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Openings and closings in tourist offices in Belgium, France and the Netherlands: A relational analysis of their structural properties

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Abstract This paper deals with openings and closings in 400 service encounters in tourist offices situated in Belgium's two main language communities, Flanders and Wallonia, in the north of France and the south of the Netherlands. On the basis of a detailed, bottom-up quantitative analysis of the structural properties of the openings and closings, we draw part of the interactional profiles of the tourist office encounters. Differences between the four regions are shown to be related to the degree of volubility and involvement of the interactants and to the degree of ritualisation and efficiency of the opening and the closing section.

Keywords openings, closings, Belgium, tourist office encounters

Introduction

Service encounters have been defined as oral or written interactions in which "some kind of commodity, be it goods, information or both, is exchanged between a service provider (e.g. clerk, vendor) and a service seeker (e.g. a customer or a visitor)" (Félix-Brasdefer 2015: 1). They are analysed as institutional interactions because they concern asymmetric, task- and goal-oriented interactions between a representative of an institutionalised, commercial or non-commercial setting, viz. the 'service provider', and an "ordinary" participant, viz. the 'service seeker' (Drew & Heritage 1992).

However, in spite of their task- and goal-orientedness, interactions in service encounters are hardly ever restricted to mere transactional talk. They generally also contain a more or less significant proportion of talk that is crucially "interactional" (e.g. Aston 1988) or "relational" in nature (McCarthy 2000, Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008, Félix-Brasdefer 2015), hence not essential to the transaction at hand.

For several decades, scholars have been attracted by the recurrent presence and the relative orderliness of the relational component of service encounters, the reasoning being that these regularities found in strictly non-essential parts in a transaction can only be due to certain (normative) expectations of the interactants with respect to the ways they should interact (Márquez-Reiter & Bou-Franch 2017: 2). From a cross-cultural perspective, the recurrent differences observed with regard to the relational component of the transaction

point towards distinct cultural practices and norms, which may shed light on distinct "politeness orientation[s] of a lingua-culture in a given institutional context" (Márquez-Reiter & Bou-Franch 2017: 2).

This paper sets out to study relational talk as it is displayed in opening and closing sections of service encounters in the specific institutional setting of tourist offices. Just like other relational portions of the interaction, (verbally realised) openings and closings are, strictly speaking, non-obligatory for the transaction to take place, but they fulfil a number of important structural, cognitive and social functions. As a matter of fact, according to Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005), openings and closings are the locus par excellence of positive politeness (see section 1.4.), realised by greetings, thankings and wishes. These speech acts support the relation between participants and allow one to start or to end a conversation in a 'smooth' way (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 243).

The paper is situated in the field of cross-cultural and variational pragmatics (Schneider & Barron 2008). It follows hence the overall objective of these studies to examine to which extent groups of people who share the same (variant of a pluricentric) language and the same geographically delineated area (e.g. the same country or the same subnational entity, e.g. Flanders/Wallonia) share comparable verbal and, more generally, interactional behaviour. In this paper, the focus is on four neighbouring regions which share, in pairs, the same, pluricentric, language: Dutch for Flanders and the (southern part of the) Netherlands, on one hand, and French for Wallonia and (the northern part of) France, on the other hand. Whereas French interactions in 'small shops' have been the object of a fairly high amount of (cross-cultural) studies, the systematic, quantitative based study of opening and closing sections in service encounters in Belgium and the Netherlands has hardly been undertaken (see Tobback & Van den Heede 2019) let alone the combined comparison with two French-language regions.

This paper is the first part of a diptych that aims to describe the verbally expressed communicative behaviour in openings and closings in order to get a grip on the interactional profiles that emerge from these boundary sections of tourist office interactions. The present paper is focussed on the structural properties of openings and closing rituals as constituted by combinations of a series of opening and closing devices such as greetings, thankings and wishes.

The structure of the paper is as follows: after having described the main conceptual framework of the research (Section 1), the research focus, the corpus and the discursive setting (Section 2), we present the results with respect to the organisation and the composition of respectively the opening (Section 3) and closing ritual (Section 4). The results will allow us to reflect on the interactional profiles of the four regions in Section 5, before jumping to a general conclusion in Section 6.

1. Conceptual background

This section discusses some of the previously described main characteristics of service encounters which are useful for our analysis (1.1.), before turning to the functions of opening and closing rituals (1.2.) and to context-bound variation exhibited by the interactional behaviour in service encounters (1.3.).

1.1. Characterising Service Encounters : institutional and relational aspects

Service encounters involve task- and goal-oriented (Drew & Heritage 1992) interactions between a representative of an institutionalised, commercial or non-commercial setting (service provider) and an ordinary participant (service seeker), which qualifies them as 'institutional interactions' (Félix-Brasdefer 2015; Márquez-Reiter & Bou-Franch 2017). According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005), their characteristics are situated between those of formal institutional interactions and informal conversations. Heritage & Greatbach (1991, in Félix-Brasdefer 2015: 26), however, make a distinction between formal and informal institutional interactions. Both remain task- and goal-oriented, but while the former are characterised by a strict question-answer format and by a fixed turn-taking system, informal institutional interactions have a much freer organisation and certain parts can take on a quasi-conversational character (Félix-Brasdefer 2015: 26).

In contrast to the symmetric relationship that characterises ordinary conversations or interactions between colleagues in a work situation (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008), the nature of the relationship between service provider and service seeker is described as asymmetric. Indeed, both participants have different roles and tasks: the service seeker makes

a request, receives a product or service and pays (if necessary), while the service provider takes on tasks such as receiving the visitor, explaining/providing products or asking for payment (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008: 19). The asymmetric nature of the interaction does however not necessarily entail that one of the participants dominates the relation (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008). Especially in commercial settings, each of the participants may be dominant in different ways. The sellers are financially dependent on their clients and are at the service of the client who is 'king', who takes the initiative for the interaction and has the most decision-making power (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001). But the salespeople are in their own territory and they have the 'power', as it were, to serve. They are also the ones who possess the technical knowledge regarding the products/services they offer. The sellers are thus the professional 'experts', while the customers are typically just 'amateurs', although, in the capacity of customers, some competence can be attributed to them (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2008: 20).

Although service encounters are task- and goal oriented interactions, in a similar way as other types of interactions, and especially work place discourse, they are constituted both by instrumental or transactional talk and by talk that is "participant relationship-oriented" (McCarthy 2000: 84). The opposition between both types of talk is, however, not clear cut, which leads to the conceptualisation of a continuum with 'core business/service talk' at one extreme and 'phatic talk' at the other extreme end of it (Holmes 2000, Placencia & Mancera Rueda 2011, Félix-Brasdefer 2015). Core business talk or (purely) 'transactional talk' (McCarthy 2002, Félix-Brasdefer 2015) may been defined as "relevant, focussed, often context-bound, on-task talk, with a high information content" (Holmes 2000: 36). In service encounters, this form of talk is exemplified, for instance, by requests for products or payment. By contrast, 'phatic talk', is "independent of any specific workplace content, […] 'atopical' and irrelevant in terms of workplace business […] and has relatively little referential content or information load" (Holmes 2000: 27). Most typical examples of phatic talk are ritualised forms of greetings and partings.

Since most of the distinctive features of both forms of talk are gradable, many instances of work place/service encounter talk figure in between the extreme ends of the continuum. Close to 'core business/service talk', Holmes (2000) and Placencia & Mancera Rueda (2011) consider 'off-topic work/ser-

vice related talk', which concerns talk that is not strictly relevant for the task at hand but nevertheless work related. McCarthy (2000) and Félix-Brasdefer (2015) use the term 'transactional-plus-relational talk' to refer to transactional talk that includes a relational component (e.g. by asking if the client wants "cutting it as normal", the hairdresser shows to be engaged in a personal relationship with the client, McCarthy 2000) or to non-obligatory personal comments on transactional events (e.g. when a client at the hairdresser's notices the smell of the shampoo, McCarthy 2000). Because it explicitly refers to the relational component, we prefer to adopt the term 'transactional-plus-relational' talk.

On the other side of the continuum, apart from ritualised, context-independent phatic talk, one also finds relational talk that is less ritualised, and more specifically related to the context and the individuals involved. It is off-topic and the focus is on the contact between the interlocutors, although it may be loosely linked to the work place. This type of talk is labelled 'social talk' by Holmes (2000) and it is included, together with the most ritualised, context-independent 'phatic talk', in the category of 'small talk'. We will however follow Placencia & Mancera Rueda (2011) in considering 'phatic talk' as a form of 'social talk' and in opposing (ritualised) 'phatic talk' to 'creative/individualised social talk', although even 'phatic talk' may contain creative or individualised elements.

Based on the different forms of continuums proposed in Holmes (2000), McCarthy (2000), Placencia & Mancera Rueda (2011) and Félix-Brasdefer (2015), we adopt the following continuum for types of talk in service encounters:

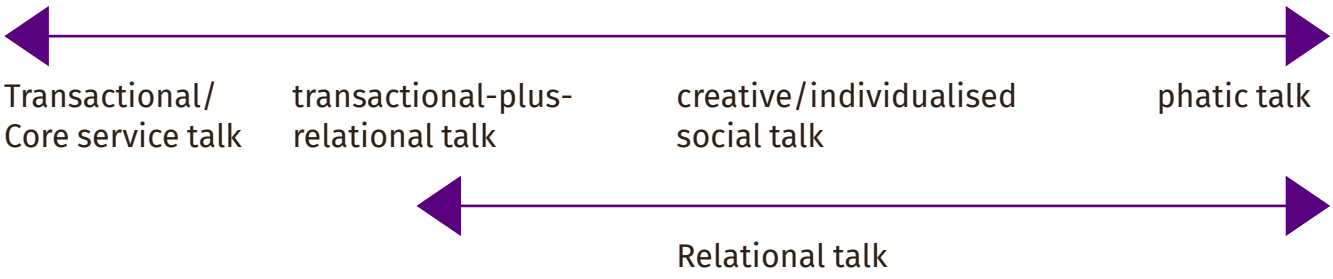


Figure 1. Types of talk in service encounters.

While some forms of relational talk, especially elements of phatic talk such as greetings and farewells, also have an organising function and others may play a role in the realisation of power relations (Holmes 2000), what they all have in common is their social function. Fundamentally, relational talk serves to construct, express, maintain and reinforce interpersonal relationships between interactants (Holmes 2000, Félix-Brasdefer 2015). In contrast to transactional talk, which is oriented towards task achievement, and hence towards 'efficiency' concerns, relational talk is essentially oriented towards 'face' concerns (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang 2003, Lorenzo-Dus 2011). More specifically, relational talk serves to 'oil' the relationship between speakers and is oriented towards the positive face of the addressee, which makes it a "core example of positively polite talk" (Holmes 2000: 49). However, although it may seem opposed to efficiency and to the goal-orientedness of service encounters as institutional interactions, indirectly, "oiling the wheels" of the relationship may also be beneficial for the transaction at hand (Holmes 2000, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005).

1.2. Opening and closing rituals: from structural properties to relational work and (positive) politeness

For several decades, the opening and the closing of ordinary conversations and institutional interactions have attracted a lot of research interest. From a conversation analytic perspective, researchers (e.g. Schegloff 1968, 1979; Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Sacks et al. 1974) have mainly been interested in the detailed description of the opening and leave taking 'machinery', as part of their overall objective to describe the orderliness and the systematicity of the organisation of conversation and interaction (Schegloff 1979). Roughly speaking, in openings, participants have to start the machinery, which consists of several interactional resources such as summons-answers, identification/recognition, greetings… (see for instance Mazeland 2003). Conversely, in closings, participants have to stop the machinery, which means they have to reach "a point where one speaker's completion will not occasion another speaker's talk, and that will not be heard as some speaker's silence" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 295). The use of pre-closing devices has been described as an important

mechanism to initiate the closing section of an interaction (Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Placencia 1997).

Other scholars, following early accounts by Goffman (1971), Firth (1972), Laver (1981), go beyond the description of purely structural properties of conversations and see conversational mechanisms as motivated, as meaning construction tools which serve to share information and build and preserve social relationships, among other things (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005 : 6). In this perspective, the focus is on the social/psychological and, hence, 'relational' or 'politeness' function of openings and closings (Placencia 1997, Holmes 2000, Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005, Dumas 2008, Placencia & Mancera Rueda 2011, Félix-Brasdefer 2015). From this perspective, both openings and closings have been interpreted as somehow risky activities (Laver 1981). Starting an interaction means one enters the 'territory', the personal space of the addressee (Rash 2004), while ending an interaction carries the risk of ending the relationship between speakers (Placencia 1997). Greetings, then, have a propitiatory function in that they allow to break the silence (Laver 1981) and to show the speaker as not aggressive (Firth 1972), but as willing to establish (be it) a minimal social relationship. This leads to reducing uncertainty or even anxiety (Firth 1972, Márquez Reiter & Placencia 2004). At closings, agreement markers (or 'warrants', e.g. *okay*, Schegloff & Sacks 1974) tend to be used as indirect means to indicate interlocutors' wish to end the interaction. Moreover, in service encounters, even though the separation is not dramatic, very often closing rituals prove to be quite extensive, which shows that taking your leave *is* in one way or another a risky activity. In Laver's (1981: 290) terms: "maximum risk leads to maximum routine, and conversely, maximum routine reflects highest risk".

As opposed to this 'pessimistic view' on opening and closing rituals as means to reduce the risky character of starting and ending an interaction, greetings and farewells, as typical expressions of phatic talk, have also been interpreted as oriented to the addressee's positive face needs (Holmes 2000, see section 1.2.). In the same vain, Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2014) analyses the speech acts used in the opening and closing sequences as instances of positive politeness. This concords with the author's model of Politeness (the model we adhere to in this research), which is presented (see e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005) as a revised version of Brown & Levinson's (1987) original framework of

linguistic politeness[1]. One of the key elements of Kerbrat-Orecchioni's model concerns, precisely, the idea that Brown & Levinson's model is too pessimistic because it is based on the overall assumption that most speech acts are potentially face threatening. In order to take into account speech acts such as compliments, thankings or congratulations, which are mainly enhancing of flattering interactants' faces, Kerbrat-Orecchioni introduces the concept of 'face flattering acts' (FFAs). This also leads to redefining the concepts of 'negative politeness' and 'positive politeness'. 'Negative politeness' consists in avoiding to commit a FTA or to soften (and compensate) its realisation by all kinds of strategies, whereas 'positive politeness' consists in producing a FFA and this does not have to entail any 'repairing mechanism' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 198). In this view, openings allow a smooth start of the interaction (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005), whereas closings aim to strengthen the social relationship. In the case of service encounters, previously unknown participants show that they are not completely strangers to each other anymore and that the interaction has modified the nature of their relations, albeit temporarily. Hence, they engage in a short negotiation which aims to determine in which terms they will take their leave, the purpose being to conserve a positive image of the encounter (André-Larochebouvy 1984, in Dumas 2008).

1.3. Variation in service encounters: context and 'culture'

While the interactional behaviour between participants in service encounters serves very general socio-psychological functions, it has been shown to exhibit lots of context-related variation, which may concern the purely organisational properties but also the relational component of the interaction. Two of these factors are of specific interest to this paper: the characteristics of the discursive setting and the cultural background of the interactants.

1 Kerbrat-Orecchioni's vision on politeness concords in several respects with insights from so-called 'second-wave' or discourse approaches to Politeness (e.g. Locher 2006; Locher & Watts 2008). For instance, she also insists on the importance of 'context', stating that politeness is an inherently adaptive phenomenon, without accepting however, that any utterance may be polite or impolite depending on the contextual situation. For Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005), the "(im)politeness-effect" is produced conjointly by the content of the utterance (its status as a FTA or a FFA), its formulation (with possible softeners of strengtheners) and the situational and cultural context.

Variations related to discursive settings can be triggered by the type of 'shop' or the type of product/service involved (e.g. fewer greetings but more frequent enquiries regarding the availability of a product in open air markets than in enclosed shops, see Mitchell 1957 in Félix-Brasdefer 2015), by the time factor (e.g. less time for jokes or small talk in busy settings) or by the characteristics of the participants: especially the question whether the service seeker is a frequent visitor/client or not, has an impact on the nature and amount of relational talk in a conversation (Placencia 1997, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005, Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008, Dumas 2008).

Previous research has also shown that 'culture'[2] matters. Comparing interactions in 'small shops' in France to interactions in Vietnam, Syria, Tunisia and Lebanon, several scholars found differences related to the general architecture and the temporal organisation of the interaction, as summarised clearly in Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso's (2008) literature review. Concerning the general architecture, it has been shown that whereas in France, the interaction starts as soon as clients enter the shop, this does (or did)[3] not necessarily prove to be the case in Tunisian grocery shops (Hmed 1997, in Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008), where clients often express their request before being taken care of, or in Syrian shops, where interactions are regularly opened from outside the shop by clients asking for the availability of a product (Traverso 2006, in Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008). With respect to the temporal organisation, c.q. time management, in France, service encounters in small shops appear to be determined by several principles such as 'efficiency' (or 'celerity', Cosnier & Picard 1992), the 'cuing principle' or the principle of 'continuity' in interaction (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008). This means interactions do generally not take longer than needed, clients are being served according to the principle 'first in first out' and one interaction is ended before a new one starts. As was shown by several scholars (Hmed 1997, Dimachki 2004, Traverso 2006, in Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008),

2 Following previous cross-cultural research on service encounters, the term 'culture' is used (in a pre-theoretical and heuristic fashion) to refer to groups of people who share the same language and/or the same geographically delineated area (national countries or subnational entities such as semi-autonomous regions, e.g. Flanders/Wallonia).

3 It would be interesting to test whether the observations made some 15 to 25 years ago still apply today.

these principles do not always apply in countries such as Tunisia, Lebanon or Syria. Researchers observed clients do not necessarily respect the 'cuing principle', take their time even if others are waiting and different interactions may be conducted more or less at the same time.

Whereas previous cultural variations are globally related to structural characteristics of the interaction (which nevertheless may have an impact on the relational component), others have to do more specifically with the purely relational aspect of the service encounter. Concerning openings and closings of service encounters, cross-cultural analyses show for instance that these require a substantial number of ritual speech acts in French small shops, whereas this is much less the case in other cultures (e.g. Syria, Tunisia, Vietnam, Lebanon, see references in Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008). Research in clothing and accessories stores in two Latin American cities (Montevideo in Uruguay and Quito in Ecuador) also revealed differences related to the length of opening and closing sequences and to the degree of variability of formulas used to show the availability of the service provider, but also to the use of more or less formal address forms between the participants (e.g. use of V/T; cf. Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004). With respect to Belgian and Dutch service encounters, hardly any systematic research on service encounters has been undertaken yet (see Tobback & Van den Heede 2019). Danblon *et al.* (2005), however, refer to the impression voiced by foreign visitors that politeness markers and, especially, expressions such as 'please' and 'thank you' are used very frequently in Belgian service encounters. The exploratory study conducted by these authors in 300 Belgian service encounters (100 in each administrative Region: Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) revealed, furthermore, that service providers overall use more politeness markers than service seekers and that 'farewells' (comprising several types of elements such as greetings and wishes) are almost omnipresent.

The observed variations with respect to the relational component of the service encounter interactions have been linked to more general oppositions between more convivial (friendly) vs more distant interaction styles (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008), "weak interactional speech" vs "friendly interactions" (Aston 1988) or respectful distance-keeping vs involvement/closeness strategies (Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004). These oppositions, in turn, may be linked to the two types of face which are negotiated by par-

ticipants in service encounters: involvement versus independence (Scollon *et al.* 1995/2012, Félix-Brasdefer 2015).

Weak interactional speech or deference politeness appears when participants behave, not as individual persons seeking to have a (brief) friendly personal contact with each other but as "competent consociates" (Aston 1988: 95), who show polite behaviour that adheres fairly strictly to their institutional role. The purpose of the "weak interactional speak", is mainly "facilitative" in that it serves to oil "the social wheels so that the transaction can be smoothly completed" (Aston 1988: 78). In this case, participants may be said to be oriented towards the 'independence' aspect of face[4], which manifests itself through several discursive strategies, such as "making minimal assumptions about the needs or interests of others, by not "putting words into their mouths", by giving others the widest range of options, or by using formal names and titles" (Scollon *et al.* 2012: 48). Taciturnity and using one's own language or dialect are presented as other independence strategies (*ibidem*).

By contrast, in the case of "friendly interactions", the use of relational talk cannot simply be related to its facilitative function, but it should be explained by the willingness to establish "friendly relations which constitute an end in themselves" (Aston 1988: 78–79). In that case, participants do not act as representatives of their respective roles, but as individuals who do some 'positive politeness' (e.g. when a hotel receptionist asks a specific (friendly) question to hotel guests with respect to what they did that day, Aston 1988). In this case, the involvement[5] aspect of face is foregrounded. It is displayed through discourse strategies such as paying attention to others, showing a strong interest in their affairs, pointing out common in-group membership or points of view with them, or using first names (Scollon *et al.* 2012: 51). Other strategies mentioned are general volubility and using the interlocutor's language or dialect (ibidem).

4 The independence aspect of face is close to the definition of 'negative face' given by Brown & Levinson (1987).

5 Which is close to the definition of 'positive face' given by Brown & Levinson 1987 (cf. Locher 2008).

2. Research objectives, corpus and discursive setting

Before getting to the results, we describe the objectives of the research (2.1.), the corpus and its annotation (2.2.) and we reflect on the specificities of the discursive setting of the tourist offices (2.3).

2.1. Research objectives

This paper focuses on the relational work which is verbally performed by visitors and clerks in the opening and closing sections of service encounters in tourist offices in Flanders, Wallonia, the Southern part of the Netherlands and the northern part of France[6]. Based on a bottom-up, quantified analysis of a considerable data set, the overall aim or our research is to describe the ways interactants, in different regions, perform relational work and interpret their relationships in this specific context. More specifically, the present paper deals with the structural properties of the opening and closing sections, focussing on the typology and frequency of opening and closing devices or 'speech acts'[7] involved, the length of the opening and closing sections and their degree of ritualisation (the extent to which they present fixed patterns, or conversely, allow variations)[8].

First, we will offer a description of the commonalities and differences between the four groups of lingua-cultures along the dimensions mentioned above. This comparison will allow us to understand how participants take

6 The paper develops a pilot study conducted by the authors (Tobback & Van den Heede 2019) on the opening and closing rituals in 200 tourist offices in the two Dutch-speaking regions, viz. Flanders (Belgium) and the southern part of the Netherlands. The present paper incorporates the Dutch-language data used in the previous study and broadens the picture by integrating 200 French-language interactions in tourist offices in Wallonia (the French-speaking region in Belgium) and (the northern part of) France. As will be shown (Section 6, conclusion), the French-language data allow to shed new light on some of the previous findings.

7 Following Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005: 22), we adopt the concept of 'speech act' without strictly adhering to all the theoretical assumptions of Austin and Searle. The stance we adopt is that distinct linguistic forms (or types of utterances) may serve the same communicative function of 'greeting', 'thanking', 'wishing', 'expressing the availability to help' etc.

8 This study will be completed by a detailed analysis of the repertoire of pragmalinguistic expressions used in these interaction (Tobback & Van den Heede in prep.).

up their specific roles as service seeker and service provider, how they build up a minimal social relationship at the opening and how they manage face at the moment of leaving the interaction. As such, both the discourse genre (based on the commonalities) and the cross-cultural dimension (based on the cross-cultural specifics) will be in focus.

2.2. The corpus and the annotation

The research was conducted on a corpus of audio-recordings of 400 interactions in 13 different tourist offices, between clerks and visitors from to the same country (France, the Netherlands) or the same subnational entity (Flanders, Wallonia):

- 100 interactions between French visitors and French clerks in 3 tourist offices situated in two regions close to Belgium, more specifically in two cities situated in Nord-Pas-de-Calais Picardie, and one city in Alsace Champagne-Ardenne Lorraine[9];
- 100 interactions between visitors and clerks of Walloon origin in 4 tourist offices situated in four different Walloon provinces: Liège, Luxembourg, Namur, Hainaut;
- 100 interactions between Dutch visitors and Dutch clerks in 3 tourist offices situated in the (southern) Dutch provinces Zuid-Holland (1 tourist office) and Noord-Brabant (2 tourist offices).
- 100 interactions between Flemish visitors and Flemish clerks in 3 tourist offices situated in the provinces Antwerpen (Antwerp), Vlaams-Brabant (Flemish Brabant) and West-Vlaanderen (West-Flanders).

Clerks (and managers of the tourist offices) were asked the permission to record the interactions before the start of the research. In order to avoid the observer's paradox (Labov 1972), the information provided to them with regard to the objectives of the research was kept quite general[10]. Visitors

9 For the sake of anonymity, we do not provide the names of the cities.
10 They were informed that the research aimed to analyse linguistic features of the interaction.

were requested to give their consent to use the anonymised data for scientific linguistic research, immediately after the conversation. Besides avoiding the observer's paradox, this approach allowed the interaction to start without being hindered by the intervention of the researcher (asking permission). Since conversations in tourist offices are not sensitive or private, permission was obtained very easily and only very few visitors asked to delete the recordings (see also Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004).

A total of 53 clerks took part in the interactions, besides 100 visitors per tourist office, which limits the impact of individual speaking habits on the results to some extent[11]. The interactions were transcribed into Elan (https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/) and further annotated in Excel. The analysis was always done by one investigator, but in case of doubt, the other investigator was consulted.

2.4. Specificities of the discursive setting

As was said before, the characteristics of the specific settings where interactions take place may have an important impact on the features of the interactions themselves, (see e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005; Kerbrat-Orecchioni & Traverso 2008). Therefore, it will be useful to shortly describe some specificities of the service encounters which take place in tourist offices.

In the first place, service encounters in tourist offices are normally one-off interactions between a clerk and a visitor who have never met before. Hence, unlike in other settings, such as 'small shops', interactants do not have a "conversational history" (Dumas 2008). This, in turn, may have an impact on the relational component of the interaction: interactions with loyal/frequent customers have been shown to lead more often to using relational talk such as small talk or jokes (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni

11 Ideally, factors such as gender, age and socio-economic status (in the case of visitors) should be analysed to know their respective impact on the results obtained, but this falls beyond the scope of the present paper. With respect to gender, female clerks are somewhat overrepresented in the corpus, with 38 clerks being women. On the other hand, clerks belong to varied age categories, roughly extending between ages 20 and 60.

2006; Márquez-Reiter & Bou-Franch 2017), but also to shorter openings (e.g. Dumas 2008, Márquez-Reiter & Bou-Franch 2017).

In addition, unlike many other types of service encounters that are either commercial or non-commercial in nature, interactions in tourist offices are more diverse: visitors may just request for (tourist or even other) information, but in many cases the request of information goes hand in hand with the purchase of a map or a tourist guide. In yet other cases, the tourist office also acts as a ticketing office for cultural activities and even (in the Netherlands) as a souvenir shop. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that certain purchases take place in the tourist office, this remains essentially a non-commercial setting because the clerk does not derive any personal financial benefit from the sale of the products offered by the office. In this type of service encounters, we can therefore safely state that the relationship between the clerk and the visitor is never purely commercial.

Furthermore, a priori, the asymmetric character of the relationship between interactants in institutional settings seems to apply as follows. Clerks are the professional experts who can help visitors with their questions. On the other hand, in their role as municipal official, clerks are also expected to provide answers to the questions of the visitors. Finally, we can state that employees of a tourist office also act as a signboard of the city for which they work, so that the nature of their interactions could have an impact on the image of the city which the visitors perceive as tourists.

3. Opening the service encounter: results

Before offering a quantitatively supported insight in what unites and distinguishes the four studied regions (3.2.), we bring a qualitative overview of the most frequent and the less recurrent opening devices (or 'openers') (3.1.) found over the four regions.

3.1. Overview

Example (1) illustrates the three most frequent opening devices (called 'main openers' hereafter) used in the opening section, which is delimited by the entrance of visitors, on the one hand, and their request, on the other hand.

(1) Clrk bonjour (‘hello’)
Vstr bon [jour
Clrk [je peux vous aider? (‘can I help you ?’)
Vstr oui euh on regarde si c'est possible d'avoir une carte pour faire des marches euh
(‘yeah, uh, we're looking to see if it's possible to get a walking map’)
(WALLOON CORPUS, B_13)

(1) Greetings. In this example (like in many others, see section 3.2.), the clerk opens the verbal part of the interaction with a typical greeting expression, which is followed by a greeting expression by the visitor. As has been shown previously, and specifically for service encounters, greeting expressions function as ‘pragmatic amalgams’, which means they serve several, often hard to separate, functions (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2008). On the one hand, greetings allow clerks to acknowledge the presence of the visitors, which in itself may constitute a form of a ‘summon’, or attention calling device. Greetings by visitors may also function to call the attention of the clerks, who may, in turn, react to this summon by formulating a greeting. On the other hand, as has been discussed (see section 1.2.), greetings both serve to establish a positive social relationship between participants and to reduce some form of uncertainty, (mainly) resulting from the fact that they don’t know each other.

As speech acts, greetings may be realised by greeting expressions alone, by a combination of a greeting expression and an address term (e.g. ‘bonjour Madame’, with ascending (/) or descending (\) intonation) or by address terms alone (e.g. ‘Madame \’):

(2) Clrk Madame bonjour / (‘madam hello’)
Vstr Monsieur \ (.) moi je voudrais voir euh […]
(‘sir (.) I would like to see euh […]’)
(FRENCH CORPUS, B_8)

(2) Availability to help. The second most frequent opener is used by clerks to express their ‘availability to help’ as service providers. This type of opener may be realised by overtly formulated offers to help (e.g. *(hoe) kan ik u helpen* ‘(how) can I help you’), by formulas which invite visitors to express their

request (e.g. *dites-moi* 'tell me') or even by the mere use of address terms (esp. with descending intonation, Möller 2000), such as in example (3):

(3) Clrk madame bonjour /
Vstr bonjour /
Clrk madame \
(FRENCH CORPUS, C_23)

When address terms used by clerks follow mutual greetings, their interpretation as 'availability markers' seems quite straightforward. In some cases, however, the address term is the clerk's first opener, which makes them interpretable as another 'pragmatic amalgam', between a greeting and an availability to help. In order to keep the analysis maximally coherent, we chose to code these single address terms as 'availability markers'.

(4) Vstr goeiedag mevrouw ('hello madam')
Clrk meneer ('sir')
Vstr heeft u soms ook al het nieuwe boekje over het seizoen want […] ('would you happen to have the new booklet on the new season because […]'
(FLEMISH CORPUS, C_79)

Expressing the availability to help may be seen at the relational level as a further means to reduce the uncertainty of the visitor who wants/needs to formulate a request. It may, however, also be interpreted as a tool which allows to start the transactional part of the encounter in an efficient way (cf. the 'celerity principle', see section 1.3.; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2008: 112). This way, it might qualify also as a form of 'transactional-plus-relational talk' (see section 1.1.).

(3) Other forms of relational talk. Besides these three main opening devices, openings contain a few other forms of relational talk, but in very limited numbers. In a few cases, these instances seem to function again as transactional-plus-relational talk: e.g. by asking visitors to wait a little moment (e.g. *een ogenblikje alsjeblieft* (lit. 'a little moment please')), clerks establish a minimal

social interaction (in contrast to silence), while at the same time organising it, which contributes to increasing the efficiency of the service encounters.

The corpus also contains a limited number of instances of 'creative social talk'. In all cases, it is less context-independent than purely phatic talk because it is related to the specific setting of the interaction, but it is never related to the specific individual persons involved (any clerk or visitor might utter it). In two cases, clerks hesitate as to the expression to be used in their greeting (as service providers they are less aware of the world outside their work space) and this leads to a short moment of relaxed talk that includes some laughter:

(5) Clrk hal [lo ('hello')
Vstr1 [goeiemorg[en ('good morning')
Vstr2 [morgen ('morning')
Clrk goede(..)morgen ('goed(.)morning')
Vstr1 ja [nog net (laughs) (lit. 'yes still just')
Vstr1 [nog steeds (laughs) ('yes still')
Clrk Ja, inderdaad (laughs) ('yes indeed')
(DUTCH CORPUS, A_7)

Other instances of 'creative social talk' involve, for instance, giving comments on the city and the weather, or on the quietness of the tourist office. Finally, in one case, the opening also contains a question asking about the general state of the interlocutor (*comment allez-vous*? 'how are you'…)[12]. This low presence of individualised social talk contrasts with was has been found in other types of discursive settings (e.g. a tobacconist shop, Dumas 2008, on-site delicatessens in supermarkets, Félix-Brasdefer 2015), and may probably be explained by the overall absence of a "conversational history" between participants, due to the one-off character of service encounters in tourist offices.

12 This opener is attested only once (in the Walloon corpus): it is uttered by a visitor who regularly visits the tourist office to get the cultural agenda of the city. In this case, asking how the clerk is doing, is not unexpected.

3.2. Quantification of the results: principles

In order to compare the practices between the four regions, we quantified the data for a certain number of parameters, with two levels of granularity. In a first stage, the focus was only on the above described 'main openers' produced by the main participants to the interaction (that is the visitor and the clerk who are responsible for the bulk of the interaction). Quantification concerned (a) the frequency of each of the three main openers and (b) the degree of elaboration of the opening sequence, put simply, its length, as measured by counts of types of main openers uttered by visitors and clerks.

In the second stage, the perspective was broadened. Indeed, despite the limited number of different types of main openers, opening sections show quite some variation (albeit to different degrees in the four regions, see section 3.4.). This variation may merely be due to differences in sequencing of the openers. For instance, the initiative to start the verbal interaction may be taken either by the clerk (in most cases) or by the visitor. Second, some openings may be devoid of any of the main openers, even without there being a clear explanation for it[13]. Third, in some cases, the opening appears to be more elaborated, because other forms of relational talk occur, because certain types of openers are reduplicated, or because the opening is realised by more than one clerk and/or more than one visitor. As will be shown in section 3.4., the physical presence of several clerks and/or visitors does not necessarily lead all persons to verbally participate in the interaction, but whenever this is the case, this yields a higher number of openers, hence a higher overall interactivity of the participants. The same holds for the cases in which certain openers are reduplicated. This is, for instance, the case when mutual greetings uttered as soon as visitors enter into the tourist office (and which probably also function as a reaction to the summons constituted by the visitor's presence) are repeated when visitors reach the information desk. In other cases, opening devices are realised twice (albeit by using different linguistic forms) when both participants are at the information desk, as in the following example:

13 In some cases, the absence of openers seems to be related to the crowdedness in the tourist office, but this factor does not hold in all cases.

(6) Clrk hallo, goeiemorgend (‘hello, good morning)[14]
Vstr goeiemorgen (‘good morning’)
(FLEMISH CORPUS, A_2)

Taking into account these factors of variation led to the detection (in stage 2) of no less than 86 different sequencing ‘scenarios‘ (for the four regions combined), many of which are (evidently) only weakly represented in the corpus. The quantification of all these elements allowed to find the most typical sequencing scenarios, to get an insight in the degree of variability they show and into the overall interactivity of the participants in the opening section of the service encounter.

Following these quantification principles, we were able to find some common patterns for the four regions (3.3) and a series of differences between them (3.4.).

3.3. Common patterns for the four regions

The common patterns found for the four regions are the following:

(1) Greetings by main clerks are omnipresent, with percentages amounting to 79% in Flanders and the Netherlands, 84% in Wallonia and even 89% in France[15].
(2) Compared to greetings, utterances of the availability to help by main clerks are less frequently attested, especially in Flanders (7%), France (8%) and Wallonia (12%); in the Netherlands the percentage amounts to 48% (see further section 3.3.).
(3) Main visitors also greet in the majority of the interactions, but do so less frequently than the clerks (Flanders: 59%; the Netherlands: 73%; Wallonia: 82; France: 79%).

14 The first ‘greeting’ may probably be interpreted as a reaction to the summons constituted by the presence of the visitor.
15 The differences between the four sub-corpora are not statistically significant ($p = 0.19$; $chi^2 = 4.82$; $df = 1$). The figures are represented in table 1 (section 3.4.1).

(4) The initiative to open the verbally realised part of the interaction (generally by uttering a greeting) is most often taken by the clerks. This is the case in 74% of the encounters in the Netherlands, 69% in France, 63% in Flanders and 62% in Wallonia[16].

(5) As a consequence of the preceding, opening sequences are most often constituted by 2 types of openers, which are (most often) reciprocal greetings or 1 greeting (by visitor or clerk) combined with the availability to help: this is the case in 74% of the openings in France, 73% in Wallonia, 56% in Flanders and 45% in the Netherlands.

(6) Taking into account all possible sequencing scenarios (stage 2), the most frequent one consists of reciprocal greetings by main clerk and visitor, initiated by the former: it amounts to 35% in France, 29% Wallonia, 30% in Flanders and 19% in the Netherlands (but see 3.4. for a clarification of this lower percentage).

The high frequency of greetings corresponds to what was observed in earlier research, e.g. in French small shops (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005), in Montevidean and Quiteño clothing and accessories shops (Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004) and US visitor centers (Félix-Brasdefer 2015). It contrasts however with findings in American and Mexican on-site delicatessens in US and Mexican supermarkets and in Mexican small shops, where greetings appear to occur much less frequently (Félix-Brasdefer 2015). Besides a (potentially) cultural difference (e.g. Mexican vs French small shops), specific characteristics of settings might also play a role. Indeed, on-site delicatessens in supermarkets contrast with the other settings by the fact that they are integrated in supermarkets and hence do not create a completely new discursive space, which invites to formulating explicit greetings.

The observation regarding the fact that clerks most often take the initiative to open the verbal part of the interaction has also been observed in French shops. This may confirm one of the roles of greetings as reactions to the summon

16 The chi-square-test does not yield any significant differences between pairs of subcorpora (FL vs WL; FL vs FR; FL vs NL; WL vs FR; WL vs NL; FR vs NL), but the difference between the Dutch (74%) and the Walloon (62%) data are close to the threshold of significance ($p = 0.07$; $chi^2 = 3.31$; $p = 1$).

realised by the presence of the visitor (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 244). It may probably also be explained in regard of the fact that clerks operate in familiar territory, which may be a factor of uncertainty reduction, whereas visitors most often enter the tourist office for the first time and have to formulate a request, which may make them feel somewhat more uncertain (even though, of course, the formulation of the request is completely expected behaviour in the specific context of service encounters). In this respect, by taking the initiative to open the interaction, clerks immediately remove (part of) the visitors' uncertainty, and show their availability as service providers, which will allow the visitors to start the transactional part of the interaction in a smooth way. Overall, this result supports the asymmetric roles of service providers and service seekers.

3.4. Differences between the regions

In spite of the above described similarities, openings also show quite some differences between the four regions. These concern the frequency of occurrence of the main speech acts (3.4.1.) and, related to this, the length of the opening section (3.4.2.) and the degree of variability it shows (3.4.3.).

3.4.1. Frequency differences with respect to the main opening devices

Table 1 shows the frequencies[17] reached by each of the main openers in the four regions. This allows to discover some first differences with regard to openings.

Table 1: Main opening devices realised by main clerk and main visitor.

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders	p-value, chi-square test (applied to the 4 regions)
Greeting Clerk	89	84	79	79	$p = 0.19$; $chi^2 = 4.82$ (df = 1)
Greeting Visitor	79	82	73	59	$p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 15.96$ (df = 1)
Availability to help by Clerk	8	12	48	7	$p < 0.001$; $chi^2 = 75.46$ (df = 1)

17 Since the number of interactions is 100 for each region, percentages and absolute frequencies amount to the same. Hence, unless specified otherwise, the figures in the tables represent both the absolute frequencies and the proportions.

First, whereas greetings by clerks occur significantly more often in France than in the Netherlands and in Flanders[18], greetings by visitors are significantly less frequent in Flanders (59%) than in Wallonia and France[19]. Second, although visitors greet less often than clerks in the four regions, the gap between both participants is much bigger in Flanders (with a difference of 20 percent points) than in the other regions and especially in Wallonia, where it is almost inexistant (with only 2 percentage points of difference)[20].

Probably the most striking difference concerns, however, the 'availability to help' opener, which is much more frequently attested in the Netherlands (48%) than in the other regions (8% in France, 12% in Wallonia, 7% in Flanders)[21].

3.4.2. Length of the opening section

(1) Main opening devices realised by main clerk and visitor

As was mentioned in the previous section, opening sections are most often constituted by two of the three main openers in the four regions. However, this common pattern hides quite some differences between them, as can be seen from table 2:

(1) In the Dutch tourist offices, the percentage of openings consisting of the 3 main openers (greeting clerk, greeting visitor, availability clerk) is much higher (29%) than in the other regions, and especially in Flanders, where this scenario only occurs once.
(2) Conversely, in Flanders, openings much more frequently (31%) consist of only 1 main opener (most often the greeting by the clerk) or even do not contain any of the main opening devices (12%).

18 Chi-square test applied to FR vs FL/NL: $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 4.37$; $df = 1$.
19 With the Dutch data, the p-value reaches 0.05 ($chi^2 = 3.013$; $p = 0.05$; $df = 1$).
20 The chi-square test shows this difference is significant for Flanders ($p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 9.35$; $df = 1$). It is almost significative for France ($p = 0.054$; $chi^2 = 3.72$; $df = 1$), but not in the Netherlands ($p = 0.32$; $chi^2 = 0.99$; $df = 1$) and not at all in Wallonia ($p = 0.72$; $chi^2 = 0.14$; $df = 1$).
21 The chi-square test applied to the smallest difference (WL: 12% vs NL: 48%) yields a p-value of 0.04 ($chi^2 = 4.37$; $df = 1$).

(3) In France, it is the two extremes (3 resp. 0 openers) which appear to be the least frequent.
(4) In the Walloon tourist offices, by contrast, we see both a slightly higher percentage of openings with three openers and of those devoid of any of the main openers.[22]

The mean number of openers attested in the opening of the service encounters confirms these tendencies: whereas it only amounts to 1.45 in the Flemish tourist offices, it raises up to 1.76 and 1.78 in the Walloon resp. French offices, to amount to 2 in the Dutch corpus[23]. This higher mean is to be attributed to the more frequent occurrence of the 'availability to help' device.

Table 2: Length of openings: number of interactions with 'n' opening devices.

Length of opening section	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
3 openers	**3**	**8**	**29**	**1**
[greeting Clrk] [greeting Vstr] [availability Clrk]	3	8	29	1
2 openers	**74**	**73**	**45**	**56**
[greeting Clrk] [greeting Vstr]	70	70	36	50
[greeting Clrk] [availability Clrk]	0	1	5	2
[greeting Vstr] [availability Clrk]	4	2	4	4
1 opener	**19**	**8**	**23**	**31**
[greeting Clrk]	16	5	9	26
[greeting Vstr]	2	2	4	4
[availability Clrk]	1	1	10	1
0 openers	**4**	**11**	**3**	**12**
Mean number of openers per interaction	**1.78**	**1.76**	**2**	**1.45**

22 The differences related to the length of the opening section are also statistically significant: $chi^2 = 80.019$; p = 0; df = 9.
23 The Kruskal Wallis test shows the differences between the regions are significant: Kruskal-wallis chi squared = 29.217, df = 3, p-value = 2.017e-06.

(2) All realisations of openers by all participants

In order to have a more precise view on the length of opening sections, we also calculated the average number (per interaction) of all realisations of the main opening devices (greetings Clrk, greetings Vstr, availability Clrk) by all the participants (main and other clerks and visitors who participate in the opening section). Table 3 shows that the Walloon result increases most importantly (+ 35%) compared to the other regions and this yields the highest average number of openers (2,37) per conversation. The increase is less strong in the French (19%) and even more so in the Dutch (11%) and the Flemish corpus (6%). Overall, the Flemish openings keep to be the shortest (1.55). So, even taking into account all possible realisations of all types of (main) openers by all interactants, Flemish openings are, overall, characterised by a fairly low number of openers, which makes it the most "taciturn" region of the four.

Table 3: Average number of (instances of) main openers.

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
average number of main openers by main Clrk & Vstr	1.78	1.76	2	1.46
average number of all instances of main openers by all participants	2.11	2.37	2.22	1.55
% increase	19%	35%	11%	6%

The explanation for these differences appears to be related in the first place to the occurrence of 'polylogal' openings. Both French and Walloon openings contain indeed a (substantially) higher number of openings which are realised by more than one clerk and/or visitor (23% resp. 31%), than the Dutch (13%) and Flemish openings (3%). Interestingly, as can been seen from table 4, the lower frequency in Dutch and Flemish openings cannot simply be attributed to an overall significantly lower number of service encounters in Flanders (and the Netherlands) in which several visitors/participants take part in some part of the interaction. Hence, this means that French-language openings in tourist offices more often take a 'polylogal' character (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2004), which increases the general interactivity of the interactants in the open-

ing ritual, whereas the Dutch-language, and especially the Flemish openings mostly remain dialogical in nature.[24]

Table 4: Proportions of polylogal openings and correlation with polylogal interactions in the remainder of the conversation (i.e. with several visitors or clerks).

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
Polylogal openings	23 (/100)	31 (/100)	13 (/100)	3 (/100)
Interactions in the course of which several visitors participate verbally	52	36	37	44
Interactions in the course of which several clerks participate verbally	18	35	18	12

A second factor which may explain part of the differences is related to the frequency of duplicated openers. Compared to the Dutch and the Flemish openings, the French and Walloon also contain a higher number of openings showing reduplication of main openers (cf. example 6 supra): this is the case in 7 openings in France, 9 in Wallonia, but only in 4 openings in the Netherlands and in Flanders.

Before turning to the next section, there is one final element which should be mentioned here and which hints at the overall interactivity of the participants, viz. the occurrence of forms of slightly more 'creative social talk' (see section 3.1.3). Since these elements often take more than one turn, they were not taken into account in the calculation of the mean numbers of openers, but whenever they occur, they do entail some increased interactivity between the main interlocutors. The data show then this is more often the case in the Dutch tourist offices than in the other regions, although its impact should not be overestimated since the number of openings concerned only amounts to 6. However, this number is definitely higher than in the other regions, where it only amounts to 1 in France, 2 in Wallonia and even 0 cases in Flanders.

24 The threshold for statistical significance is not reached for the difference between France and the Netherlands ($p = 0.07$; $chi^2 = 3.39$; $df = 1$); it is for the difference between Wallonia and the Netherlands ($p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 9.44$, $df = 1$).

3.4.3. Variability in the sequencing of opening devices

A final factor of difference between the four regions is the extent to which opening sections present or not a fixed, strongly ritualised character. Table 6 below gives a first answer to this question. It offers an overview of the most typical sequences of opening devices ('scenarios') attested in each of the four regions, taking into account all possible realisations of all types of openers by all the participants. More specifically, for each region, it represents the top-3 most frequent scenarios (with several ex-aequo positions).

The results allow to make two general observations. First, the top-3 most frequent scenarios cover at least 45%[25] of all opening rituals in each region, but this coverage differs quite substantially between the regions: whereas in Flanders it amounts to 67%, this percentage lowers to 62% in France, to 50% in the Walloon corpus and even to 45% in the Netherlands. Second, whereas in France, 62% of the openings are covered just by three different types of scenarios, in the Netherlands, 4 different scenarios only lead to 56% coverage (in Wallonia 3 scenarios give 50% coverage; in Flanders 4 scenarios give 79% coverage).

A close look into the data yields a number of (different) explaining factors, which will be shortly presented separately for each of the four regions.

(1) The Flemish corpus. The low degree of variability in opening scenarios is first of all related to the overall low interactivity of the participants: main visitors quite less often realise a greeting and main clerks express only a few times their 'availability to help'; openings are mostly dialogical in nature (even though other persons happen to take part in the remainder of the interaction); main opening devices are generally only realised once (e.g. one greeting); finally, 12% of the interactions do not contain any form of relational talk before the request by the visitor. Apart from showing a low level of interactivity, Flemish opening sections do not contain any other form of relational talk. This way, if variability there is at all, it is mainly (14 of the 21 non-prototypical scenarios, i.e. 66.7%) due to differences in sequencing of the main opening devices (greeting main clerk, greeting main visitor, availability clerk).

25 Calculations are based on a strict interpretation of the concept of "top-three", excluding the fourth rank in case of ex-aequo.

(2) The French corpus. With 62% of the openings covered by one of the top-3 most frequent scenarios, French openings appear to be some less strongly ritualised than the Flemish, but quite more so than the Walloon (50%) and the Dutch openings (45%). The most important factors of variation in this case are related to the occurrence of polylogal openings, which account for 61%[26] of the non-prototypical openings (23 / 38) and to the reduplication of some of the main openers, which occurs in 18% of the non-prototypical openings (7/38).

(4) The Walloon corpus. Walloon openings show a higher level of variability, with 50% of the openings not being covered by the top-3 most frequent opening scenarios. Just like in the French corpus, this is related, to an important extent, to the high proportion of polylogal openings (62% of non-prototypical scenarios, i.e. 31/50 cases) and (less so) to the reduplication of some of the main openers (18% of non-prototypical scenarios, i.e. 9/50). In this corpus, however, another element seems also to contribute to a lower level of ritualisation. We saw, indeed, that Walloon interactions may contain a high number of openers, but on the other hand, in 10% of the interactions, the request by the visitors is not preceded by any form of relational work.

(3) The Dutch corpus. In this case, the high variability (55% not covered by top-3) of the openings seems related to several factors, the most important one being identical to the main factor in Flanders, viz. the different ordering possibilities of the main openers, which accounts for 52.3% of the variation (23/44). This factor is probably mainly (and almost mathematically) related to the overall higher frequency of the 'availability to help' opening device (more possible combinations with 3 speech acts). On the other hand, compared to the other regions, Dutch openings contain more often elements of 'creative social talk', which hence break the ritualised openings elsewhere observed.

26 In some cases, more than one element of non-prototypicality is present (e.g. polylogal opening + presence of another form of relational talk).

Table 6: Top-3 most frequent opening scenarios.

% (100 interactions)	France		Wallonia		Netherlands		Flanders	
Rank1	greeting Clrk – greeting Vstr	35%	greeting Clrk – greeting Vstr	29%	greeting Clrk – greeting Vstr	19%	greeting Clrk – greeting Vstr	30%
					greeting Clrk – greeting Vstr – availability Clrk	19%		
Rank2	greeting Vstr – greeting Clrk	16%	greeting Vstr – greeting Clrk	11%			greeting Clrk	25%
Rank3	greeting Clrk	11%	absence of opening ritual	10%	greeting Vstr – greeting Clrk	9%	greeting Vstr – greeting Clrk	12%
					availability Clrk	9%	absence of opening ritual	12%
	(total)	**62%**	**(total)**	**50%**	**(total)**	**56% (45%)**	**(total)**	**79% (67%)**

4. Closings: results

4.1. General overview: main closing devices and elements of variation

Example (7) illustrates most of the most frequently attested closing devices ('main closing devices') in the tourist office encounters: pre-closing elements, thankings, wishes and final greetings.

(7)
Clrk qui est ici et au pied du (name of building) (.) vous avez
tout de suite la rue (street name) (.) vous faites le tour
('which is here and at the foot of the (name of building) (.)
you immediately have the street (street name) (.) you go around)
Vstr1 ok (.) super mais écoutez
je vous re[mercie
('ok (.) great but look thank you')

Clrk	[voilà merci à vous	[bonne visite (.) au revoir
		('so thanks you enjoy your visit (.) goodbye')
Vstr2	[merci beaucoup (.) au revoir	
	('thanks a lot (.) goodbye')	
Vstr1		[bonne journée merci au revoir
		('have a nice day thank you goodbye')

(FRENCH CORPUS, C_9)

(1) Pre-closing devices. As has been described in the literature, bringing an interaction to an end is, interactionally speaking, a rather complex event. Structurally speaking, interactants have to signal that they do not want to add anything anymore (Schegloff & Sacks 1973). From a purely relational point of view, the interaction has to be ended in such way that all participants feel comfortable and do not feel rushed. Very often, as illustrated in example (7), the closing section is introduced by one or more 'pre-closing devices'. In this case, *ok* is a typical form of what have been called 'warrants' (Schegloff & Sacks 1973), i.e. expressions (such as *okay*, *well*, *so* in English) which signal that, as far as the utterer is concerned and if the other participant agrees, the closing may start. Pre-closing devices often take the form of mutual agreement markers (such as *ok*, *d'accord*): they indirectly and, hence tactfully, indicate the wish by one of the participants to end the interaction (Placencia 1997) and, if produced by both interactants, they express a form of mutual agreement that the interaction may be closed (Placencia 1997). As illustrated in example (7), pre-closing elements may also be realised by evaluative, intensified expressions (e.g. *super*). The latter may be interpreted as "positive statements of the encounter" (Albert & Kessler 1978 in Márquez-Reiter & Placencia 2004) signalling that the encounter has been positively experienced.

Finally, in this case (like in most others, see section 4.3.), it is the visitor who takes the initiative to open the closing section. Relationally speaking, this is probably not unexpected: as the main beneficiary of the service encounter, visitors signal that they received a satisfactory answer to their requests and, hence, that the service encounter may be ended. This way, they avoid clerks having to commit the somewhat face threatening act of signalling their desire to bring an end to the interaction and hence their availability to help

the visitor. In example (7), the clerk simply ratifies the initiation of the closing section (by using the conclusion marker *voilà*).

(2) Thankings and aknowledgements/rejections. Thankings may be realised mutually (as in example (7): (visitor) *je vous remercie* – (clerk) *merci à vous*) or by only one of the participants. In contrast to purely commercial settings, characterised by the presence of a mutual accountability relationship (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005), in tourist offices, as was said before, visitors may be seen as the most important beneficiaries of the interaction and may hence be expected to thank clerks more often than vice versa. Thankings in the closing section may serve to ratify the interaction globally in a positive way, as is the case in the example above (*je vous remercie – merci à vous*) (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005, 2008). Other instances of thankings may however also show up in the closing section: as a reaction to the handing over of some product (e.g. a map, tourist guide) or to the payment by the visitor (for maps, tourist guides, tickets,…) or as an answer to a wish uttered by one of the participants (example 7: *bonne journée – merci*).

Instead of mutual thankings (like in example 7), thanking sequences may also be constituted by a thanking followed by a 'rejection or acknowledgement of thanks' (Placencia 1997), such as *de rien* ('you are welcome'), *je vous en prie* (idem), *avec plaisir* ('with pleasure'), *graag gedaan* (idem), *met veel plezier* (idem).

(3) Wishes and greetings/projects. Wishes are realised by expressions such as *bonne journée* ('have a nice day'), *bon week-end* ('have a good weekend') in French or *veel plezier* ('enjoy yourselves') or *prettige/fijne dag* ('have a nice day', 'enjoy your day') in Dutch. They may be mutually uttered or followed by a thanking by the other participant. In some cases in the Dutch-language corpus, expressions such as *goeiemiddag* may either be interpreted as wishes, especially when they are combined with *nog* (litt. 'still') or *nog hé* (litt. 'still huh') (*goeiemiddag nog hé* ; 'have a good afternoon huh') and are pronounced with high pitch. In other cases, they are pronounced with low pitch and seem to function as a pragmatic amalgam between a wish and a greeting. In the latter case, we decided to code them as greetings.

Final greetings are most often realised by *au revoir* (mutually realised or not) in French and by expressions such as *daag* ('bye') or *tot ziens* ('see you') in Dutch. In the case of *tot ziens* and, to a lesser extent, also *au revoir*, we may see again a form of pragmatic amalgam between a greeting and a 'project'. Since *'au revoir'* is the default leave taking expression in French[27], we always analysed it as a final greeting in the French-language corpus[28]. In the case of *tot ziens*, and especially when it is followed by 'hé' (*tot ziens hé*), it is harder to separate both readings, hence we decided to leave the amalgam-reading intact and to provide the code 'greeting/project' in all cases, except in the single occurrence of the more elaborate expression *graag tot ziens hé* (lit. 'with pleasure see you huh'), where the adverb 'graag' seems to impose the reading of a 'project'.

Except for this latter case, only a few other examples of more explicit future oriented projects of seeing each other again have been found in the French-language corpus. For this reason, we decided not to count them in for the quantification of the 'main' closing devices (see section 4.2.).

(4) Variation. Like in openings, these most frequent and less recurrent closing devices are uttered in different combinations and orderings, giving rise to a whole array of different 'scenarios'. Moreover, as in openings, some of the closing devices happen to be reduplicated (e.g. two instances of final greetings) or by more than one clerk or visitor present in the tourist office, as is the case in example (7) above. Placencia (1997) notes the reduplication of certain closing elements can be interpreted as evidence for the fact that ending an interaction is, relationally speaking, a difficult operation.

Closings also contain some instances of more creative social talk, which appear to be closely related to the specific setting of the interaction. The corpus especially contains a few comments with respect to the weather or the crowdedness of the tourist office and some instances of humour related to the interaction at hand. In example (8), for instance, the question whether the

27 Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005: 247–248) recalls the original meaning of the expression, viz. a project to see each other in the future, which would still be somehow present, since *au revoir* enters in an opposition with *adieu* (lit. 'to god' – 'see you in heaven').

28 This is also the option chosen by Placencia (1997), where *hasta luego* ('see you later') is analysed as a leave-taking expression.

visitor still needs something else, is answered in a humoristic way, the visitor saying he would need a 'baguette':

(8) Clrk c'est tout ce qu'il vous c'est tout ce qu'il vous fallait ?
('that's all you that's all you needed?')
Vstr1 oui on a (.) si une baguette de pain
('yes we have (.) yes a baguette of bread')
Clrk ben ce sera pas ici par contre
('well it won't be here though')
Vstr2 (laughing)
(FRENCH CORPUS, B_14)

Finally, another factor which contributes to the enormous variation in the closing section (see also Dumas 2008), is related to the fact that closings do not necessarily present a straightforward character but may proceed in different phases (see e.g. Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Félix-Brasdefer 2015), as illustrated in example (9):

(9) Clrk voilà ma [dame ('here you go')
Vstr1 [voilà super ('that's great')
(1 sec)
Vstr1 mer [ci ('thanks)
Clrk [s'il vous plait ('here you are')
Vstr1 t'as une autre question ? ('do you have another question?')
Vstr2 non
Vstr1 non
Vstr2 c'est [tout bon merci ('no everything is all right thanks')
Vstr1 [très bien (..) merci ('fine (..) thanks')
Clrk je vous en prie, bonne journée
('you are welcome, have a nice day')
Vstr2 au revoir ('goodbye')
Clrk au revoir
(FRENCH CORPUS, A_17)

In this case, after the exchange of pre-closing elements (*voilà madame* (clerk) – *voilà super* (visitor)), visitor1 first seems to go to the final phase by already expressing a 'thanking', but then she asks her partner if he still has a question. Only when visitor2 confirms he is not in need of any further information, the interaction is really ended. In other cases, one of the participants reopens the interaction by introducing a new question, which then leads to a second closing sequence. Apart from contributing to the high degree of variation in the closing section, these kinds of closings also tend to take more time, and might possibly be interpreted as less efficient than closing which are straightforward. Hence, they might be said to infringe somewhat the 'celerity principle' discussed above (Cosnier & Picard 1992; section 1.3.). We will show (section 4.4.3.) that non-straightforward closings are not equally distributed over the four regions.

4.2. Quantification of the results: principles

In a comparable (but not identical) vain as for the opening section, the quantification of the results for the closing section was realised with two levels of granularity. In a first stage, the focus was on the above described 'main' (most frequent) closing devices produced by the main participants (main clerk and main visitor). For the second level of granularity, the perspective was broadened to take into account all instances of the main closing devices, by all participants. In comparison to opening sections, as the overview given above will have made clear, closing sections are much more complex (see also Dumas 2008), if only because the number of main closing devices is higher. Theoretically speaking indeed, the 3 main closing devices uttered by visitors and the 4 main closing devices by clerks give rise to a total number of 128 different possible combinations, without taking into account the actual order in which they are uttered by both main interactants, let alone the occurrence of other, peripheral, closing elements and the verbal intervention of other participants. For this reason, it would make little sense to take into account all possible scenarios, most of them being only very weakly represented. Hence we decided to limit the second level of quantification to the realisations of the 'main' closing devices only.

In what follows, we first describe the common patterns for the four regions (4.3.), before turning to the differences (4.4.) between them.

4.3. Closing sections: common patterns for the four regions

(1) **Confirmation of extreme variability of closing sections.** As expected, in comparison with the opening section, the variation in closing scenarios is more important for the four regions. Table 1 (in annex) shows the top-4 most frequent closing scenarios (made up by combinations of main closing devices by main participants). Whereas in openings, the top-3 most important scenarios[29] accounted for at least 45% of all opening rituals in the four regions (with 67% in Flanders, 62% in France, 50% in Wallonia and 45% in the Netherlands), the top-4 in the closing section accounts for a maximum of 38% of all closing scenarios (38% in Flanders, 29% in France, 30% in Wallonia and 29% in the Netherlands).

(2) **Pre-closing devices.** The main visitor is the one who, most often, takes the initiative to announce that the service encounter may be ended, by using one or more pre-closing devices. For those interactions that effectively contain pre-closing devices[30], the percentages are the following: 80% in the French, 87% in the Walloon, 90% in the Dutch and 73% in the Flemish corpus. This situation interestingly mirrors what was observed in the opening of the interaction, which is typically initiated by clerks (see also Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005 on French small shops). By taking the initiative, visitors avoid clerks having to signal that they want to end the interaction, which given their institutional role as service providers, might be perceived as somewhat face threatening (see section 4.1. above).

29 Let us recall that the top-3 of most frequent opening scenarios took into account all realisations of all speech acts by all participants.

30 In part of the interactions, the closing is ended in other ways. Especially when the service encounter contains a commercial transaction (e.g. visitors buying a map, a tourist guide or a souvenir), the closing of this transaction (e.g. with reciprocal thankings at the exchange of products and money) regularly functions as a transition to the actual closing section consisting of wishes, final greetings, etc. These kinds of variants will be treated in follow-up research, just like the question why Flemish visitors apparently less often initiate the closing part of the interaction.

(3) **Thankings.** As shown in table 7 below[31], thankings are the most important closing device for visitors whereas they are much less frequently used by clerks. They are also almost omnipresent in the top-4 most frequent scenarios for closing sections (see table in annex). Their emblematic omnipresence also confirms the hypothesis formulated above with respect to the visitor as the main beneficiary of the interaction in tourist offices and it contrasts – logically – with the results described for commercial settings, where a more equal distribution of thankings between clients and shopkeepers concords with the idea that they are both beneficiaries of the interaction (clients because they get the desired product and shopkeepers for the financial benefit; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005 ; see also Félix-Brasdefer 2015).

(4) **The 'thanking-acknowledgement/rejection'** device (Placencia 1997) appears as another central component of closing sections in all regions: clerks react to thankings by visitors in about 50% of the cases in all regions (table 7):

(10) Vstr merci beaucoup monsieur ('thanks a lot sir')
Clrk je vous en prie ('you are welcome')
(WALLOON CORPUS, A_20)

The scenario consisting of the thanking by the visitor followed by the acknowledgement by the clerk also appears in the top-4 most frequent scenarios (see annex). In previous research, this closing device has hardly been described, which may be due to their focus on commercial settings. In tourist offices, its quite frequent attestation further supports the asymmetric relationship between visitors and clerks as service providers who do not immediately benefit from the encounter.

(5) **Wishes.** In contrast to thankings, wishes are more frequently realised by clerks than by visitors[32]. This result, again, is not unexpected. On the one

31 Only 'final thankings', ratifying the interaction globally in a positive way were taken into account at this stage.

32 Differences between visitors and clerks are statistically significant, except for the Walloon data. E.g. for Flanders: FL clerks (27%) – FL visitors (7%): $p < 0.001$; $chi^2 = 14.17$; $df = 1$.

hand, wishing a good day (or a nice walk or an interesting visit) may be seen in the prolongation of the service which clerks have just rendered as their information should contribute to offer the visitors a positive experience. Hence, wishing-well utterances may be seen as emanations of the role of 'serving professional' the clerk assumes. By contrast, from the point of view of the visitor, not wishing a nice day to the clerk might reflect an (implicit) awareness of the fact that clerks are in 'working modus'. This difference has also been observed for French small shops (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 247). It confirms again the asymmetric relationship between both types of participants in these kinds of service encounters.

(6) **Final greetings.** In the four regions, both visitors and clerks greet less frequently in the closing section than in the opening of the interaction. However, compared to other (cultural) settings, where final greetings hardly seem to be attested (e.g. in Félix-Brasdefer's data (2015), final greetings do not appear among the prototypical closing devices), the percentages observed in the four regions may probably be considered as fairly high (but see section 4.4. for a nuanced account of differences between regions) and, just like in French small shops, as one of the central closing devices (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 247).

Table 7: Main closing devices in tourist office encounters[33].

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
Final 'thankings'				
Clerk	28	7	4	16
Visitor	85	83	60	79
Acknowledgement/rejection (by clerk) of thanking	50 (59% = 50/85)	46 (55% = 46/83)	29 (48% = 29/60)	42 (53% = 42/79)
Wishes				
Clerk	52	39	69	27
Visitor	16	37	14	7
Final 'greetings'				
Clerk	61	60	45	60
Visitor	44	44	46	28

4.4. Differences between the regions

The most important differences between the regions are related to the frequency of individual closing devices (4.4.1) and to the length of the closing section (4.4.2). In addition, section 4.4.3. will provide a quantified account of the closings which either contain other than phatic instances of relational talk or do not present a straightforward character but proceed in different phases.

4.4.1. Frequency differences with respect to the main closing devices

Table 7 above gives an overview of the frequencies found for each of the main closing devices as uttered by the main interactants in the service encounter. This allows to detect some preferences in each of the regions and some differences concerning the asymmetric relation between main protagonists.

33 Except for acknowledgements/rejections of thanking, absolute figures are identical to percentages since the number of analysed interactions amounts to 100 in the four regions.

(1) Thankings. Although thankings overall appear as the most important closing device for the visitors, Dutch visitors use it significantly less often than their colleagues in the other regions (60% vs at least 79% in the other regions[34]). On the other hand, although Flemish (16%) and French clerks (28%) clearly thank less often than the visitors (FR: 85%; FL: 79%), as expected given their role in the setting, they do this significantly more often than their Walloon and Dutch homologues[35].

(2) Wishes. Wishes by clerks are significantly more frequent in the Dutch corpus (69%) than in the other regions (France: 52%; Wallonia: 39%), and especially in Flanders, where the percentage only amounts to 27%[36]. On the other hand, the part of wishes realised by the Walloon visitors (37%) is almost identical to the part realised by the Walloon clerks (39%), and substantially higher than in the other regions.

(3) Final greetings/projects. In this case, the Dutch clerks' behaviour deviates again quite importantly from the other regions by presenting a significantly lower part of final greetings: they only greet in 45% of the cases, whereas clerks in the other regions do so in about 60% of the interactions[37]. The other most striking result concerns the occurrence of greetings by Flemish visitors, which is significantly weaker (28%) than in the other regions, where it amounts to about 45%.

In other words, closing sections in the four regions present quite some specificities:

34 Difference NL (60%) – FL (79%) : $p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 8.51$; $df = 1$. Let's recall that chi-square tests are mainly applied to the differences which, at face value, appear to be the smallest.

35 Difference FL (16%) – WL (7%): $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 3.98$; $df = 1$.

36 The frequency in the Dutch corpus proves to be significantly higher than in the four other regions, including France (difference NL (69%) – FR (52%): $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 6.05$; $df = 1$). The difference between the French and the Walloon data remains just below the significance threshold ($p = 0.065$; $chi^2 = 3.41$; $df = 1$).

37 Difference FL (60%) – NL (45%) : $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 4.51$; $df = 1$.

(1) The French corpus. The French data are probably most notable for the overall high number of attestations of closing devices: although the differences are not always statistically significant, French closings display the highest frequency of final thankings, both by main clerk and main visitor, the highest part of acknowledgements of thankings, high numbers of wishing-well utterances by clerks and high numbers of final greetings, both by clerks and visitors. This seems to confirm indirectly the importance given to the relational work realised by interactants in closings in French 'small shops' (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005: 247).

(2) The Dutch corpus. The data show a quite different picture. In the case of clerks, wishes appear as the most central closing device (69%), whereas final greetings are much less often attested (45%). Compared to the other regions, Dutch clerks hardly ever thank visitors for the interaction as a whole. In the case of Dutch visitors, as expected, thankings are an important speech act (60%), followed by final greetings (45%), whereas wishing-well utterances are much less attested (14%). However, as already described above, compared to the other regions, thankings are less often attested (60% vs 79% in FL, 83% in WL and 85% in FR).

(2) The Flemish corpus. In contrast to the Dutch data, in Flemish tourist offices, thankings by visitors clearly appear as the most important speech act, with 79% of the closings containing at least one realisation of it. The other speech acts reach a much lower percentage. Moreover, whereas 7% for wishes is not really unexpected in regard of the visitors' role, the low percentage of final greetings (28%) rather sharply contrasts with the percentages in the three other regions. However, it confirms the relative taciturnity of Flemish visitors which has already been observed in the opening section. Flemish clerks for their part, as was said, deviate from the other regions by a lower number of attestations of wishes (27% vs 39% in WL, 52% in FR and even 69% in NL). On the other hand, the part of interactions containing a final greeting is (more or less) identical (60%) to the French (61%) and Walloon (60%) data. Final thankings are, as expected, scarcely attested (16%), but are more frequent than in the Walloon (7%) and the Dutch data (4%). The data related to thankings, both by visitors and clerks, hence seem to confirm the

observation made by Danblon *et al.* (2005) with regard to the strikingly high use of thankings in, at least, the Flemish part of Belgium.

(3) Walloon corpus. As expected (in view of the specific roles of clerks and visitors), and compared to the other regions, we see high numbers of thankings by visitors (83%), low numbers of thankings by clerks (7%) and relatively high numbers of final greetings by clerks and visitors. On the other hand, wishes by clerks are less often attested (39%) than in France (52%) and especially than in the Netherlands (69%), but more often than in Flanders (27%). The most striking result (compared to the other regions), concerns probably the relatively high part of closings (37%) containing a wish uttered by the main visitor. Not only is it substantially higher than in the other regions (37% vs 16% in FR, 14% in NL and 7% in FL), it is also almost identical to the number of attestations for the clerks (37% Vstr vs 39% Clrk). This very small difference recalls a similar observation made with respect to opening greetings which differ very little between clerks (84%) and visitors (82%). Both results seem to indicate that, at some point, Walloon service encounter interaction less clearly reflect the asymmetric relationship between service provider and service seeker.

4.4.2. Length of the closing section

In this section, in accordance with the two levels of granularity described above (see section 4.2.), we measure the length of the closing section by calculating (1) the average number of distinct types of main closing devices used by main clerk and visitor per interaction and (2) the average number of all instances (= tokens) of main closing devices used by all participants in the interaction. These results will allow to estimate the overall volubility and interactivity of the participants in the closing of the service encounter.

(1) Main closing devices realised by main clerk and visitor

Compared to the opening ritual, which comprises maximally 3 main types of openers (greeting by clerk, greeting by visitor, offer to help by clerk), the total number of types of main closing devices amounts to 7 (thankings, wishes,

final greetings for visitor; thankings, acknowledgements of thanks, wishes, final greetings for clerks).

As is shown in table 8, in none of the four regions does the closing section contain all 7 different main closing devices. Moreover, in the four regions, closings most often consist of 2, 3 or 4 different types of closing devices. However, the table also reveals a rather sharp contrast between France and Wallonia on the one hand and the Netherlands and Flanders on the other hand: the part of closings containing the highest numbers of closing devices (5 to 6) is clearly higher in the French (19%) and the Walloon (24%) tourist offices than in the Dutch (5%) and the Flemish offices (8%). Conversely, the part of closings containing the lowest numbers of closing devices (0 or 1) is higher in the Dutch (17%) and Flemish (16%) tourist offices than in the Walloon (13%) and certainly in the French (7%) tourist offices[38]. The differences are also reflected in the mean numbers of closing devices, with an average of 3.35 closing elements in France and 3.24 in Wallonia, compared to 2.65 in the Netherlands and 2.56 in Flanders[39].

The table in annex, representing the 4 most frequent closing scenarios per region, also allows to confirm some of these tendencies. More specifically, for France, it confirms the overall high degree of interactivity between the main participants as the number of attested closing devices in the top-4 is never below 2 and in one case (4 attestations), the scenario consists of not less than 6 closing devices. The data also confirm the lower degree of interactivity of Flemish interactants: in contrast with the French data, the top-4 never contains more than 3 closing devices and, moreover, it also contains a scenario devoid of any of the basic speech acts. In case of the Walloon data, on the other hand, the top-4 reveals the high mean number of closing devices hides quite diverse scenarios since it contains quite rich closing rituals, consisting

38 The application of the chi-square to the most extreme ends of the table (5–6 speech acts contrasted with 0–1 speech acts) gives de following results: as expected, differences are not significant between FR and WL ($p = 0.49$; $chi^2 = 0.48$; $df = 1$) and between NL and FL ($p = 0.43$; $chi^2 = 0.64$; $df = 1$). Differences are significant between FR and NL ($p < 0.001$; $chi^2 = 12.08$; $df = 1$), between FR and FL ($p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 7.94$; $df = 1$), between WL and NL ($p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 9.80$; $df = 1$) and between WL and FL ($p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 5.80$; $df = 1$).

39 The Kruskal Wallis test shows the differences between the regions are significant: Kruskal-wallis chi squared = 22.839, df = 3, p-value = 4.363e-05.

of 3 or 4 speech acts, but also very poor rituals, consisting of only 1 (thanking by visitor) or even none of the basis speech acts. This variability recalls a similar observation made with respect to openings (see section 2.4.2.).

Table 8: Length of the closing section (number of main closing device types).

Total number of main closing devices per closing (main participants)	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
6 closing devices	9	8	0	0
5 closing devices	10	16	5	8
4 closing devices	25	21	20	12
3 closing devices	28	20	31	30
2 closing devices	21	22	27	34
1 closing device	5	8	13	10
0 closing devices	2	5	4	6
(total number of interactions)	100	100	100	100
mean number of closing devices per closing	**3.35**	**3.24**	**2.65**	**2.56**

(2) Realisations of main closing devices realised by main and other participants (= all participants)

Like for the opening section, we also measured (part of) the overall degree of interactivity in the closing section. The results are represented in table 9. For ease of comparison, the first row takes over the mean numbers of different closing devices by main participants (1). The second row shows the mean numbers of all instances (or realisations) of the main closing devices realised by the main participants only (2), while the third row shows the mean numbers of all realisations of the main closing devices by all participants (3).

Table 9: Length of closing section (number of types and instances of main closing devices).

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
(1) average number of distinct main closing devices (= types) by main participants	3.35	3.24	2.65	2.56
(2) average number of all instances of main closing devices (= tokens) by main participants	3.79	3.71	2.93	2.82
(3) average number of all instances of main closing devices by all participants	4.59	4.58	3.48	3.24
% increase (1 → 2)	13.13%	14.51%	10.57%	10.16%
% increase (2 → 3)	21.11%	23.45%	18.77%	14.89%
% increase (1 → 3)	37.01%	41.36%	31.32%	26.56%

The results yields the following observations:

(i) In all cases, the degree of interactivity in the closing section is higher in the French and the Walloon corpus than in the Dutch and the Flemish corpus.

(ii) In all cases, the increase between the different mean numbers is the lowest in the Flemish corpus, followed by the Dutch corpus.[40]

(iii) In the four regions, the relative increase appears to be more strongly impacted by the fact that other participants than main clerk and visitor take the floor (row 3) than by the number of realisations of the main speech acts (row 2). However, here again the Dutch-language data differ from the French-language data by showing a lower level of increase (NL: 18.77%; FL: 14.89% vs FR: 21.11%; WL: 23.45%). This result concords with the data regarding polylogal closings in the four regions. Indeed, the part of interactions containing a polylogal closing, is substantially higher in the French (43%) and the Walloon corpus (36%), than in the Dutch (27%) and, especially in the Flemish corpus (22%)[41].

40 The Kruskal Wallis test shows the differences between the regions are significant. For row 2: Kruskal-wallis chi squared = 21.419, df = 3, p-value = 8.616e-05; for row 3: Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared = 28.207, df = 3, p-value = 3.286e-06.

41 As we showed for the opening section of the interaction, these results may not be attributed to a lower number of interactions where only one visitor or clerk would be present in the setting.

The comparison of the results for the opening and the closing sections of the interactions leads to a few final observations concerning the degree of interactivity they show. For ease of the description, we repeat the main findings related to the opening section in table 10.

Table 10: Interactivity in opening section.

	France	Wallonia	Netherlands	Flanders
average number of main openers by main clerk and main visitor	1.78	1.76	2	1.46
average number of all realisations of main openers by all participants	2.07	2.25	2.28	1.52
% increase	16%	28%	14%	4%
number of polylogal openings	23%	31%	13%	3%

(i) **The Flemish data** for the closing section largely confirms the observations made for the opening section: in all cases, Flemish interactants show the lowest means, both in terms of types and tokens, for opening and closing devices and the means only slightly increase when other than the main participants are taken into account.
(ii) **The French and Walloon data** for the closing section mainly confirm the high level of interactivity of the opening section, especially for the maximal situation taking into account all realisations of main opening and closing devices by all participants.
(iii) By contrast, in the **Dutch corpus**, the results are different for openings and closings: whereas, in openings, the mean number of realisations of openers proved to be almost identical to the averages observed in France and Wallonia, the closing section appears to be some shorter, on average, than the French and the Walloon closing section.
(iv) A final observation concerns the **polylogal character** of openings and closings. Interestingly, compared to the opening sections, the part of polylogal interactions in the closing sections increases substantially for all regions, with the exception of Wallonia where polylogal openings are already frequently

attested[42]. This might suggest that, as was mentioned by Dumas (2008), the relation between visitors and clerks changes throughout the conversation, the interlocutors maybe considering each other less absolute strangers, visitors being less shy at the end then at the beginning of the interaction, etc. This should of course be confirmed by follow-up studies focussing on the relational work performed by the interactants during the complete service encounter. However, the data confirm (albeit some less convincingly[43]) the tendencies observed for the opening section: just like in openings, French-language closings more often take a polylogal character than the Dutch-language closings: the part of polylogal closings amounts to 43% in France, to 36% in Wallonia, to 27% in the Netherlands and to 22% in Flanders.

4.4.3. Individualised forms of relational talk and non-straightforward closings

To complete the quantified account of differences observed between the four lingua-cultures, this section focuses on closings which contain instances of creative social talk, on the one hand, and on closings which do not present a straightforward character but proceed in different phases, on the other hand.

(1) Individualised forms of relational talk. As in openings, other than phatic forms of relational talk are only scarcely attested in the closing sections of the interactions in tourist offices. However, like in openings, Dutch interactants more frequently use some form of creative social talk (12% of the closings), than the participants in the other regions, with percentages amounting to 5% in Flanders, 4% in France and 3% in Wallonia.

42 The percentages for opening (O) vs closing (C) polylogal interactions are the following for the four regions: 23% (O) vs 43% (C) in France; 31% (O) vs 36% (C) in Wallonia, 13% (O) vs 27% (C) in the Netherlands ($p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 6.13$; $df = 1$) and 3% (O) vs 22% (C) in Flanders.

43 The application of the chi-square test show the threshold of significance is reached for the differences between the following regions: FR–NL: $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 5.63$, $df = 1$; FR–FL: $p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 10.05$; $df = 1$; WL–FL: $p < 0.03$; $chi^2 = 4.76$; $df = 1$. It is not reached in the following cases: FR–WL: $p = 0.31$; $chi^2 = 1.024$; $df = 1$; WL–NL: $p = 0.17$; $chi^2 = 1.88$; $df = 1$; NL–FL: $p= 0.41$; $chi^2 = 0.68$; $df = 1$.

(2) Non-straightforward closings also appear to be attested in different proportions in the four regions. They are most frequent in the French tourist offices, with 31% of the interactions not being straightforward. This percentage does not differ significantly from the Walloon tourist offices, where it amounts to 24% ($p = 0.27$; $chi^2 = 1.23$; $df = 1$), but it does both from Flemish (16%, $p < 0.05$; $chi^2 = 6.23$; $df = 1$) and especially from the Dutch corpus, where the part of prolonged closings only amounts to 8% ($p < 0.0001$; $chi^2 = 16.85$; $df = 1$). The difference is also significant between the Walloon and the Dutch data ($p < 0.01$; $chi^2 = 9.52$; $df = 1$), but not between the Walloon and the Flemish data ($p = 0.16$; $chi^2 = 2.00$; $df = 1$) and neither between the Flemish and the Dutch data (in this case, however, the significance threshold is almost reached: $p = 0.08$; $chi^2 = 3.03$; $df = 1$). Hence, in this respect, Flemish closings exhibit an intermediate situation between Dutch closings, on one hand, and the closings in the French-language interactions, on the other hand.

5. Discussion

The above described data enable us to answer at least partially the question how both groups of interactants, in the four regions, interpret their respective roles in the opening and closing sections of tourist office encounters. Some common patterns among the four regions reveal what seems to be specific to openings and closings in tourist offices in general (at least for the studied regions) (5.1.). The observed differences, on the other hand, seem to point toward different interactional profiles for service providers and/or service seekers in each of the four regions, some of which will be linked to the 'involvement' vs 'independence' dichotomy described above (5.2.).

5.1. What opening and closing devices tell us about (asymmetric) relations in service encounters in tourist offices

First of all, the data show some patterns that transcend the differences observed for the 4 regions and support the interpretation of service encounters in tourist offices as institutional interactions, characterised in particular by a certain asymmetry between participants. Indeed, the discursive roles adopted by both visitors and clerks seem to correspond, overall, to the relational functions that can be attributed to them by virtue of the characteristics

of the setting. The clerks, to begin with, act as the main initiators of the interaction: their all-pervasive greetings pave the way for the visitors, show they acknowledge their presence and make it more easy for visitors to formulate their request. This is even more the case when they also explicitly utter their availability to help (e.g. 'what can I do for you?'). The latter opening device, on the other hand, also allows the transactional stage of the interaction to start in an efficient way. At closings, clerks do generally not take the initiative to formulate pre-closings first. Hence, they do not tend to 'rush' closings by showing their wish to end the interaction. Compared to visitors, clerks generally formulate wishing-well expressions more often than visitors, which may again be linked to their role of 'serving professionals', whose information will normally contribute to the 'nice day/walk' they wish the visitors to have. By contrast, clerks overall utter few thankings but react to thankings by visitors by 'thanking-acknowledgement/rejection devices' ('you are welcome'), which supports the idea that, unlike their homologues in commercial settings who have been shown (e.g. Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005) to thank pervasively, clerks in in tourist offices are not direct beneficiaries of the service encounter.

By contrast, based on the interactional data, the role of main beneficiary rests with the visitor. This is patent in the closing section, where visitors most often show their gratitude with respect to the clerks, by thanking them (very) frequently and far more often than clerks themselves. Visitors also (most often) take the initiative to signal that the interaction may go towards an ending (by the use of pre-closing elements), hence reducing the face threat this would cause for clerks if they had to signal that their services come to an end. Conversely, visitors less frequently wish clerks a 'nice day', which may reflect their awareness of clerks being in working modus.

Overall, albeit in varying degrees, tourist office openings and closings contain a fair amount of devices which aim to initiate a minimal social relationship and to end the interaction in a smooth, positive way. Especially in closings, interactions are hardly ever devoid of any closing elements. This was also observed in previous research (e.g. André-Larochebouvy 1984, Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005) and it seems to confirm interactants are somehow aware of the "risky" nature leave taking has, therefore endeavouring to leave with a positive feeling (see section 1.2.).

On the other hand, the nature of the opening and closing devices mostly attested appears to correlate with the overall characteristic of tourist offices encounters being one-shot interactions between strangers, who have no conversational history and show a fairly high degree of social distance. The absence of conversational history is very obvious, for instance, in the absence of such typical opening questions asking how the other participant feels ('how are you') or in the very scarce use of expressions of real projects to see each other again (e.g. 'see you next week'). Moreover, opening and closing devices are in most cases limited to instances of phatic talk, such as greetings, thankings and wishes. Only a limited number of instances of more creative social talk are attested in the four regions.

5.2. 'Cross-cultural' differences with regard to interactional profiles

The globally shared characteristics of openings and closings in the four regions should however not obscure the fact that our results reveal considerable differences. In what follows, we will try to show that they relate to three types of dimensions: (1) involvement (vs independence) of the interactants; (2) ritualisation of the opening/closing section and (3) efficiency.

(1) Degree of involvement vs independence

One of the parameters put forward by Scollon *et al.* (1995/2012) to measure the degree of 'involvement' vs 'independence' of interactants is their degree of volubility vs taciturnity. Referring to psychological studies of conversational exchanges and formal interviews which have shown that high amounts of talk in interactions make them feel as "warm" or "affiliative", whereas low amounts of talk are associated with "cold" or "non-affiliative" exchanges, Scollon *et al.* (1995/2012: 50) propose to interpret more talk or volubility as an involvement strategy, and less talk or taciturnity as an independence strategy. Based on this parameter, the tourist office encounters show a clear contrast between Flemish interactants, on the one hand and the French-speaking interactants on the other hand, while a more nuanced image emerges from the Dutch data.

Flemish interactants, indeed, show the lowest overall degree of interactivity. Both opening and closing sequences appear to be substantially shorter

than in the other regions. This is due, in the first place, to a lower number of (realisations of) opening and closing devices by visitors and, to a lesser extent, by clerks. Visitors significantly less often greet clerks at openings and closings. Clerks, in turn, less frequently express wishes. This way, openings frequently only consist of greetings by clerks (or do not contain any of the main openers) whereas closings are often limited to the sole exchange of thankings and acknowledgements-of-thanking. Moreover, main opening and closing devices are generally not realised more than once (e.g. no double greetings by participants) and openings and closings most often have a dialogical character, meaning that no other than the main clerk and visitor participate in these sequences of the interaction, although other participants may intervene in the course of the encounter.

In Dutch tourist office encounters, a contrast appears between the opening and the closing of the interaction. In openings, the mean number of main openers is higher than in the other regions, which is mainly explained by the fact that clerks often explicitly utter their availability to help. By contrast, on average, Dutch closings are shorter than French-language closings (but remain longer than Flemish ones). This is partly due to the lower part of closings containing final greetings by clerks, thankings by visitors and also (logically) lower frequencies of acknowledgements of thanking by clerks.

Walloon and even more so French openings and closings show a high degree of overall interactivity and volubility of the participants, which is reflected in high frequencies of individual opening and closing devices, in high mean numbers of devices per interaction and the rather frequent occurrence of reduplications of them. Moreover, openings and closings quite frequently show a polylogal character, since other than the main participants often take part in them, and this increases the overall degree of interactivity, hence volubility of the participants.

(2) Degree of 'ritualisation' of the opening and closing sections

The degree of 'ritualisation' covers two subdimensions. The first relates to the more frequent use of purely phatic opening/closing devices, which are disconnected from the specific roles of the interactants as service provider and service seeker. For instance, although clerks are not the main beneficiaries of the service encounter, Flemish and even more so French clerks,

quite often thank the visitor at the end of the conversation. Walloon visitors, for their part, formulate final wishes more often than their colleagues in the other regions, which reflects somehow a lower consideration of the fact that clerks are in 'work mode'. By contrast, Dutch participants, and especially Dutch clerks more frequently use opening/closing devices that are more closely related to the service (to be) offered. At openings, they substantially more often utter their availability to help (e.g. 'what can I do for you'), which exactly corresponds to their function (as service provider) in the encounter. At closings, while hardly using any final thankings, Dutch clerks more frequently utter final wishes (e.g. 'have a nice day'). These may probably be interpreted as quite closely linked to their specific role as service provider since the service they provided will normally contribute to the success of the visitors' day. This way a certain contrast appears between a more frequent use of completely context-independent and, hence, purely ritualised phatic talk (thankings by Flemish and French clerks; wishes by Walloon visitors), on the one hand, and slightly less context-independent (or more 'meaningful' with regard to the context), hence, less purely ritualised talk by Dutch participants.

This difference is confirmed, more strongly, by the observation that both Dutch openings and closings contain a higher number of instances of creative/individualised social talk than the other regions. These forms of relational talk precisely break the purely ritualised character of the phatic opening and closing devices.

The second subdimension of 'ritualisation' is related to the degree of variability with regard to the ordering (sequencing) of opening/closing devices: the lower the variability, the higher the degree of routinisation or 'ritualisation' of the sections. In this respect we observed, to start with, varying degrees of variability in the sequencing of opening and closing devices. On the basis of the top-3 most frequent opening 'scenarios' (see section 3.4.3.), Flemish openings appear to show the highest degree of routinisation (since 67% of them are covered by the top-3), followed by the French (62% of openings covered by top-3), the Walloon (50%) and the Dutch (45%). In a comparable vain, the top-4 most frequent closing 'scenarios' show a higher degree of routinisation for the Flemish data (38% covered by top-4) than for the three other regions (with 29% or 30% of the closings covered by the top-4) (see section 4.3.(1)).

With respect to the Walloon data, we observed still another guise of variability, which is related to the length of the opening and closing sections. Both Walloon openings and closings may be very rich and extensive, containing high numbers of opening/closing devices, but they also relatively often appear devoid of any of the main opening or closing devices.

(3) Efficiency vs maximal 'risk reduction'

The last dimension that seems to underpin the observed differences between the four regions revolves around the concept of efficiency. Dutch openings and closings appear to be more task-oriented and, hence, more efficient. This conclusion can be inferred from several observations. As already mentioned, the most frequent opening and closing devices used by clerks are closely related to the service they provide, viz. the availability to help visitors to smoothly, and hence, efficiently, enter into the transactional stage of the encounter. Also, Dutch clerks favour 'meaningful' wishes at closings, while underusing purely phatic thankings. Moreover, closings in the Dutch interactions mostly show a straightforward pattern. All these observations seem to point to a more efficient, goal/task-oriented way of constructing their discourse, rather than extending the closing section with the aim of maximising the oiling of the relationship. This way, Dutch participants appear to respect more clearly the so-called 'celerity principle' than their colleagues in the other three regions. Only the higher number of Dutch openings and closings with some form of 'creative social talk' (which makes them longer) seems to contradict this conclusion. We leave the potential factors favouring this kind of creative social talk for further research.

It could be argued that the shortness of openings and closings in the Flemish tourist offices are also guises of efficiency. On the other hand, however, we saw that Flemish clerks quite often utter thankings although they do not directly benefit from the encounter, which does not immediately pleads in favour of their efficiency. More importantly, compared to Dutch data (8%), Flemish endings show less often a straightforward pattern (16% non-straightforward endings). Hence even though closings are generally short with regard to the numbers of attested closing devices, they may require quite some time.

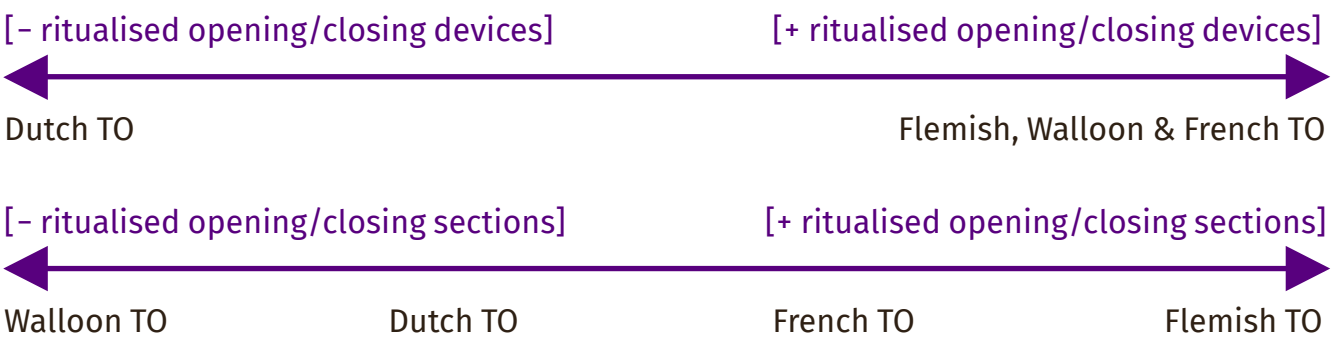
French-language openings and closings tend to be quite extensive and the part of non-straightforward endings is quite high (31% in the French

and 24% in the Walloon corpus). This makes them less efficient compared to the Dutch interactions. On the other hand, in accordance with Laver's (1981: 290) interpretation of "maximum risk [leading] to maximum routine, and conversely, maximum routine [reflecting] highest risk", these tendencies might suggest that taking your leave is considered fairly dangerous in these 'lingua-cultures'. They also seem to confirm Traverso's (1996: 81) observation with regard to French conversations between friends: a closure that is too well conducted suggests that one is in a hurry to leave, that one is bored; it is therefore threatening. If this were to occur in other settings as well, it could point to a cultural difference between Francophones (and partly Flemings), on the one hand, and the Dutch, on the other, who apparently have less difficulty in concluding a conversation.

Bearing in mind that the observed differences between the lingua-cultures are primarily a matter of tendencies, we propose to summarise the main findings of the research so far by visualising the position of the four lingua-cultures in relation to the above described dimensions. This will allow to draw, albeit very tentatively, the interactional profile which emerges from the opening and closing sections of the service encounters in the four studied regions.

(1) involvement vs independence

(2) Ritualisation



(3) Efficiency vs 'risk reduction'

The profiles that emerge from these visualisations are the following:

- Overall, French and Walloon interactions come across as quite similar: participants generally show high levels of interactivity and volubility, which may be interpreted in terms of involvement. Extensive openings and closings may also reflect a weaker focus on efficiency and, conversely, a higher focus on risk reduction, especially in the case of leave taking. This is also confirmed by the observation that, compared to the Dutch data, French-language opening and closing devices are slightly more often purely ritualised phatic elements, having as sole aim to (further) build or strengthen the relationship between interactants. The main difference between French and Walloon data, then, concerns a lower level of overall routinisation (or 'orderliness') of the opening and closing sections in the Walloon tourist offices.

- As opposed to the French-language data, Dutch data show lower levels of overall interactivity, especially at closings. Following Scollon *et al.* (2012), this supports a somewhat lower level of involvement of the interactants. Conversely, Dutch interactants appear to value efficiency more than risk reduction, which is reflected both by shorter closing sections and by a more intensive use of slightly more task-oriented and context-bound (and hence 'meaningful' with respect to this context) opening and closing devices. It remains however to be further examined how the more frequent occurrence of forms of creative social talk fits into this story.
- The Flemish data first of all show the lowest level of overall interactivity between the interactants, which shows them to value more the independence aspect of face (Scollon *et al.* 2012). The overall lower interactivity also leads to rather routinised openings and closings. On the other hand, however, just like in the French-language data, Flemish participants tend to use purely ritualised, phatic opening and closing devices and non-straightforward endings occur quite frequently, albeit in lower proportions than in the French-language data. Hence, compared to Dutch interactions, Flemish interactions do not equally value efficiency, albeit some more than in French-language interactions.

6. Conclusion

Based on a detailed quantitative analysis of some of the structural properties of opening and closing rituals in service encounters, we tried to identify some crucial elements of the interactional profiles of the discourse participants. Besides some globally shared characteristics, which seem to confirm the typical asymmetry in this kind of discursive institutional settings and their specificity compared to other types of settings (e.g. commercial interactions), we found quite important differences between the four regions.

Before reflecting on the limitations of this research, we would like to briefly position the conclusions of the present paper based on data of four regions against the conclusions of a previous study, which was limited to Dutch and Flemish tourist offices (Tobback & Van den Heede 2019). In relation to openings, the current data overall confirm the main conclusions of the

previous paper: Flemish participants show to be more taciturn and, related to this, openings show to be more strictly organised than in the Dutch tourist offices. Also, the Dutch particularity regarding the use of explicit availability markers ('how can I help you') is confirmed since this opening device does hardly occur in the French-language service encounters. However, instead of linking this specificity directly to a higher level of involvement of the clerk as we proposed in the previous paper, the results regarding the closing sections in the four regions hint at an alternative interpretation. As a matter of fact, compared to the French-language interactions, and except for the cases containing some form of 'creative social talk', Dutch closings tend to be shorter, more straightforward and limited to those devices that are most closely related to the institutional purpose of the service encounter, viz. providing the information visitors ask for. Therefore, we interpret henceforth these findings as evidence for the fact that Dutch participants – and *a fortiori* service providers – seek to establish an efficient service encounter. Finally, although Dutch participants globally tend to show a higher level of interactivity than the Flemish, the comparison with the French-language data also revealed a contrast between the Dutch-language and the French-language interactions. Indeed, both openings and closings in the French-language tourist offices show to be more often polylogal, several visitors and/or clerks taking part in them, whereas in the Dutch-language corpus they remain more often dialogical, even though more than one visitor and/or clerk is present in the setting.

With respect to the latter observation, it remains however unclear – and this brings us to the limitations of the present study – to what extent our findings are purely determined by the lingua-cultural factor or might also be impacted by other factors such as the crowdedness of the setting or the physical organisation of the tourist office itself. The present paper is limited, indeed, to the study of 'lingua-cultural' (regional) differences in verbally expressed interactional behaviour. Other parameters, such as gender, age, socio-economic status of the participants, or the crowdedness and the physical organisation of the setting might also impact the interaction. Further research will allow us to shed light on this question. In this respect, the conclusions of the present paper can only be provisional. Moreover, one should avoid drawing hasty conclusions and overgeneralisations also for a couple of other reasons.

First, although the research is based on a substantial number of interactions (100 in each region), for the Netherlands and for France, data were only gathered in specific parts of the countries (the southern part of the Netherlands and the north-eastern part of France). Hence, no conclusions may be drawn for France and the Netherlands in general. Second, our conclusions are based on audio-recordings, which means that the non-verbal part of the interaction remains a blind spot. Non-verbal behaviour may of course also play an important role in establishing a positive relationship between interactants. In the same vain, the study of the specific linguistic expressions that instantiate the opening and closing devices, which is the focus of the second part of this research (Tobback & Van den Heede in preparation) may also shed new light on the ways relational work is realised in discourse. Finally, from a methodological point of view, it would be interesting to complete the analysis based on the sole observation of verbal behaviour with post-hoc interviews (for instance with service providers). This would allow to compare the researchers' interpretation with participants' epilinguistic awareness. N

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Annex: Top-4 most frequent closing scenarios, constituted by main closing devices jointly performed by main clerks and visitors

TOP4	France	# acts	# convers.	Wallonia	# acts	# convers.	The Netherlands	# acts	# convers.	Flanders	# acts	# convers.
1	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgement Clrk	2	11	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgement Clrk	2	9	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk – Greeting Clrk	3	9	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgement Clrk	2	17
				Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk – Greeting Vstr – Greeting Clrk	4	9						
2	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk – Greeting Vstr – Greeting Clrk	4	8	Thanking Vstr	1	7	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk – Greeting Clrk – Greeting Vstr	4	8	Thanking Vstr + Greeting Clrk	2	8
3	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk – Greeting Clrk – Greeting Vstr	4	5	Thanking Vstr – Greeting Clrk	2	5	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk	2	6	Thanking Vstr – Thanking Clrk – Greeting Clrk	3	7
	Thanking Vstr – Greeting Vstr – Greeting Clrk	3	5	Absence of main speech acts	0	5	wish Clrk	1	6			
	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk	2	5									
4	Thanking Vstr – Thanking Clrk – Greeting Vstr – Greeting Clrk – wish Clrk – wish Vstr	6	4	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk – Greeting Clrk	3	4	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk – wish Clrk	3	5	Thanking Vstr – wish Clrk – Greeting Clrk	3	6
	Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk – wish Clrk	3	4				Thanking Vstr – Acknowledgment Clrk	2	5	Absence of central speech acts	0	6