

礼貌原则在商务沟通中的应用

THE APPLICATION OF POLITENESS
PRINCIPLE IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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·长沙·

前 言

第二次世界大战以后,国际贸易开始蓬勃发展。用英语来进行商务沟通逐渐成为国际贸易活动中不可缺少的部分。从 20 世纪 70 年代早期开始,语言学家对语言在商务活动中的使用越来越感兴趣。语用学家、文体学家和会话学分析家,从不同角度分析商务谈判和商务信函的语用特点、文体特征以及语篇特色。本书列举了大量的实例,尝试用语用学中的礼貌原则来解释并指导商务沟通。

语用学是语言学的一个较新的领域,它研究在特定情景的特定话语,研究如何通过语境来理解和使用语言。其中,合作原则和礼貌原则分别是由 Leech 和 Grice 提出来的两个重要原则。Leech 把礼貌原则当做 Grice 的合作原则的补充。说话者出于礼貌的缘故,故意违反合作原则中的某些规则。礼貌原则分为得体准则、慷慨准则、赞誉准则、谦逊准则、一致准则、同情准则。本书探讨了如何把这两大原则应用到日趋重要的商务沟通中,特别是商务谈判和商务信函中。

本书参考了国内外出版的各种教材、报刊和语言学论著,以求例句准确地道,并能大体上反映礼貌原则在商务沟通中的指导作用。材料和例句的选择力求满足三个方面的要求:

①典型性与实用性相结合,举一反三,又表现语言运用的实例,切实可信;

②规范性与趣味性相结合,例句准确无误,各类题材穿插配合,避免枯燥;

③单个例句与话语相结合,充分反映语言结构各个层次的复杂情况。

实用性是编写本书所追求的一个重要目标。本书以实例的具

体分析为主,讨论礼貌原则在商务沟通中的具体应用。

全书分为五章。第一章导言部分概略说明礼貌原则、商务谈判、商务信函及其相互关系。第二章、第三章详细介绍了这些概念,是本书的理论部分。第四章、第五章详细介绍了礼貌原则和合作原则在商务谈判和商务信函中的具体应用以及他们的指导作用,是本书的理论与实际相结合的部分。

本书在内容和编写上未必能尽如人意,不当之处,恳请各位专家同行和读者批评指正。

作 者

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Politeness, which is a social phenomenon, touches upon every respect of life. It naturally comes into theorists' view in different perspectives. It is of great concern with sociologists, socio-linguists, social anthropologists and social psychologists, etc. They probe into the contents of politeness, its principle, its function, and its means. Herein I mainly look into it from the pragmatics' angle. Anyway, roughly speaking, politeness means to take the need of others into consideration in order to achieve some social goals, such as maximizing the benefit to self and other, minimizing the face-threatening nature of a social act, etc. The ultimate goal of politeness is "the attainment of comity" (Leech 1983a: 104). It is true that people can achieve this kind of social purpose by many means, but non-verbal expression and verbal expression may be regarded as mainly two tools in presenting the degree of politeness. The polite language, as well as transmitting all kinds of information as a function of language, establishes and maintains and improves the social relationship with each other. It manifests itself not only into human daily life, but also into human political, economic, cultural and other social lives. Therefore politeness and its relevant language should be taken into account.

Business is all those activities involved in providing the goods and services needed or desired by people, i. e. the buying and selling of goods and services. Business communication is the exchange of messages that supports the goal of buying and selling goods and service. International business communication is a process by which an oral or written message is exchanged between individuals of different cultures through a

common system of symbols, signs, or behavior, with a view to producing actual effects in business.

Effective international business communication is the lifeblood of every international business organization. Business communication is so important that without it a business organization cannot function since a business organization is a group of people associated for business, its activities requiring human beings to interact and react; to exchange information, ideas, plans, proposals; to coordinate; to make decision. And communication to customers, inquirers and the public can have a far-reaching effect on the reputation and ultimate success of the company. Thus communicating effectively can contribute in a variety of ways to the lifeblood of our business organization because successful messages eliminate unnecessary additional correspondence, save time and expense, create favorable impression, enhance goodwill, and help to increase the company's profit.

International business communication may take many forms, such as letters, negotiations, interoffice memorandums, reports, telegrams, cables, telexes, resumes and printed forms that are used for special goals. Here, we'll concentrate on business correspondence and business negotiations.

Correspondence means the act of communicating by means of letters or the letters which pass between correspondents (王萍, 1995: 59). Then business correspondence refers to the correspondence used in business transactions.

An international business letter has the purpose of communicating a message to sell something, to make an adjustment, to collect money, and so forth, and at all times to maintain goodwill for our business organization. But no matter how strong and powerful the message is in itself, it

can be effective only if the letter communicating the message is faultless. Thus the importance of letter writing cannot be overemphasized. It is not without reason that it costs more to write a poor letter than it does to write a good one because the international business letter is an image-maker. Its format, grammar, stylistics and word usage conjoin to produce a tangible reflection on paper not only of the writer's ability and knowledge and the typist's competence, but also of a business organization's total image. Badly written business letters may create negative impression on our recipients so they will have second thought about pursuing business relationships with our business organization. The letter, then, is in fact an exponent of overall organizational style, regardless of the size of the firm. And if there appears to be no pride in or concern for the quality of something as basic as our business correspondence, how then can there be concern for or pride in the quality of our products and services? Thus, the impression created by a politely written international letter can be a crucial factor in doing business with our international business counterparts.

Business negotiation is a complex human activity, which plays an important role in economic interactions. It involves a dynamic interpersonal action in negotiating. As a rule, the negotiating parties have to make a decision about their respectively independent objectives, the ultimate of which does not mean to take care of oneself at the other side's expense. Cohen Herbert, an American famous negotiating master, points out that a successful negotiation does not mean "winning by defeating the other party, but winning by getting what both parties want". For the economic interest, both parties have to mutually compete against each other, but simultaneously have to cooperate with each other. In order to take the lion's share, one party has to exploit all the odds of taking the upper hand over the other; if both parties go to the extremes, the negotiation is

doomed to break down. For their common goal and interest, they have to work together in the way of the organization of negotiation, when the mutual conflict develops into contradiction.

It is indeed worthwhile to study how negotiators get along with each other. In order to avoid the deadlock or failure of negotiation, the mediation of interpersonal relationship is one of the most important factors, which should not escape from our eyes. In the course of business negotiation, the harmonious, friendly and cooperative atmosphere can, in a way, better the negotiating conditions that keep the negotiation going on smoothly. Thus it is rewarding for the negotiators to create a friendly and cooperative situation through some appropriate strategies and tactics. Among them, politeness can work as one of those effective negotiation strategies, which is "the broad plan or technology used to obtain the outcomes desired from the negotiation and the resultant agreement (Wall 1985: 7)." The politeness strategy is put into effect by means of some relevant tactics, especially the polite utterance. Tactics is generally "the component of the strategy or activities to the success of the strategy (Wall 1985: 7)." Through his command of appropriate language, a negotiator can skillfully adjust himself to the conflicting atmosphere, and somehow propitiate the other, whereas abusive language alone invites dissatisfaction, even hatred from others. Undoubtedly, in conveying his viewpoints and negotiation position, it is so necessary that negotiators should take advantage of the effects of politeness & its verbal tactics; and that the deliberation on them should be worthwhile & rewarding.

We shall highlight some of the main points in what are probably the most influential publications on politeness as revealed in language usage, such as the publications of G. Leech (1983), S. Levinson and P. Brown (1987), C. Yule (1996), P. Crice (1976). Among these theorists, G.

Leech proposes the politeness principle on the basis of P. Grice's cooperative principle; and Levinson and Brown suggest the theory of face work. These linguistic politeness and ways are socially constituted and have some theoretical and realistic significance in human life. Naturally, these theories can play some part in business negotiation.

Basic to the universality of politeness in language usage is a rational model person, who is able to choose an appropriate way in which he can maintain the mutual faces in the most efficient way possible. The model person is endowed with a positive face and a negative face: roughly the want to be approved of in certain respects and the want to be unimpeded. He must manage to avoid face-threatening act in accordance with the politeness principle as against the cooperative principle. If he acts in some cases as the cooperative principle supposes, he is easy to threaten the others' face. Thus it dawns on him that the politeness principle would be available. For the politeness principle manages to maximize benefits to others and to minimize benefits to self, etc. In the course of business negotiation, conflict occurs easily. A negotiator endeavors to be the model person. On the one hand, he tries to cater to the other's hypocrisy, opinion, attitude and other face wants; on the other hand, he manages to maintain his self's face at the same time. Under this circumstance, the rational model negotiator must take some appropriate strategies and language. Among them, such politeness language strategies as vagueness, euphemistic presentation, understatement, compliments, the cooperative principle, the "you-attitude", the "inductive" and "deductive" approaches are some effective politeness ones, which are to be explicated in the book.

Business negotiation is essentially a kind of economic activity undertaken through language. Whether it succeeds depends largely on the use

of language. Both parties have to cooperate with each other as well as being competitive against each other. Either party will endeavor to win the most of benefits while maintaining cooperation with the other. Undoubtedly, this goal has to be achieved through an appropriate language. It is indispensable for one side to choose effective negotiating strategies and language in gaining advantages over the other. Among those strategies, politeness strategy and its relevant language are of great importance in negotiating. To start with, the interrelation between the principles of business negotiation and its language necessitates the strategy of polite language. As a negotiation expert called Cohen Herbert says, successful negotiation does not mean "winning by defeating the other party, but winning by getting what both parties want". Thus, business negotiation is a kind of cooperation and appropriate language is totally necessary. Politeness language complies with the politeness principle, which embodies the speaker's politeness to others, such as friendliness, esteem, sparing others' face, etc. Different ways of expression embody different politeness scales. Pragmatists think that all the speech acts are somewhat face-threatening acts (FTA). To properly deal with FTA and save the interlocutors' positive & negative face, it is totally necessary to use politeness and its language strategy appropriately. In terms of the linguistic expressions of politeness mainly used in business negotiation, there are vagueness, euphemism, understatement, and compliments.

Business correspondence is also a special kind of communication, specifically, "a piece of conversation by post". It is acknowledged by almost all business people that there are six writing principles in business correspondence: Correctness, Completeness, Clearness, Conciseness, Considerateness and Courtesy. They are in fact the reflection and demonstration of the classical pragmatic principles, mainly of CP and PP. The

“correctness” of the 6c’s is the requirement of the quality maxim (i.e. try to make your contribution one that is true). Therefore, “correctness” embodies the Maxim of Quality. Similarly, “completeness” reflects the Quantity maxim; the “clearness” and “conciseness” principles give expression to the Maxim of Manner. Guided by the PP, some writing strategies are often used in business communications: the cooperation principle, the “you-attitude” strategy, the “inductive” and “deductive” strategy.

In sum, the politeness principle can to some extent guide our business communication, and improve our business communication competence and proficiency, accelerate and facilitate our business communication, and make it more effective.

This book unfolds as follows: Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 is concerned with the definition of business communication, and limits the discussion of business communication to business negotiation and business correspondence. Chapter 3 makes a brief survey of theories regarding politeness such as face theory and the politeness principle. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 deal with the effective strategies of politeness in business communication.

Chapter 2 Business Communication

2.1 Business Communication in General

Business is all those activities involved in providing the goods and services needed or desired by people, i. e. the buying and selling of goods and services. Business communication is the exchange of messages that supports the goal of buying and selling goods and service. International business communication is a process by which an oral or written message is exchanged between individuals of different cultures through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior, with a view to producing actual effects in business.

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bles, telexes, resumes and printed forms that are used for special goals. Here, we'll concentrate on business correspondence and business negotiations.

2.2 Business Negotiation

2.2.1 The Definition of Business Negotiation

James Wall (1985: 4) thinks that business negotiation is a process through which two or more parties coordinate an exchange of goods or services and attempt to agree upon rate of exchange for them; and Ways Max (1979:15) defines it as a process in which two or more parties, who have both common interests and conflicting interests, put forth and discuss explicit proposals concerning specific terms of a possible agreement. What James Wall and Ways Max say essentially has no differences. It is a kind of communicative process of economical activity. The primary objective may be an agreement or any other outcome indigenous to or resulting from the ongoing exchange; its core lies in the interplay of two phrases, "common interests" and "conflicting interests".

Negotiation parties must have common interests and conflict interests. Common interests mean that they jointly prefer certain outcomes to other possible outcomes. Conflicting interests mean that some of the jointly preferred outcomes are better for one party, whereas others are better for the other party. Unless both are present, in either an overt or a latent way, negotiation makes no sense. Negotiated records are actually specific and not intended to abolish all the conflicts between the parties. Self-interest and mutual interest increases the aggregate of contracts, some of which are negotiated. A negotiator's common interests versus his competing interests exactly create the fundamental tension.

As a communication action, business negotiation has some basic

purposes.

- ▶ To establish and build goodwill. In order to work effectively with others, we must be able to recognize and understand their feelings, attitudes and motives. Our ability to establish good relationship with co-workers, clients, and customers has a major effect on our professional development and advancement. Good relationships result in goodwill, or the favorable reputation that a business has with its customers. Goodwill must exist before the other purposes of communication can be achieved.
- ▶ To influence the actions of others. The ability to motivate or persuade others to act in a certain way depends on our ability to convince them that they will benefit from such action.
- ▶ To obtain or share information. Information is one of the most valuable resources of an organization. Obtaining, using and sharing information in an appropriate manner is critical to the success of an organization.
- ▶ To establish personal effectiveness. When we receive a communication that is accurate, easy to understand, and error-free, we form a positive image of the person who sent it. We are likely to regard the sender as attentive to detail, intelligent, and concerned about others -a good person to do business with. On the other hand, a message with numerous errors suggests carelessness, lack of intelligence or thoughtlessness. As senders we are constantly being evaluated on our ability to communicate.
- ▶ To build self-esteem. Positive comments and reactions from others that result from effective communication build our confidence. As a result, we feel good about ourselves and continue to be successful (Henson. M.1990: 4). Without communication, negotiation would be more than a series of bids or offers exchanged between parties. There would

be no information provided as to why the bid or offer was unacceptable. Without more information there would be no reason, other than the passage of time, for parties to make concessions. In short, there would be no negotiation.

Business negotiation is one of economic activities, with its attributes and principles. However, there are some differences between negotiation and bargaining. Negotiation is a more general category composed of bargaining and debate. Bargaining can be succinctly defined as moved by the negotiator to alter the opponent's behavior, whereas debate is the problem-solving portion of a negotiation. Debate entails discussions, explication, interpolation syntheses, and proposals undertaken jointly by the negotiator and opponent in order to decide upon an agreement that is acceptable to both sides.

2.2.2 The Principles of Business Negotiation

Cohen Herbert introduces a theme, which is followed throughout the principles of business negotiation. Successful negotiation does not mean "winning by defeating the other party, but winning by getting what both parties want". The principles of business can be roughly classified as follows.

- **Cooperation** In business negotiation, both parties are working together towards the common or convergent goals. They first must agree on the overall goal that they jointly share; simultaneously they establish long-term relationship as business partner. The goal of business strategies is to produce a stable relationship favorable to us with the consent of our competitor. By definition, such restraint by a competitor is cooperation. Such cooperation from a competitor must seem to be profitable to him.