

A Brief Analysis on the Application of Pragmatics in Business Negotiation

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Abstract: Due to the increasing needs of business activities, people have to master the principles and skills of foreign business activities under the international backdrop of highly-integrated world, and increasingly frequent international business activities. Business negotiation is a dispensable part of these activities, and its success mainly depends on the application of language. This paper will discuss decent and appropriate language expressions which can promote smooth process of business negotiation, by using language strategies in Pragmatics to make both sides a win-win result under pleasant conditions.

Keywords: Business negotiation; Pragmatics; Cooperative principle; Politeness principle

1. Introduction of business negotiation

The word "business" refers to commercial affairs, involving the economic interests of the subject in economic activities, such as product buying/selling, transportation and storage, property insurance, capital lending, joint venture, labor service cooperation, debt repayment, economic disputes etc. Therefore, business negotiation refers to the behavior and process of economic activity subjects to negotiate the business relationship for their respective interests. The modes of negotiation mainly include written negotiation, face-to-face negotiation and telephone negotiation, face-to-face negotiation is one of which the most common and important one in business negotiations. The principles of business negotiation refer to the rules of thought and behavior that both sides must abide by during the negotiation. The experts generally believe that business negotiation should stick to the principle of equality and voluntariness, the principle of sincerity and faith, the principle of knowing oneself and one's enemy, the principle of perserving mutual benefits, the principle of setting goals, the principle of flexibility, the principle of timeliness and the principle of handling affairs according to law.

2. Strategies of polite language

2.1 The definition of politeness

In the 1970s, H. Grice (1975), an American philosopher and linguist, proposed Cooperative Principle. Judging from what he had said, in all verbal communication activities, there exists a tacit understanding between the speaker and the hearer, which is regarded as a principle both sides should obey to get a specific goal. Cooperative Principle contains four maxims: quantity, quality, manner and relation, while Grice noticed that not everyone strictly follow these maxims and even violate one of them in some occasions. In order to make up for the shortcomings of Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle was defined by G. Leech (1983), another famous English linguist. He pointed out that rhetoric is the effective use of language, which has been classified into interpersonal rhetoric and textual rhetoric by Leech later, and interpersonal rhetoric includes Cooperation Principle and Politeness Principle. According to Leech, Politeness Principle is a necessary complement that may rescue the CP from serious trouble in theorizing, which also includes six kinds of maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, and the author will talk about these maxims in business negotiation later.

3. Application of pragmatics on the business negotiation

3.1 The application of Cooperation Principle

Considering the characteristics and practical experience of business negotiation, the author intends to analyze the prin-

principles to be followed by negotiation language from the distinct angle of pragmatics, and discuss the actual use of negotiation language, so as to help business negotiators reduce language mistakes and improve language skills. In business negotiation, Cooperation Principle can be regarded as an effective yardstick to measure the quality of negotiation language according to the maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner. According to Grice, the first premise is to make your contribution as informative as required, and then should not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Generally speaking, there are often two kinds of outcomes in business negotiation: win-win result and win-lose result, and the former is more common and expected. Additionally, the maxim of quantity is frequently applied in win-win negotiation, which requires negotiation language to avoid hearsay.

Talking about the maxim of quality, you should intend to make your contribution true and do not say what you believe to be false and something which is lack of adequate evidence. Some negotiators regard business negotiation as the antagonistic cut-throat competition, and during the phase of specific negotiation, regardless of the objective facts, deception, fraud, concealment, and relying on lies or “boast” to gain their own negotiating advantages.

Grice pointed out there is overlap between the maxim of relation and the maxim of quantity, since too much information can be irrelevant. Once deceptive language is recognized by the other side, it will not only damage the relationship between the both sides, cast a shadow over the negotiation or even give rise to breakdown of the process, but also will bring great losses to the reputation of the company. In business negotiation, some negotiators lack concrete analysis of the negotiation situations of both sides in advance, and are coupled with their weakness in expression, when elaborating their own stance, point of view or answering some questions to the other side, vague, ambiguous, incoherent or contradictory speaking may result in misunderstanding.

3.2 The application of Politeness Principle

Based on Grice’s Cooperation Principle, the Politeness Principle was evolved by Leech out of a fresh form. Leech argues that conflicts may also arise between a certain maxim of the PP and one maxim of the CP. And when the maxims of the PP and the CP come into conflict, PP often gain more consideration. Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that CP gives people the ability to observe what the indirectness is and PP introduces the reasons that trigger off the indirectness. According to Leech, there are also two scales of politeness:

1) Absolute politeness scale, which refers to order utterances on a scale of politeness out of context. For example:

Thanks.

Thank you very much.

This scale is unidirectional, and registers degrees of politeness in terms of the Lexi grammatical form and semantic interpretation of the utterance.

2) Relative politeness scale, which refers to judge politeness as relative to norms in a given society, for a given group, or for a given situation. For example: Could I possibly interrupt?

This type of politeness scale is sensitive to context and is bidirectional. In this sense, the politeness principle also lays a solid foundation for business negotiation to establish a long-term relationship, and the author will discuss three maxims of PP in this chapter.

Approbation or flattery maxim requires us to minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise of others. For example:

—— What a nice dinner you cooked!

—— What a disgusting dinner you cooked!

In our daily communication, we have to obey the maxim of approbation to reduce the derogatory expression of others. Such behavior is easy to hurt other’s feelings, and the other side may even give confrontation or revenge “in return”. In business negotiation, although the competition between the two sides is fierce, the purpose of both sides is to reach an agreement that benefits each other. Some negotiators always tend to be quarrelsome and competitive, and hope all “can hold the other side down” from the start. They are accustomed to sharp and offensive words when speaking to the other side, which may hurt your partner’s self-esteem. Therefore, the language pattern for negotiators should be concise and speed should be moderate as well as be good at controlling emotions.

The requirements of modesty maxim are probably equal to the approbation maxim we’ve mentioned before. Although it sounds relatively simple to follow this maxim, within interpersonal communication, people often give priority to speech with a self-centered pose unawares, which is still a common problem for us to solve. In business negotiations it shows more

prominent performance: casually interrupt the other side of the conversation; look around or keep an absented mind when the other side is speaking; once it is your turn, you volubly talk yourself out without taking much consideration for the opponent's feelings; when negotiating a deal, you oversell yourself and ignore the other side. This requires negotiators to learn the art of listening to others and show strong interest in talk as well as more role reversal.

4. Speech errors in business negotiation

4.1 Violation of the maxims

Although CP and PP are universally applied to our life and workforce, Grice points out the CP and its maxims will not be followed by everyone all the time. People sometimes violate them and tell lies. Conversational implicature can only be taken out on the basis of the CP. If someone deliberately conceals facts from his hearers, the basis for accurate interpretation is useless. In other words, lies do not have implicature proper. This is the first assumption. Meanwhile people are reluctant to follow the requirements of these maxims and they clearly understand that others also know the rule. For example, I can't say more about someone or something happened; I can't spill the beans and suchlike. This is the second assumption. People will violate one maxim for accomplishing another maxim when they are in a dilemma. For example, in order to provide information as required (the first principle of quantity maxim), I must violate the principle that what I've said should be convincing and evidence-proved (the second of quantity maxim). This is the third assumption.

5. Conclusion

From all we've discussed above, negotiation is not just a simple social communication activity, which involves a lot of knowledge storage and the conception of cross-cultural communication. The study of Pragmatics is increasingly attracting the scholars as a result of the gradual awareness in the great gap existing between modern linguistic theories and actual linguistic communication. This thesis mainly probes into the significance of language strategies and their application in business negotiation under the guidance of pragmatics. Considering these limitations, further research is indispensable in the field of language strategies with the guidance of relevant disciplines, so as to offer more practical strategies which can benefit each other in business negotiation. Language is ever-changing and lively. Although this study is only a start in an attempt to study the application of language strategies in business negotiation, the author does hope that the thesis may function as a reference for future research and have some instructional guidance for business negotiators.

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