汉语谈判中的模糊语言

Negotiating with Vague Language : A Chinese Perspective

赵晓华　张　乔　著

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中文摘要

人们为什么使用模糊语言（例如“许多”，“一点儿”）？人们又是如何使用模糊语言的？通过研究作为中文商务谈判交际策略的模糊语言，我们在本书中探讨上述问题。本研究有别于以往研究的三方面为：1）使用真实、自然的商务谈判语料；2）从词法、句法、语流、语用等多个视角分析研究；3）把社会、文化因素作为相关参数融入到对模糊语言的分析中。本研究发现，从普及性和有效性来看，模糊语言不但不比非模糊语言逊色，而是可能更出色，因此人们往往更喜欢使用模糊语言。当出于实用性和融洽人际关系这两个目的使用模糊语言时，前者比后者用得多而广。模糊语言的运用在不同程度上受到年龄、亲疏、性别的影响。本书是研究模糊语言在真实的中文商务谈判中如何运用的初次尝试之一，为模糊语言和语言交际的研究增添了重要的内容，并对汉语的模糊性及其有效运用的启示提出了见解。本书可作为从事语言学、语言研究、语言交际学以及跨文化研究的学者和研究生的参考资料，也可供从事语言教学、跨文化教育、语言交际专业培训的教育工作者、以及对语言与语言交际感兴趣的读者使用。

Abstract

How and why is vague language (e. g. 'many', 'a bit') used? We explore these questions by investigating the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations. Three elements set this study apart from previous studies: 1) using naturally occurring data; 2) exploring the data from multiple perspectives (lexical, syntactic, sequential, and pragmatic); and 3) including social, cultural factors as relevant parameters in the analysis of vague language. This research finds that vague expressions should be as conventional and effective as non-vague expressions, if not more so. Very often, they are preferable to non-vague expressions because of their greater efficiency and relevance. While vague language is used for a combination of practical and interpersonal purposes, its priority is practical. The ways in which it is mobilized are, to a lesser or greater degree, influenced by the social factors of age, distance, and gender. This is one of the first attempts to study vague language in real-life Chinese business negotiations, and provides insights into vagueness in Chinese language and its implications for effective communication. The findings add an important dimension to the study of vague language and communication in general. This book is a useful resource for academics and postgraduate students engaged in linguistics, language studies, communication and intercultural research; educators and practitioners involved in language teaching, intercultural education, professional training of communication; and general readers who are interested in languages and communication.

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Key words: vague language, vagueness, fuzzy, business communication, Chinese language, business negotiation

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Transcription conventions

(0.5)	The number in brackets indicates a time gap of five seconds.
(.)	This indicates untimed pause, which is noticeable but too short to measure.
=	This indicates latching between utterances.
(overlap)	This indicates overlapping utterances, no gap between lines.
(indistinct)	This indicates inaudible.
(?)	This indicates that the preceding word is unclear.
(laugh)	This indicates a laugh sound.
【…】	This indicates a section of the extract is left out.

Note: The transcription of Chinese uses pinyin. It uses the original tone of the Chinese character, tone sandhi is not shown. For example, it shows yīxià (一下, "a little in scale, scope or capability"), rather than yíxià.

List of abbreviations

VL: vague language

VE: vague expression

A +: older age

A-: younger age

F: female

M: male

D-: friends

D =: acquaintances

D +: strangers

N: negotiations

S: speakers

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the study

Popper (1992, p.24) points out that 'One should never try to be more precise than the problem situation demands.' Similarly, Jucker, Smith, and Lüdge state, 'When we speak or write, we are rarely very clear, precise, or explicit about what we mean—and perhaps could not be—but are, on the contrary, vague, indirect, and unclear about just what we are committed to.' (2003, p.1738)

We define a vague expression (VE) as a linguistic unit without a clear-cut meaning boundary; and vague language (VL) as language which has an inherently unspecified or underspecified meaning in the context in which it occurs, and which can be used as a communicative strategy. (Zhang 1998, Cheng and Warren 2003, Ruzaitė 2007) VL consists of inexplicit expressions used strategically, exemplified by *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little'), *kěnéng* (可能 'possibly'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *hěnduō* (很多 'many'), and *jīngcháng* (经常 'often'), etc. It should not be confused with 'misused' language: on the contrary, it is an integral part of the language and indispensable in communication.

Traditionally, vagueness in language use is considered undesirable. The perception of vagueness as a negative feature of language is mainly based on the essentialist attitude to meaning (Plato 1914, Aristotle 1946, 1963). However, this tradition conflicts with the fact that VL is used pervasively. Rather than being undesirable, it is regularly employed, and is regarded as an effective means of communication. Channell, one of the earliest researchers to investigate vagueness systematically based on English data, states that 'a complete theory of language must

have vagueness as an integral component' (1994, p. 5), suggesting that the understanding of VL use is of significance. Using an empirical approach, Jucker *et al.* (2003, p. 1737) demonstrate that 'vague expressions may be more effective than precise ones in conveying the intended meaning of an utterance.'

Chinese has long been perceived as being an inscrutable language with indirect ways of communicating. Wu (1999), Chen and Wu (2002), and Zhang (1998, 2004a, 2005), among others, have investigated the phenomenon of vagueness in Mandarin Chinese. They stress that VL is part of our normal everyday language, and is as important as, if not more important than, so-called non-VL. Although VL is an indispensable part of language, it has been ignored for quite a long time. In particular, few previous works have focused on the use of VL in real-life Chinese business negotiations. We intend to fill this gap, providing insights into vagueness in Chinese language and developing an account of effective communication in Chinese business discourse.

China has a long history of civilization, and its language is full of cultural elements and traits. China's rich and profound socio-cultural influence contributes to the intricacy of its language. It would be intriguing to see how social and cultural factors impact on VL's linguistic representations and pragmatic use in Chinese business negotiations, which are practical as well as deeply culture-influenced. China is fast becoming one of the most important powerhouses in the world. To establish and maintain a good business relationship with the Chinese requires well-informed and effective communication strategies. The Chinese people are very culture-rooted, which has great influence on their communication behaviors, so awareness of communication strategies and their cultural roots is crucial in business negotiations if mutual understanding and good business deals are to be achieved. We intend to explore linguistic patterns from the perspective of VL use, to enhance the understanding of Chinese business culture and to promote communication with Chinese business people in effective and efficient ways. The findings will also add an important dimension to the study of VL and have implications for the exploration of effective communication in general.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The research question of this study is how VL is employed strategically in naturally occurring Chinese business negotiations. It is addressed by the following four objectives:

(1) identifying the lexical and syntactic patterns of VL used in Chinese business negotiations, including their forms and frequencies,

(2) investigating the pragmatic functions of VL and the underpinning socio-cultural factors for the use of VL,

(3) exploring the negotiators' interactive moves using sequential analysis,

(4) speculating on the implications of the findings on the study of Chinese business communication and communication in general.

The four objectives are interlinked and dependent on each other. The first one lays a foundation for the other three, and the second and the third both look at VL through an interactive approach. The last objective will be addressed after the first three are dealt with. The achievement of the four objectives will explicate how and why the Chinese use VL as communicative strategies in their business negotiations, the relevant socio-cultural factors involved, and the effectiveness of these communicative strategies.

What distinguishes this research from previous studies on vagueness is that we explore sequential flow and the accomplishment of effective interaction using VEs, among others. We adopt an interactional framework, i. e. exploring VEs by studying their roles in sequential organization (unfolding interaction), in addition to applying lexical and syntactical analysis. A comprehensive analysis of sequential organization in this study reveals more than isolated utterances can, in terms of the negotiating efforts of the speaker and the hearer, and linguistic patterns underpinned by socio-cultural factors.

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