystander demonstrates an intimate understanding of the prior discourse and indicates that she is participating in the management of the social and moral norms within the customer service

institution by engaging with the challenger's language policies. She takes a very personal approach to this task—in fact, 'nasty' is no longer used as in 'sounding nasty,' but as in 'being nasty.' In other words, the bystander uses what Goodwin & Goodwin (1990) have called *format tying* to draw on prior discourse and transform it so that 'nastiness' becomes a more personal, static descriptor of the challenger, rather than a context-dependent interpretation of language. This evolution is significant; after all, to *be* nasty has a very different connotation than to *sound* nasty.

The challenger and bystander go back and forth for several turns calling each other nasty before the challenger ends the cycle by emphatically denying that she is nasty. The bystander's response in lines 178-179 in extract (10) is notable: she harkens back to an earlier call for support from other customers that the challenger makes in line 20 ("who all agrees with that?") to justify the bystander's active involvement in the interaction. The bystander thus reveals that she isn't chiming in randomly; she was asked to align herself with the challenger earlier, and decided to make it clear that despite a shared customer identity, she does not endorse the challenger's language policy.

This refusal to align with the challenger is interpreted by both the challenger and the target as an alignment with the target. As alluded to earlier, in cases of direct bystander involvement, it would be very difficult for the bystander to claim neutrality, and their alignment with the challenger or target is generally binary and exclusive. In this case, the bystander clearly intends to align herself with the target, and together, they form a unified front against the challenger's verbal abuse.

The bystander provides a non-negligible source of institutional authority to the target as they combat the authority of the challenger. Because the target is not an employee, she isn't

vulnerable to the same economic threats or sanctions as the target, and as a fellow customer, she is under no obligation to respect or cater to the needs of the challenger in a customer service setting. The bystander and target take full advantage of this equal playing field as they tag-team their demand that the challenger leave:

(11) CLDI_022 'If they did something wrong'

```
181 CAM:    Get your ass out.
182 CHA:    Shut the fuck up. You don't tell me when to get the fuck out.
183 TAR:    No you done. We done [we done.       ]
184 CAM:                         [Quit bein nasty]
185 CHA:    Bitch you get back.
186         ((CAM drops her phone and the screen is back for the rest))
187 ???:    Wait wait wait no no no no.
188 CHA:    She's tryin to touch me.
189 ???:    No no no no
190 CHA:    Did you know I'm a (  )
191 CAM:    I don't give a shit what you are.
192 TAR:    No nobody [cares.]
193 CAM:              [(  )  ]
194 CHA:              [(Get) ] you fuckin ass back down.
195 TAR:    Nobody cares Holly (  ) you need to go.
196 CAM:    Sorry I couldn't hold back.
197         (2.0)
198 CAM:    Sorry sorry.
199 CHA:    Now and you're not getting paid for today.
200 TAR:    No pro:blem. You can go you free to go.
201 CAM:    You're nasty.
```

As shown above, in line 181 the bystander uses her invulnerability as a fellow customer to demand that the challenger leave. When the challenger points out the bystander's lack of institutional authority, the target quickly supplies that authority (albeit less forcefully than the bystander). Clearly, this alliance provides a practical advantage for the target by shielding her from the economic threat associated with acting authoritatively on an individual level. This economic threat does resurface as the challenger leaves the premises and makes it clear that she will not pay for the service she received, but the target appears emboldened and unphased by this threat, thanks to the support of the bystander.

The bystander, on the other hand, appears remorseful for her strong stance (lines 196, 198) once she realizes the economic threat that the challenger poses to the target. It's as if she is just realizing that the challenger has the power to make economic threats, and is also realizing that her own power as a customer isn't enough to protect the target from such a threat. This speaks to the highly nuanced and deeply-entrenched nature of these institutional roles—one might not even realize how they operate until they are being used for harm.

It's important to note that customers-as-bystanders can also use their power collectively to align themselves with a challenger or target. This is the case in CLDI_044. In this case, the challenger is a mother bringing her child in for treatment at a hospital in Canada. The targets are two clinical workers, as well as unnamed and unseen doctors whom the challenger references but are not active participants. A large group of bystanders sit in the waiting room as well, and many of the bystanders become actively involved in the interaction starting very early in the recording. The focus of the interaction is the challenger's continued request for a "white, Canadian doctor who speaks English" for her child. She refuses to let her child be seen by any doctor at the hospital, claiming that they don't meet this criteria.

Here, I consider the challenger's role as someone seeking treatment to be analogous to a customer role, since she expects an exchange of payment and services. Therefore, the hospital is a customer service environment, and the clinical workers are customer service workers—not only because they facilitate the payment portion of the exchange, but also because the challenger treats them as representatives of the greater organization and has expectations regarding how they should treat her.

Throughout the recorded interaction (shown below in excerpt (12)), an instance of politeness, rudeness, or another similar attempt to manage moral behavior only appears once,

towards the end. However, what's notable is that this instance is an accusation of rudeness coming from a bystander, directed at the challenger, whereas most other cases we've seen have been the challenger controlling the dialogue about im/politeness. As a group, the bystanders in the hospital waiting room are vocally opposed to the discrimination enacted by the challenger, and they take advantage of their individual and collective power as customers to attempt to influence the behavior of the challenger on behalf of the target. The targets themselves remain non-confrontational, upholding the normative expectations for their behavior as customer service workers.

(12) CLDI_044 'Please see a white doctor'

```
135 CHA    His chest is hurting, and he's sick.
136 CW2:   (       )
137 CHA:   I'm not going there, with all those Paki doctors, I don't have
138        money to go to Georgetown. (.) There's gotta be somebody that
139        speaks English here.=
140 BY3:   =Your child clearly has more issues, with you being his mo:ther,
141        (.) than him needing to see a doctor. You are extremely rude and
142        racist. You wanna talk about Paki people being in a hospital?
143        Maybe you should check yourself i[n.]
```

There is no resolution to the interaction in the form of the challenger either leaving or receiving care, but regardless, the collective actions of the bystanders are a powerful display of customer authority.

While the customer-as-challenger does seem to possess some seemingly unchallengeable rights to abuse others within the customer service space, such as the right to enact economic sanctions against the employees and the institution in general, these cases show us how the customer role can also be used in defense of employees-as-targets. The difference between a customer-as-challenger and a customer-as-bystander is how they choose to engage with the power they have been granted within the customer service institution.

4.2 Inter-customer confrontations

All of the previous cases have one key feature in common: the challenger is a customer, and the target is an employee. We've seen how customers can also use their institutional authority as bystanders, but how does the dynamic shift when both the challenger and the target are customers? Within the confines of the customer service institution, individuals are subject to different expectations, and even rules, than they are in, say, a parking lot or a neighborhood. At the same time, customers in conflict with one another don't always have to play by the same social rules that govern employee behavior. We see this in cases like CLDI_007, in which both the challenger and target are customers, and unsuccessfully attempt to exert authority over each other:

(13) CLDI_007 'Then call the police (Greek couple)'

```
26  TAR:   You're telling [me what language] to speak.
27  REC:                  [  Thank  you:,  ]
28  CHA:   Yeah.=speak Engl[ish. ]=
29  REC:                    [Bye:.]=
30  TAR:   =Don't [tell me what to do.]=
31  CHA:          [you're in America. ]=
32  REC:   =Bye:.
```

Both parties exchange direct orders concerning language and linguistic behavior ("speak English," "don't tell me what to do"), but neither are able to derive power in the same way that they might be able to if the other was an employee of the store. This failure makes clear how the power differential between customer and service provider, derived from institutional roles, is key to 'doing' discrimination in the customer service context.

However, there are cases in which the customer-challenger and customer-target are still obligated to follow the implicit rules of the customer service institution, despite their inability to take advantage of a power differential. While they can't wield direct power over each other, they use their customer identities in creative ways to artificially create a power differential. In

CLDI_014, this is especially clear. Both the challenger and the target are customers shopping in a big-box store at the time of the interaction, and they clearly struggle to establish who has power over the other. It is the target who initially calls the challenger rude in response to a discriminatory remark by the challenger, which implicates the challenger's behavior as non-normative and socially unacceptable. The challenger retaliates, calling the target rude (although no explanation is given for this label). This exchange is shown in extract (14) below:

(14) CLDI_014 'Run your mouth (Walmart)'

```
07  CHA:                [go h- go ba:ck wherever you're from, ((waves arm
08       around))
09       (0.7)
10  TAR: I said excuse [me don't be ru:de=
11  ???:               [( )
12  CHA: =you're the one that's ru[de,
```

Their power struggle continues in extract (15) (below) as the challenger instructs the target to leave and the target staunchly refuses:

(15) CLDI_014 'Run your mouth (Walmart)'

```
48  CHA:                        [((waves arm around)) just go o:n, (.) just=
49       =go o:n,
50      (0.3)
51  CHA: just go on, [((waves arm around)) get your stuff and get out of=
52       =here=
53  TAR:             [whatever
54  TAR: =↑no: I'm [not going to get out of here:,
```

Since neither of them has an advantage over the other, this stalemate mimics other CLDI cases that do not occur in customer service environments, where there are fewer (or no) institutional rules to mobilize. Eventually, a manager (labeled MAN) arrives to intervene on behalf of the target:

(16) CLDI_014 'Run your mouth (Walmart)'

```
86  CHA: ((waves arm around)) get her to- (m-) [leave me alone
87  MAN:                                       [no ma'am (what di- did-)=
88       =this is inappropriate, [(0.5) for- for the-
```

```
89  TAR:                          [↑ridicu[lous
90  CHA:                                  [yeah [((points at TAR)) tell her,
91  MAN:                                        [no no ma'am=
92  TAR: =(↑h[mm)
93  CHA:     [tell her,=
94  MAN: =it's inappro[priate speak for the store,
95  TAR:               [↑I said excuse↑ me
96        (1.6)
97  CHA: I'm not here for the store,
98        (0.7)
99  MAN: you're in the store,
100       (0.2)
101 CHA: I'm spending money in the sto[re,
102 MAN:                              [cor[rect
103 TAR:                                  [so ↑am I:↑ [.hh
104 CHA:                                              [that's correct,
105       (0.2)
106 MAN: uh huh. (.) so we're[11] both [customers,
```

However, the challenger sees the manager as a potential tool for her cause (lines 90 and 93), and assumes that he will yield to her power as a customer and do what she asks him to do. When he labels her behavior as 'inappropriate speak for the store,' again framing her as non-normative within the customer service environment, she doubles down on her authority as a customer by contrasting her customer role with the expectations for an employee in line 97. Because she's not 'here for the store,' or a representative of the customer service establishment, she can get away with behaving non-normatively in a way that an employee could not. By pointing this out, she reframes the employee's reference to what's 'inappropriate speak for the store' to mean 'what's inappropriate for a representative of the store.' The employee clarifies that this is not the case by specifying that the challenger is 'in the store,' so his statement, and the expectations for her behavior, still apply. In further defense of her authority, the challenger points out that she spends money in the store—again, the economic power that customers hold is made

[11] The manager's usage of "we" in line 106 presumably does not include himself (because he is not a customer), and is therefore a puzzling choice. We could compare this to the "nurse's we," but it also seems to be distinct (possibly a second person usage), and perhaps worth investigating further.

explicit and is weaponized to further the aims of the challenger. However, both the challenger and the target are customers, so the target also holds this economic power—the target and manager both point this out in lines 103-106.

The economic argument appears to be a sticking point for the challenger because the target possesses equal economic power as a fellow customer. Any rights derived from being a paying customer are neutralized in a conflict with another paying customer, and everyone involved in the interaction seems to be aware of this.

When the 'paying customer' angle fails, the challenger turns to another strategy derived from her power as a customer—the strategy of intimidating the employee by implying her intention to threaten his job security. The challenger instantiates this in line 179 when she confirms the manager's first name, implying that she is taking a mental note to report his behavior later:

(17) CLDI_014 'Run your mouth (Walmart)'

```
168 MAN:    [she's shopping as well ma'am, [she has every right to be here =
169      =as you,
170 CHA:                                   [I am too and I'm not going to=
171      =listen to her mou:th
172      (1.0)
173 MAN: you don't have to listen to her but she's st[ill here and has every=
174      =right (.) <to shop>
175 CHA:                                             [I do when she's=
176      =((crab hand gesture))(dutdutdut) I do,=
177 MAN: =which is what you're doing as well ma'am
178      (2.5)
179 CHA: ((moves closer to MAN)) what's your name, [Wes?
```

The recording ends not long after this, with the challenger walking away in frustration. In just a few minutes of interaction, though, several strategies are employed by the challenger to leverage her power as a customer in order to enact discrimination. When there is no initial imbalance in power supplied by the customer-employee relationship, the challenger creatively

draws on other institutional advantages until she's exhausted her options and leaves. These advantages include, but are not limited to: the 'customer is always right' mentality, which emboldens the customer to make brash demands and expect them to be carried out; economic advantages, mostly related to an ability and willingness to spend money and an expectation that the institution will protect the right to do so; and unsubstantiated threats to job security, implied through the explicit and theatrical solicitation of the personal identifiers of employee.

Through the employment of these strategies and others, the customer service environment is uniquely suited to protecting the customer-as-challenger's right to discriminate against linguistic minorities (which may also be intersectional with other minority identities like race, gender, and class; Crenshaw 1989). The ease with which challengers draw on the implicit rights of customers to aid them in their discrimination in a variety of contexts is deeply unsettling; the difficulty that targets and target-aligned bystanders often have in combating this discrimination is equally disturbing. The expectations placed on service workers to be subservient, unwaveringly positive and helpful, and liable for customers' (subjectively) unpleasant experiences make them especially vulnerable to attack—multimodality might explain how linguistic minorities in customer service roles experience this vulnerability to an even greater degree. The cases in this analysis are intended to illustrate some of the many ways in which challengers can creatively make use of institutional roles in the customer service context to 'do' discrimination, and also how targets and bystanders can creatively make use of their own respective roles to challenge discrimination.

5.0 Discussion

This paper has thoroughly discussed the different tools that customers have at their disposal to enforce language policies and manipulate the norms to serve their interests in customer service contexts. However, this knowledge, while a useful first step, does little on its own to resist the structures that it describes, and begs us to further investigate how it might be practically employed. One avenue is to explore how participants might *resist* or *combat* discrimination by harnessing context-specific roles and expectations, especially ones that are morally-enforced. In other words, how can target-aligned actors weaponize the power associated with being a customer or service provider for good? Bystanders, especially, seem to have a great potential for shifting the overall power dynamics of a discriminatory interaction, even though most bystanders might not know this about themselves in the moment. We saw how alliances between employee targets and customer bystanders can blend the different sources of institutional power to sanction customer challengers, and making customers aware of their power to assist targets in times of conflict might embolden them to become more involved in cases of harassment in the future.

Suggesting that bystanders and targets could defend themselves more effectively is perhaps the wrong approach, though, especially keeping in mind that some targets are ESL speakers who may not even have the linguistic resources necessary to fight back, and bystander allies might not always be available. Playing defense, so to speak, is a sisyphean task with unacceptable risks for targets. Instead, this analysis should guide us toward changing the culture around customer service to make it less easy for challengers to safely do discrimination in those contexts in the first place. The customer empowerment that firms seem to value so greatly seems to be a prime culprit, and the existence of this value could be traced back to neoliberal

individualism and consumerism which have allowed the "customer is always right" mentality to thrive. This research, along with previous work by others (Harris & Daunt 2013; Harris & Reynolds 2003; Kashif & Zarkada 2015), has demonstrated the violent outcomes associated with the customer being "wrong," or behaving unacceptably by enacting discrimination. This allows us to ask what needs to change in order for institutional representatives to regain some power for self-defense in these situations. This could be addressed through company trainings and policies which discourage and disallow customer misbehavior, and which firmly support employees' rights to maintain a safe workplace.

This analysis of language discrimination is also, inevitably, missing some context. We have seen from the data just how intense language-related conflicts can be, and language alone can't seem to explain this intensity, despite the fact that "language discrimination" is the central focus of the corpus. Customer service role relations can't account for this either. I have struggled with this incomplete explanation; in fact, throughout the paper I have had to repress the urge to describe the behavior of challengers as 'racist' as opposed to 'discriminatory' for the sake of precision. However, the intuitions behind my vocabulary are not unfounded. I would be remiss to present this analysis without also acknowledging that language discrimination, in these interactions, is about much more than just language. Why, we should ask, did certain linguistic varieties come to be stigmatized and undervalued (Lippi-Green 2011) in the first place? Why am I inclined to label challengers as 'racist?'

The answer to these questions is language racialization— a process by which language and race come to be associated with each other as "systems of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of communities co-construct and transmit from generation to generation through learning" (Charity Hudley 2017: 381). Charity Hudley (2017) describes

how ideas about language and race have been co-constructed throughout history due to colonialism[12] and white supremacy, and this is exactly what we see expressed in the CLDI data.

It's true that very few interactants explicitly mention race, and the connection is often derived by considering history, politics, economics, and other fields in context; regardless, race is undeniably present in the way participants talk about language. When a challenger says, "if you want to be polite to the customer, speak English to the customer in America," they're making a claim about who is considered normal in America and how the way we speak reflects this. The case of CLDI_020 is a great example of how easy it is for participants to talk about language and race as indexing each other, and vice versa—in this case, through the invocation of nationality (with accompanying subtext about immigration, citizenship, economic status, etc.). After hearing that another employee is Cuban, the challengers say "but that's okay, he was speaking English to us." In this explanation, "that's okay" is *permitting* Cubanness, and only on the grounds that an element of Cuban culture, Spanish language, was assimilated to the language associated with whiteness: English. In other words, behavior and presentations of self become more acceptable as they become more aligned with whiteness.

This conclusion leads us to Hill's (1998) concept of *white public space*, which Hill describes as a phenomenon constructed in the following ways:

> "(1) intense monitoring of the speech of racialized populations such as Chicanos and Latinos and African Americans for signs of linguistic disorder and (2) the invisibility of almost identical signs in the speech of Whites, where language mixing, required for the

[12] I have personally struggled with and find it important to acknowledge the fact that English is both the privileged scientific metalanguage for pragmatics (Haugh 2016) and the language of oppression in many CLDI cases as a result of a long history of colonialism and hegemony. Ultimately, I believe that it is important to begin critically examining, even in the dominant language, hegemonic practices, but also to make this research accessible to the non-English speakers it is intended to benefit.

> expression of a highly valued type of colloquial persona, takes several forms." (Hill 1998: 680)

This is the key to understanding why challengers (who are often white, although not always) seek to police and harass speakers of other languages in public spaces—the treatment of non-English-speaking and nonwhite bodies as marked maintains a norm in which English-speaking, white bodies are unmarked, and therefore 'normal.' Interventions, such as individually-enacted language policies, defend the white public space against perceived threats.

Indeed, language ideologies and policies are about much more than just language. When we say that customer service environments are particularly amenable to language discrimination, what we're also saying is that customer service environments are particularly salient and defensible white public spaces. The data shown here support this claim, especially when politeness is metapragmatically employed; the mechanisms for enacting language discrimination and the mechanisms for maintaining white public space are one and the same. Therefore, this research contributes not just to the intersection of language discrimination, politeness, and customer service, but to the monitoring of white public space in the customer service realm specifically, which in turn creates opportunities to critically examine normativity, white supremacy, and structural racism.

6.0 Conclusion

Up until this point, I have treated the data as objective, and for the most part, it does provide a fairly objective perspective thanks to its spontaneous nature. However, the data drawn upon to make observations and conclusions would not be possible if it were not for the dozens of people who happened to be in the right place at the right time with a camera and who chose to

record and upload the interactions. While we can be grateful for the circumstances and choices that led to the creation of the video data, we must also interrogate these circumstances and choices themselves. A good place to start is by asking who is behind the camera and why they chose to start filming when they did, but these are oftentimes impossible questions to answer. Even more difficult are the questions of which challengers *aren't* being recorded and why. As it stands, we can posit general hypotheses: for example, perhaps female-presenting challengers are recorded more often than male-presenting challengers because they're perceived as less physically dangerous by the recorder. However, these hypotheses are difficult to test with the existing data, so more data and subsequent research are pivotal to beginning to unpack these nebulous questions of sampling.

That's not to say that this study doesn't offer an important first step in understanding how politeness is weaponized in customer service settings to enact discrimination and maintain white public space. Even so, it also exposes new questions that we didn't even know to ask previously. There is a strong need, and many opportunities, for future research which could elaborate on this work and employ innovative research design and methods. For example, a more explicit comparison between CLDI cases occurring in strictly public places (like those mentioned earlier—parks, parking lots, etc.) and cases occurring in customer service environments (which I have exclusively examined here) could reveal more about the different strategies participants might use to discriminate or respond to discrimination. Another direction might examine whether participants make use of different strategies depending on whether they are physically inside of a customer service establishment or just outside of it, like in CDLI_022, which takes place on the front porch of a Cracker Barrel restaurant. There are countless opportunities to expand upon this work—perhaps a systematic comparison of discriminatory interactions in restaurants versus in

retail settings might yield significant results, or a comparison of different cultures' politeness strategies might be conducted as more international cases are added to the corpus.

Future research might also wish to address the methodological issues mentioned earlier by looking beyond the CLDI data, or by comparing them to data from other sources. Others might also seek to enrich the data by diversifying the data included in the corpus. How, for example, might a study of politeness in customer service encounters look different if we were to gain access to 24-hour security footage over a period of a month, or even longer, from a single institution? Or perhaps there are other ways to interact with the subjectivity of the recorder, human or non-human, to look at these interactions from different perspectives. I have already proposed half a dozen possible directions for future research herein, and there are countless others exciting possibilities for researchers to explore, and so much we still don't understand about this phenomenon.

The CLDI is a relatively new resource to researchers interested in naturally occurring data, and I sincerely hope that this research will inspire more use of the CLDI in a similar bottom-up approach to the one taken here. The data offers a wealth of information about real-world discrimination, and interested researchers would do well to let the strategies that participants employ serve as guides to new lines of inquiry. For those who, like me, seek to not just analyze, but transform the systems that enable oppression, these investigations into the mechanisms of real-world discrimination are an incredibly meaningful task to take up, and there is much more important work to be done in defense of linguistic pluralism and social justice.

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Appendix

Commonly Used Transcription Conventions

The following are the symbols that appear most frequently in the transcripts we'll be working with in this class. For a more complete listing, consult your textbook, Jefferson (2004), and/or Hepburn & Bolden (2017).

`?,.`	**Punctuation** is designed to capture intonation, not grammar: Comma is for slightly upward/downward 'continuing' intonation; question mark for full upward intonation; and period for full falling intonation.
`[`	**Left-side brackets** indicate where overlapping talk begins.
`]`	**Right-side brackets** indicate where overlapping talk ends.
`(0.8)`	**Numbers in parentheses** indicate periods of silence, in tenths of a second. A period inside parentheses is a pause less than two-tenths of a second.
`:::`	**Colons** indicate a lengthening of the sound just preceding them, proportional to the number of colons.
`becau-`	**A hyphen** indicates an abrupt cut-off or self-interruption of the sound in progress indicated by the preceding letter(s) (the example here represents a glottal-stopped "because").
`He says`	**Underlining** indicates stress or emphasis.
`HE SAYS`	**Capital letters** indicate exceptional loudness.
`>He says<`	**Inward-pointing angle brackets** indicate that the rate of speech is faster than the surrounding speech.
`<He says>`	**Outward-pointing angle brackets** indicate that the rate of speech is slower than the surrounding speech.
`£Oh okay£`	**British pound signs** indicate talk produced while smiling (i.e., 'smile voice').
`↑pea↓chy`	**An arrow** symbol indicates a marked high/low pitch.
`=`	**Equal signs** (ordinarily at the end of one line and the start of an ensuing one) indicate a "latched" relationship—no silence at all between them.
`( )`	**Empty parentheses** indicate talk too obscure to transcribe. Words or letters inside such parentheses indicate a best estimate of what is being said.
`hhh .hhh`	**The letter "h"** is used to indicate hearable aspiration, its length roughly proportional to the number of *h*'s. If preceded by a dot, the aspiration is an in-breath. Aspiration internal to a word (e.g., laughter, sighing) is enclosed in parentheses.
`°hello°`	Talk appearing within **degree signs** is lower in volume relative to surrounding talk.
`((looks))`	Words in **double parentheses** indicate transcriptionist's comments (e.g., for non-vocal behavior).
`->`	**Arrows** in the margin point to the lines of transcript relevant to the point being made in the text.