A Discourse Analysis of Trade Negotiations

YANG Wenhui

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. KONG Chak Chung, Kenneth

Hong Kong Baptist University

February 2008
Abstract

Despite their centrality in business communication, trade negotiations have not received much attention from linguists, especially the emic studies that take a conversation analysis (CA) approach. Guided by the theoretical and methodological principles of CA, and based on the previous studies of social interactions and linguistic politeness, the author studies the negotiation structure and linguistic strategies which display the nature of trade negotiations and language use in institutional contexts. The research aims to identify the participation frameworks, collaborative completions, linguistic manifestations (e.g. the sociopragmatic preference for making request, and metaphorical application) and their association with interpersonal and business relationships in trade negotiations (between business strangers, friends and partners).

The findings provide significant insights into the understanding of the interrelationship between interpersonal relationship and business communication in the Chinese business contexts. The Chinese trade negotiators use different negotiation patterns and linguistic strategies to realize their various negotiation aims under different relationships. As the interpersonal relationship develops, Chinese business negotiators of varied relationships prefer to (1) apply more social-related interacting elements discursively in trade negotiations by reiterating them, extending them, and even overlapping them with other work-related elements, and the interaction patterns are getting more complicated and less formatted; (2) apply more politeness strategies and involve more facework in requests, and the generic preferences for politeness and (in)directness in requests are not necessarily related in a linear fashion or ranked intrinsically; and (3) apply more metaphors as various politeness strategies in speech acts with preferred patterns, regulating and framing the politeness strategies largely by using various linguistic forms. In trade negotiations, business negotiators take up different social and institutional roles and appropriate linguistic devices to act according to the business contexts and interpersonal situations. Generally, four central elements integrate with the Chinese communication and business politeness: being relevant, being appropriate, being contextually sensitive, and being felicitously sociable. In a relative way, the Chinese conversational structure and politeness strategies are characterized as a dynamic and developmental flux with low-predictability.

These findings improve the traditional assumptions on social interactions and linguistic politeness theories. The research should be seen as a pioneer one, and more research work in the same direction can be conducted in order to have a thorough understanding of language and culture.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviation</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Social Background                                                 | 1    |
1.2 The Research Background                                               | 3    |
1.3 Research Objectives                                                   | 7    |
1.4 The Rationale of the Study                                            | 8    |
1.5 Summary                                                               | 10   |

## Chapter 2 Literature Review and Descriptive Framework

2.1 Relevant Research on Business Negotiation

2.1.1 Definition of Negotiation                                           | 12   |
2.1.2 Current Discourse Studies of Business Negotiations                 | 13   |
2.1.3 Current Studies of Interpersonal Communication                     | 15   |

2.2 Relevant Studies of Negotiation Structure and Patterns

2.2.1 Prescriptive and Descriptive Models                                | 21   |
2.2.2 Social Conversational Structure and Speech Elements

2.2.2.1 Conversational Structure and Patterns                            | 24   |
2.2.2.2 Conversational Speech Elements                                   | 28   |

2.3 Negotiation Language and Culture

2.3.1 Business Negotiation Language                                       | 29   |
2.3.1.1 The Studies of Request                                           | 30   |
2.3.1.2 The Studies of Metaphor                                          | 32   |

2.3.2 Politeness in Communication                                         | 36   |
2.3.2.1 The Studies of Politeness Theory                                 | 39   |
2.3.2.2 Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Strategies                       | 42   |
2.3.2.3 The Studies of Interpersonal Politeness System: Western vs. Asian | 44   |

2.3.3 Chinese Business Contexts                                           | 48   |
2.3.3.1 Chinese Business Culture                                         | 49   |
5.2 Requests and Politeness Strategy

5.2.1 Requests and Politeness Strategies in Trade Negotiations

5.2.1.1 Bald on Record

5.2.1.2 Positive Politeness

5.2.1.3 Negative Politeness

5.2.1.4 Off-record Politeness

5.2.1.5 The Dynamics of Politeness Strategies in Trade Negotiations

5.3 Generic Preference for Business Requests and Politeness Strategies

5.3.1 General Distribution of Politeness Strategies in Business Requests

5.3.2 Interpersonal Variation in Request Strategies and Politeness

5.3.2.1 The Linguistic and Politeness Preference of the BS Group

5.3.2.2 The Linguistic and Politeness Preference of the BF Group

5.3.2.3 The Linguistic and Politeness Preference of the BP Group

5.4 The Impact of Interpersonal Relationship on Business Requests and Interpersonal Politeness System

5.5 Summary

Chapter 6 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies in Trade Negotiations

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies

6.2.1 FTAs

6.2.2 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies in FTAs

6.2.3 Linguistic Realizations of Metaphorical Expression in FTAs

6.2.4 Distribution of Metaphors in Trade Negotiations

6.3 Negotiators’ Generic Preferences for Metaphors in Trade Negotiations

6.3.1 Metaphors Used by the BS Group

6.3.2 Metaphors Used by the BF Group

6.3.3 Metaphors Used by the BP Group

6.4 The Impact of Interpersonal Relationship on Metaphors in FTAs

6.5 Summary

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Summary of the Key Findings

7.3 A Cultural Perspective on Conversational Structure

7.4 A Cultural Perspective on Request

7.5 A Cultural Perspective on Metaphor

7.6 A Cultural Perspective on Interpersonal Business Communication

Chapter 6 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies in Trade Negotiations

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies

6.2.1 FTAs

6.2.2 Metaphors as Politeness Strategies in FTAs

6.2.3 Linguistic Realizations of Metaphorical Expression in FTAs

6.2.4 Distribution of Metaphors in Trade Negotiations

6.3 Negotiators’ Generic Preferences for Metaphors in Trade Negotiations

6.3.1 Metaphors Used by the BS Group

6.3.2 Metaphors Used by the BF Group

6.3.3 Metaphors Used by the BP Group

6.4 The Impact of Interpersonal Relationship on Metaphors in FTAs

6.5 Summary

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Summary of the Key Findings

7.3 A Cultural Perspective on Conversational Structure

7.4 A Cultural Perspective on Request

7.5 A Cultural Perspective on Metaphor

7.6 A Cultural Perspective on Interpersonal Business Communication
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.7 Significance</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8 Limitations</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9 Summary</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>