Pragmatic Analysis of English Fuzzy Language in International Business Negotiation

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Abstract. This thesis aims to lead negotiators to pay more attention to use fuzzy language and put forward three strategies for negotiators to use fuzzy language in business negotiation following the cooperative principle and politeness principle. The thesis proves its importance in business negotiation by theoretical analysis and showing a series of examples. The author provides some strategies for negotiators and guides them to negotiate in international business negotiation well such as ambiguity, euphemism and so on. Sometimes, negotiators have to violate the maxims to gain a better result. The appropriate appliance of fuzzy language can relive the tension in business negotiation, being accurate and flexible, and improving the efficiency. The innovation of this paper is from the practical application of fuzzy language to better negotiation.

Introduction

Nowadays, with the development of economy, the communication between countries becomes closer and closer. The foreign trades are becoming more and more frequent. In order to integrate into the globalization quickly, people must pay attention to international business negotiation in the foreign trade. Business negotiation is a basic form of communication, which plays an important role in the foreign trade. Business negotiation requires negotiators not only know the rules, laws and foreign trade business very well, but also have negotiation skills. However, in real business negotiations, accurate and clear information may put one party in a worse situation. Fuzzy language is an essential nature of human language, and it’s a common phenomenon in communication. Fuzzy language has been used as a common strategy in business negotiations, in which negotiators achieve aims by using fuzzy language. It can create certain pragmatic effects and provide the speaker with a way of communication to achieve a certain communicative aim. To some extent, successful international business negotiation depends on whether the fuzzy language is used properly. Business negotiations greatly affect people’s lives. However, some negotiators have no idea of how to negotiate appropriately in business negotiation.

General Study of Fuzzy Language in Business Negotiation

An Overview of Business Negotiation

Maddux (1995) said that negotiation is a process in which people negotiate with the counterpart to get what we want and reach mutual benefit. Negotiation can be divided into two kinds: win-win negotiation and win-lose negotiation. Win-win negotiation is also considered as cooperative negotiation, because the negotiators try to cooperate in order to achieve a win-win outcome. In the opposite, win-lose negotiation is viewed as non-cooperative negotiation. Hence, negotiators should master the knowledge and be cooperative in order to get a successful negotiation.

On the basis of massive literature, McCall and Warrington (1984) pointed out the phases of international business negotiation consist of three parts: pre-negotiation phase, face-to-face negotiation and post-negotiation. In the first phrase, the parties need to collect information and take precautions to ensure any problems, for instance, religious belief, social customs, legal system and so on. In the second phrase, negotiators should be cooperative and try their best to solve the problems together and reach a good result. In the third phrase, both parties will sign a contract, the parties should be careful and make a full understanding of the detail of the contract.
Characteristics of Fuzzy Language in Business Negotiation

With the development of economy, business English has been widely applied in recent years. In business negotiation, English fuzzy language is considered as an important tool to protect business interest. It is a good way to avoid all information and intentions are exposed to other parties directly and completely. Fuzzy language is part of fuzzy semantics and it has been taken as an effective skill in business negotiation. Through this skill or the linguistic tactics, negotiators from all parties can promote the negotiation process and gain the highest benefits.

Fuzzy language can be classified into three categories by Channel (1994): (a) fuzzy additives: fuzzy additives are words or expressions that are added to what would otherwise be a precise statement, which is an important way to realize pragmatic fuzziness. (b) fuzziness by choice of fuzzy words: negotiators always choose fuzzy words to make the communication atmosphere pleasant, for example, “loads of”, “lots of”, “beautiful” and “large”, therefore, this category consists of fuzzy adjectives, adverbs, and phrases. (c) fuzziness by implicature: This kind of fuzziness is different from the first two in that the sentence is apparently precise but can be used or understood to have a fuzzy meaning.

The Causes of Using Fuzzy Language in Business Negotiation

There are many reasons why the fuzzy language exists in business negotiation. Human language is complex, so it is hard for people to express all things or determine the boundaries. For example, the sentence “The price you offer is too high”, “too high” is a fuzzy language, we don’t have idea of “high and low” and we can’t determine the boundary of “high”. However, the fuzzy expression is beneficial to the process of business negotiation.

In different situations, negotiators should apply different strategies. Under some circumstances, it is unnecessary for speakers to choose whether fuzzy language is used or not, which is depending on the circumstance. Business negotiation is a very formal and complex situation, so sometimes negotiators need to pay attention to what they should to say and respond. What’s more, how to apply fuzzy language to achieve a specific purpose and in which way negotiators can guarantee more benefit and decrease loss is of great importance. It is easy for us to understand that fuzzy language plays an important role in our daily life especially business negotiation. Fuzzy language can deal with face-to-face conflict and embarrassment. However, some of them do not have a clear idea of the causes of using fuzzy language in business negotiation.

Pragmatic Analysis of Fuzzy Language in Business Negotiation

Language is not only used as a way to transmit the messages and express the ideas, but also as a way to help people to establish and maintain human relations. As for fuzzy language, its pragmatic functions are why fuzzy language is widely used in business negotiation. So it deserves people’s attention to fuzzy language in business negotiation. How to apply the fuzzy language in the business negotiation? The cooperative principle and politeness principle should be taken into account. So the author aims to analyze the pragmatic functions of fuzzy language in business negotiation from these two aspects.

Analyzing of the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

In 1967, cooperative principle was put forward by Grice in a speech “Logic and Conversation”. The observation of Grice is that when people talk and communicate with each other, they should try to be cooperative. The principle was a breakthrough in the field of pragmatics, which caused pragmatics scholars’ attention. It is easy to find cooperative principles are commonly used in our communication. Grice (1975) thought that in order to achieve a successful conversation, the speakers should obey the basic rules. And he also thought that cooperative principles could be regarded as the guideline for the efficient and effective use of language in conversation. Translators need to apply cooperative principle to help hearers to understand the implication caused by different
culture, language and regions. Cooperative principle can construct a cooperative relationship between speakers and hearers. Grice identifies guidelines of four basic maxims of conversation.

The first maxim is the maxim of quantity. It means make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange and do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The second maxim is the maxim of quality. It means trying to make your contribution one that is true, specifically.

The third maxim is maxim of relevance. It means the information conveyed by the speaker should be relevant to the topic.

The forth maxim is maxim of manner. It requires speaker to talk orderly and briefly in order to avoid obscurity. Clearness is also the basic requirements of maxim of manner.

In the actual verbal communication, people usually apply cooperative principle unconsciously to fulfill the task and finish the contract. However, people do not always obey the cooperative principle; even violate the maxims for some certain aims.

Analyzing of the Perspective of Politeness Principle

To some extent, most of the pragmatic description of fuzzy language should be related to politeness principle. It was regarded as he basic theory for studying pragmatic functions of fuzzy language. Leech pointed out politeness principle including six maxims, which is similar to the Grice’s maxims of cooperative principle. These maxims provide a reasonable explanation why people use politeness principle. Politeness is key part in the business negotiation. Politeness principle is consists of six maxims: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modest maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim (Leech, 1983).

(a) Tact Maxim: minimize cost to other or maximize benefit to other.
(b) Generosity Maxim: minimize benefit to self or maximize cost to self.
(c) Approbation Maxim: minimize dispraise of other or maximize praise of other.
(d) Modesty Maxim: minimize praise of self or maximize dispraise of self.
(e) Agreement Maxim: minimize disagreement between self and other or maximize agreement between self and other.
(f) Sympathy Maxim: minimize antipathy between self and other or maximize sympathy between self and other. These maxims are so common in daily conversation. Among them, tact maxim is the most powerful.

Face-saving is an important part in the business negotiation. Although both parties usually involved in a conflict of benefits, being polite is necessary for negotiators to abide by. These examples of politeness principle show speaker’s respect to the counterpart and leave a good impression to the counterpart. What’s more, using of politeness principle is beneficial to try to maximize benefits.

Strategies of Using Fuzzy Language in Business Negotiation

In fact, negotiation is about compromise. Usually negotiations end up with a compromise, and the words employed are reflects in the characteristics of negotiation language. Business negotiation is a complex process that is related to many aspects. So when negotiators need more time to consider the requirements raised by counterpart, they can apply fuzzy language in the business negotiation.

Using Ambiguity in Business Negotiation

As a communicative strategy, ambiguity is very common in pragmatics language. It is multifunctional in business negotiation and can often be used as a kind of polite strategies. Zhang Qiao (1998) defines ambiguity as “expressions which have more than one semantically unrelated meaning, in other words, the expression has more than one possible interpretation. Ambiguity is a highly conscious and purposeful behavior of making linguistic choices”. In business negotiation, ambiguity often present with fuzzy language that shows uncertain and possibility.
Using Euphemism in Business Negotiation

Euphemism is not only a language phenomenon, but it is a cultural phenomenon. It has functions with evasiveness, politeness and concealing. It is widely used in various aspects, such as politics, economy, education and daily life. Euphemism is substitution of a mild or vague or roundabout expression for harsh or direct one, in other words, the expression of euphemism is substituted. Euphemism has two layers of meaning. One is superficial meaning, which shows the literal meaning directly while the other one is internal meaning, which shows the real purpose hidden in words. When facing bargains, complain or another persuasion, using euphemism can earn more opportunities and time.

Using Indirect Speech in Business Negotiation

Indirect speech is a common phenomenon, which appears to be a complicate way of communicating. Jenny Thomas (1995) pointed out that People do not always or even usually say what they mean. This kind of phenomenon is called indirect speech.

Conclusion

Business negotiations are regarded as test subject, under the theoretical support of cooperative principle and politeness principle, this thesis aims to lead negotiators to pay more attention to use fuzzy language and put forward three strategies for negotiators to use fuzzy language in the business negotiations following the cooperative principle and politeness principle. This is an important part of business English study yet has not been explored thoroughly. Sometimes, negotiators have to violate the maxims to gain a better result. The appropriate appliance of fuzzy language can relieve the tension in business negotiation, being accurate and flexible, and improving the efficiency.

Many aspects about fuzzy language have been studied in this thesis, but there stills some limitations owing to the author’s ability. Firstly, it is difficult for author to select examples from real business negotiation. The information discussed in real business negotiation is supposed to be confidential, which is impossible for author to approach to. So the examples studied in this thesis are mostly quoted from the books, websites and other’s papers. Secondly, the lack of experimental support of this thesis is a major weakness. The author analyzes these examples from books, websites, which is less subjective. The author has to admit these studies need to be tested in the real negotiation.

References