

An Analysis of Win-win Business Negotiation from the Perspective of Politeness Principle

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Abstract: The essence of successful business negotiation is the agreement between two sides of negotiation through language exchange and communication. The goals of two sides can be achieved. Its success depends on the use of language largely. Therefore, knowing the characteristics of negotiation language is conducive to a win-win situation. From the perspective of politeness principle, this paper makes a descriptive and explanatory study on many successful business negotiation cases. It is concluded that the language of business negotiation is appropriate, modest, and purposeful to reach its pragmatic goal. And the features of respecting for facts, showing sympathy, and seeking agreement are also included.

Keywords: Business negotiation, linguistic features, Politeness principle, Win-win.

1. Introduction

In the socialist market economy, various industries have achieved rapid development. Domestic enterprises have also established sound business models in line with international standards. Accordingly, win-win business negotiation becomes a long-term plan for cooperation between modern enterprises. Business negotiation is a kind of speech communication activity completed through language medium. In international business negotiation, negotiators often discuss how to use their speech acts properly to achieve the goal of win-win.

Based on the above background, the study of business negotiation discourse is followed with interest. Therefore, on the basis of many successful business negotiation cases, this paper will do an analysis of win-win business negotiation with the help of politeness principle.

2. Literature Review

This chapter organizes and classifies relevant literature from domestic and foreign aspects to understand the development of business negotiation and politeness principle, as well as clarifies the research methods, so as to prepare for further analysis of business negotiation with the help of politeness principle.

2.1. General Review of Business Negotiation

According to Liu yuan [8], The origin of “negotiation” can be traced back to the end of the clan society. “Negotiation” originates from the Latin “negotiari,” which means “to do business or to trade.” This is the earliest prototype of negotiation. Now in a broad sense, business negotiation refers to a process of conferring in which the participants of business activities communicate, discuss, and adjust their views, settle differences, and finally reach a mutually acceptable agreement in order to close a deal or achieve a proposed financial goal.

There is abundant literature about business negotiation in the West. The president of the American negotiation Association [5] has made a comprehensive study of negotiation motivation, form, method, and control by using behavioral science and psychological theories of various

schools. He systematically put forward his “Negotiation Needs theory” in the book *the Art of Negotiation*. In addition to the study of business negotiation itself, there are other factors combined. In cross-cultural aspect, Jean-Claude Usunier [3] has shown in addition to the general rules in business negotiation, nuances in interpersonal relationships and behavioral activities, as well as the understanding of members in other cultures must be noticed.

Although it starts late in China, its research on business negotiation has achieved fruitful achievements. For example, Li Yanmei and Liu Changjiang [6] have summarized the effects of cognitive, motivational, and emotional factors on information processing of negotiators in negotiation psychology research. In the aspect of business negotiation and culture, Tang Manlan and Lv Xiaoyan [10] thought business negotiation is a special expression of interpersonal relationship and people’s thinking habits, language arts, psychological needs are based on specific culture. Ying Ming [11] said in many journals on international business negotiation terms, it mainly analyzes and discusses the overall strategy of terms. The strategy of language in business negotiation can be analyzed from two aspects: the importance of language expression in international business negotiation and the skill of language expression in international business negotiation. Recently, business negotiation began to pay more attention to teaching. In the era of “Internet plus,” the teaching of international business negotiation should pay more attention to innovation and practice, according to Tang Hanxing [9].

Through a review of the existing literature, it can be seen that scholars at home and abroad have conducted beneficial discussions on business negotiation from different perspectives. But there are still gaps in the research. This paper attempts to study international business negotiation from the perspective of pragmatics, and tries to explore the language features of international business negotiation with the help of politeness principle, hoping to provide different insights.

2.2. Leech’s Politeness Principle

Politeness is a universal phenomenon. Leech’s politeness principle was not pioneering. Before him, many linguists and

sociologists had noticed the politeness in language use. Cooperative Principle was first put forward by an American philosopher Grice in 1967. The general idea behind the principle is that people who take part in a conversation will cooperate with each other to make the conversation go smoothly. Brown and Levinson [2] put forth the “Face Theory” in 1978, and this is an important progress in the study of politeness. Besides being cooperative in communication, interlocutors will in general consider the matter of face for themselves and others. Based on this observation, Leech [4] proposes the politeness principle (PP), which contains six maxims. The PP concerns the relationship between participants whom Leech calls self (the speaker) and other (the addressee, or a third party).

- (i) Tact Maxim
 - (a) Minimize cost to other.
 - (b) Maximize benefit to other.
- (ii) Generosity Maxim
 - (a) Minimize benefit to self.
 - (b) Maximize cost to self.
- (iii) Approbation Maxim
 - (a) Minimize dispraise of other.
 - (b) Maximize praise of other.
- (iv) Modesty Maxim
 - (a) Minimize praise of self.
 - (b) Maximize dispraise of self.
- (v) Agreement Maxim
 - (a) Minimize disagreement between self and other.
 - (b) Maximize agreement between self and other.
- (vi) Sympathy Maxim
 - (a) Minimize antipathy between self and other.
 - (b) Maximize sympathy between self and other.

It means to reduce the expression of impoliteness to the minimum under the same conditions, and to express in a polite way as much as possible. Leech’s politeness principle has practical significance in explaining more linguistic phenomena.

2.3. Research Methodology

In the practical study, the qualitative method is utilized to analyze business negotiation corpus from the perspective of politeness principle. Through the review of related books, journals, themes about politeness principle and business negotiation in the school library and on the Internet, a series of specific conversational contents of business negotiations from the book *A New Spoken English Course in International Business* by Liao Ying [7] are carefully picked out. After observing the text phenomenon and rules, these conversations are interpreted in a more detailed way to get the best unity of verbal materials and pragmatic theories. In this case, the language features of win-win business negotiations are understood.

3. An Analysis of Win-win Business Negotiation from the Perspective of PP

This part is the key part of this paper, and it is mainly composed of eight parts. From the introduction, the case study

of six maxims in business negotiation, and a final brief summary to complete.

3.1. Introduction

Win-win business negotiation language is a special language used in the field of business. With the increase of trade activities, smooth business negotiation corpus has been developing vigorously. The language of win-win business negotiation is characterized by propriety, pertinence, and objectivity and so on. Based on this phenomenon, a conversational analysis of the collected business negotiation corpus is made and the politeness principle of Leech is integrated into the negotiation examples to further explain the characteristics of successful business negotiation language and the communicative effect it can produce.

3.2. Tact Maxim in Business Negotiation

In the process of searching for information, many corpus of successful business negotiation have the characteristics of weakening subjective attitude and standing on the other side’s position. This feature is shown in the following dialogue.

(1) A: Have you gone over these catalogues and price lists?
 B: Yes. I have gone over. I found that your prices are quite high.

A: But you can get the products in good quality. Taking the quality of the products into consideration, you will feel that our prices are reasonable. Now, let me take you down to the sample room to have a close look at our samples.

B: That’s very kind of you. I’m sure I’ll find what we are interested. But I’m afraid that would take lots of your time.

A: Never mind. If only I could be of any help to you, I’ll be very glad. (Quoted from Liao Ying [7])

In this example, the purpose of A is to publicize his products, but he doesn’t say “I” all the time. Instead, he takes the position and attitude of the other party and changes “we” to “you” to make the other party feel important and respected. In this conversation, the seller uses “But you can get the products in good quality” rather than “But our products are very good in quality” proves this point. So a successful business negotiation results in “win-win” rather than overwhelming the other party as much as possible. Besides, “Now, let me take you down to the sample room to...” and “Never mind. If only...” show the language strategy of being considerate of others. The speaker focuses on the other party and cleverly minimizes cost and maximizes benefit to other, so those actions go with Tact Maxim. In this way, it is easy to get the favor of the other party and promote the success of the transaction.

During win-win business negotiation, businessmen should respect each other, including expression of discourse and information handling. It is necessary to fully understand the needs of others on the basis of tact maxim, which will help pave the way for the realization of their own communicative purposes and allow the other party to accept their ideas and products as much as possible.

3.3. Generosity Maxim in Business Negotiation

The pertinence can be reflected in many business negotiation corpus. Triumphant business negotiation talks are targeted. That is to say, negotiation language is to choose the right battle to fight. Here is a dialogue of talking about discount.

(2) Z: In principle, we usually won’t allow any discount, because we have made a big concession in price.

B: We usually get a considerable discount when we place such a large order from other suppliers.

Z: But I don't think you can get such favorable prices from anywhere else .

B: We have ordered such a large quantity that a discount, no matter how little, should be allowed.

Z: Considering the long-standing business relationship between us, we shall grant you a special discount of 3%.

B: A 3% discount? It's too little. We usually get a 10% discount from the European exporters.

Z: I'm afraid I could not agree with you for such a big discount. In this way, it won't leave us anything. Well, Mr. Brown, considering this is a new production, we may offer you allowance on a sliding scale.

B: Could you say it more exactly?

Z: Well, suppose your order comes to US\$ 100,000, we'll give you a 3% discount. And it goes up to 5% for purchase exceeding US\$300,000 and pro rata 7% for US\$400,000.

B: Your proposal seems to be reasonable. All right. In order to get the business, I accept it. (ibid).

As shown in the above example, it is important for the buyer to ask the seller for a discount. But for manager Z, the order quantity is more important, so he decided to give the seller a discount based on the order quantity. The larger the order quantity is, the larger the discount will be. And the seller and the buyer will get what they need respectively, which shows negotiation language is targeted. Therefore, the buyer takes "a large number of orders" as the preferential terms in exchange for the "discount" proposed by the seller, and each side exchanges for more profits with tolerable losses to achieve "win-win." It interprets the essence of "self-harm and altruism." Finally the seller' propose minimizes the benefit of himself and maximizes the cost of himself. He observes the Generosity Maxim.

This is not to compromise one's own interests and accomplish others' interests, but to give conditionally. In real life, both sides of the negotiation have their own priorities. Important issues are rarely of equal importance to the other side, so negotiators should express their purpose through targeted language and put forward constructive proposals and solutions on this basis. They can communicate with each other in one way or another with the help of Generosity Maxim during business negotiation, then the interests of both sides will be satisfied.

3.4. Approbation Maxim in Business Negotiation

In many business negotiation cases, successful business negotiation language is objective. The language expression in the negotiation process should respect the facts, be full of sincerity, and not play false. As the following example has such characteristics.

(3) Z: Mr. Brown, I'm very glad to hear that you are satisfied with our goods. Since you have seen the exhibit at the exhibition, may I know what particular samples you are interested in?

B: In addition to silks, I'm interested in almost all of the goods that made of cotton, such as T-shirts, sport shirts, pajamas, and so on. We are ready to negotiate on these items with you.

Z: Do you feel that they will be popular on the market in America?

B: I think they will be hot on the market in America, because you know, people in Europe and America have been wearing synthetic fabrics for a long time, they are tired of the rough touch. In addition, your goods are very soft. There is a possibility that more and more people will buy cotton goods and silks.

Z: You are right, as a saying goes: time proves that natural things are better than man-made ones. Wearing silk and cotton goods makes people happy.

B: I like silks very much and I know your products are very good, both the style and the touch are very excellent. Now, here is the list of my requirements. But you should make sure that the goods exported are as excellent as displayed samples, and give me a nice price, so that I could place regular orders for fairly large numbers.

Z: Mr. Brown, I can promise you the quality of all our goods and I will give you proper price. Here is our latest quotation sheet, and you will see that our prices are very competitive. (ibid).

As shown in example 3 above, the buyer uses praise terms such as "your goods are very soft," "both the style and the touch..." and "There is a possibility that..." to express affirmation of the quality, touch, and style of the seller's products, which not only creates a happy negotiation atmosphere, but also conveys the interest and intention of cooperation. And the buyer's evaluation of the goods is in line with the facts and is reasonable and credible. For the seller, there is a factual basis for presenting samples to introduce the performance and quality of his goods, so the objectivity of language can be reflected from both sides. So this negotiation dialogue achieves minimize dispraise and maximize praise of other under the Approbation Maxim. It ensures smooth negotiation between the two sides.

In successful international business negotiations, approbation is also principled. Approbation should be focused on objectivity. It is not simply to cater and compliment others, but to show the sincerity of willing to cooperate with each other.

3.5. Modesty Maxim in Business Negotiation

In the special context of international business negotiation, part of the speech acts used by negotiators are often modest. Many modest expressions in win-win business negotiation are conventional. This is reflected in the following discussion.

(4) A: You're expert in foreign trade, enjoying high prestige and commanding universal respect. I have a good mind to consult with you on a few questions.

B: You fatter me. Let's discuss them together.

A: In international business the modes of payment are an important and complex problem. I'd like you to give me some explanation in detail.

B: Well. They can be divided into three categories: remittance, collection, and letter of credit.

A: Some differences?

B: Yes. Remittance and collection belong to commercial credit, and letter of credit to banker's credit. In

A: I see. Thank you for your detailed explanation. I do benefit very much from it.

B: Don't mention it. It would be my pleasure. But you'd better practice more if you do want to understand them. (Quoted from Zhao Tong [12])

In the face of the praise from the buyer in the above-mentioned dialogue, the exporter replied "You fatter me.

Let's discuss them together" modestly, rather than show off his ability. And the last sentence "Don't mention it. It would be my pleasure. But you'd better..." is both modest and reserved. It can not only retain customers, but also accelerate the realization of cooperation. What's more, "I'd like you to...", "Some differences"? "I see. Thank you for...I do benefit very much from it." these modest expressions are all conventional languages in business negotiation. At the same time, the buyer's expressions are modestly asking for advice in some places that he doesn't understand, which ensures the conduct of demand-oriented talks between the two sides. So occasionally saying "I don't understand," "please say it again," and other words in negotiation will make the other party feel humane, sincere, and amiable, so that he is willing to cooperate with you. In this sense, the observation of Modesty Maxim increases the strength of negotiations.

In ideal negotiations, if you are arrogant, eloquent, and aggressive at the negotiation table, it is easy to cause the other party's antipathy, and even build a wall of defense. Thus expressing modesty in a regular way is helpful.

3.6. Agreement Maxim in Business Negotiation

The language of win-win business negotiation is flexible. Leaving room for agreement between words is an outstanding feature of business negotiation. Below is a typical conversation in many business negotiation cases.

(5) N: The unit price of your vase is 40 dollars higher than the price we can accept. The price of plate is 20 dollars higher. I think it would be a good idea for us to meet each other half way.

L: You mean that we will have to make a reduction of 20 dollars in our unit price of vases, and 10 dollars a yard for the plates? That's impossible.

N: If you insist on your present price, I have to accept another supplier's offer. If each of us can make a further concession, business can be concluded.

L: It is difficult for me to carry on the business. If we sell our chinaware at such price you said, we could hardly earn our cost of production. Let's meet each other halfway.

N: So, what's your advice?

L: The best idea is to reduce 10 yuan in our unit price of vase, and 5 dollars a yard for the plate. This is our rock bottom price. There would be no more reduction.

N: Well, in order to complete the trade, I can accept the price of plates, but the price of the vase can cut another 10 dollars. Let's meet each other once more, then the business will be done.

L: Mr. Nick, you always have the ability to let me agree with your price. Well, for our friendship, we would make another reduction of 5 dollars per price.

N: I'm glad we've come to an agreement on price. Business is closed at this price. (ibid).

In this dialogue, three "if" conditionals and price negotiation symbolize flexible language. The seller Lily said "The best idea is to reduce..." She makes concessions first, which may make the other side happy and break the ice. "We would make another reduction of 5 dollars per price" shows that the seller Lily really follows the Agreement Maxim, she does not insist on her original price and agrees with Mr. Nick's price. At first, Nick, the buyer, was not satisfied with Lily's offer, and the negotiation almost comes to a dead lock, but the negotiation goes on because of Lily's concession

which observes the Agreement Maxim. We can find that it is quite important for us to maximize agreement between ourselves and others in international business negotiations.

Agreement Maxim is the most frequently used politeness principle in business negotiation. In mutually beneficial business negotiation, even if there are different opinions on the requirements and instructions put forward by the negotiator, it is necessary to find the fit point and understand the opinions maintained by the other party in flexible language, and then come up with a solution to seek agreement.

3.7. Sympathy Maxim in Business Negotiation

In many perfect business negotiation cases, emotional color is injected into the negotiation language. It is often seen on the negotiation table to show sympathy or humor to overcome hardness.

(6) Here is a case of negotiation record of house rental price.

A: The third quarter is coming soon. I'm here to ask about the house rental price in the third quarter.

B: Well, based on the recent changes in market prices and the analysis of various data, we want to increase the rent by two percentage points in the third quarter.

A: Two percentage points? Didn't it go up once last quarter? Why did it go up again?

B: We don't want to, but now prices are rising and our costs are increasing. It's the same price we give to others.

A: We run a small business. We barely earned rent in the last quarter. We expected to reduce the rent, but it went up. If this price I could only drink northwest wind.

B: We understand your difficulties, but our cost has also increased. The old price is certainly not.

A: Well, let us take a step back. How about increasing by 1%?

B: Nobody has it easy. That's settled then.

(Quoted from <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/44c025f8152ded630b1c59eef8c75fbfc77d944a.html>)

In this case, party A uses some jokingly exaggerated and humorous words like "If this price I could only drink northwest wind" to promote negotiation and other humble languages like "We are a small business" according to party B's request for price increase, which is in line with the politeness principle of "depreciating oneself and respecting others", and is easy to win the sympathy of the other party emotionally. In business negotiation, "showing weakness" is an effective means. This way of gaining sympathy of the negotiation counterpart by belittling yourself or using humble language belongs to "aggressive sympathy strategy." For Party B, his purpose in this negotiation is to raise the rent. However, in the face of Party A's request, if Party B refuses directly, it will not only hurt the other party's face, but also make himself appear impersonal. This way of showing sympathy for the "adverse situation" the other party is currently in belongs to "coping sympathy strategy." Party B's "coping sympathy strategy" does not make his own requirements arouse the other party's antipathy and intensify the contradiction in the interests of both parties. These two situations also correspond to the two meanings of Sympathy Maxim.

The rational use of sympathy maxim in business negotiation can often turn confrontation into cooperation. This proves that win-win negotiation language is infectious.

3.8. Summary

To sum up, Leech's Politeness Principle gives great direction and help to the further analysis of successful business negotiation examples and dialogues. In order to achieve a win-win business negotiation, negotiators unconsciously or subconsciously follow the politeness principle when they communicate, so the politeness principle is applicable to win-win business negotiation for establishing an identical community of interests. And different maxims of politeness principle can be used in different negotiation situations and different language features are also reflected.

4. Conclusion

Through the above analysis and elaboration on win-win business negotiation examples, the language features of business negotiations are clearly presented with the help of politeness principle. It can be found that negotiators are decent, modest, and purposeful when they speak and the language expression is objective and in line with the facts. In addition, the pursuit of agreement and the showing of sympathy are also outstanding manifestations in the process of communication.

Limitations in this paper are that the results in the paper are based on the relatively small size of materials and cases, so some conclusions are limited. The future directions are that we should collect more data to ensure the reliability of the results and theoretical study should be analyzed further. It would be better for the study on international business negotiations when more negotiation corpus and the politeness principle are well observed and applied in the near future.

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