

Critical Discourse Analysis of Spoken Business Negotiations

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Abstract—The paper sets up a three-level framework to analyze spoken business negotiations and analyzes some negotiations to demonstrate the feasibility of this framework. In accordance with the critical framework, the critical analysis of business negotiations can be carried out respectively at the phonological level, the lexical level and the conversational structure level. From the analysis, it can be concluded that in business negotiations, there surely exists power and status disparity but this tendency is not obvious because the special characteristics of business negotiations. However, it is still beneficial to do this kind of analysis because it can give some insight to negotiators and can also make people understand business negotiations better through the analysis.

Keywords—critical discourse analysis; business negotiations; phonological level; lexical level; conversational structure level

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to give people more understanding to spoken business negotiations, the analysis of spoken business negotiations is needed and the author sets up a systematic analytical framework. At the same time, this analysis can also give some insight to English for Special Purposes. What's more, it is also conducive to the establishment of an analytical framework of spoken discourses, which still remains ambiguous, non-systematic and over-emphatic on content analysis in Fairclough's model.

II. ANALYSIS FROM THE PHONOLOGICAL LEVEL

A. Theory Basis

At the phonological level, the author focuses on intonation on account of two factors. On the one hand, intonation is a necessary part of a dialogue. On the other hand, although the phonological level as the bottom level involves the process of systemic options, namely tone group, foot syllable, and phoneme (Hudson, 1981), it is a set of intonation options that possesses the meaning potential available at the phonological stratum from the point of view of Halliday (1970). The fundamental tonal choice of English is basically between rise and fall, though intonation options are not limited to rise or fall and they can be further divided into falling, rising, level, falling-rising and rising-falling according to Halliday (1970). Nonetheless, many scholars insist on the two-tone approach, i.e. rise and fall. Cruttenden

(2002) holds that low-fall, high-fall and rise-fall tones pertain to the falling tone and low-rise and fall-rise pertain to the rising tone on the basis of the finishing point. Brazil (1975) adopts two-tone system, i.e. fall and rise. He believes that the falling tone is "proclaiming" while the rising tone is "referring". Tench's (1996) intonation system is mainly concerned with rising and falling tones. Therefore, in this paper, falling and rising tones of sentences in spoken business negotiations are dealt with. It is argued that falling and rising tones in sentences reflect social status of participants. Sentences with falling tones convey a speaker's dominance whereas sentences with rising tones transmit a speaker's deference and subordination. This is especially obvious in questions. Therefore, falling tones and rising tones in sentences can reflect status difference between participants.

As intonation is one of the resources to discriminate meanings, contrastive tones in a sentence will lead to different meanings.

B. Analysis

The following is an extract from a spoken business negotiation and the intonation is marked.

R: Even with volume sales, our coats for the Exec-U-Ciser won't go down much. (↓)

D: Just what are you proposing? (↓)

R: We could take a cut on the price. (↓) But 25% would slash our profit margin. (↓) We suggest a compromise — 10%. (↑)

D: That's a big change from 25! (↓) 10 is beyond my negotiating limit. (↓) (pause) Any other ideas? (↑)

R: I don't think I can change it right now. (↓) Why don't we talk again tomorrow? (↓)

D: Sure. (↓) I must talk to my office anyway. (↓) I hope we can find some common ground on this. (↓)

In accordance with Tench (1996), Cook (2002), Ohala (1984) and Gregory et al. (2001), falling tones and rising tones in questions not only expresses attitudes but also convey social status of participants in a verbal communication. In other words, a falling tone in questions denotes superior social status and dominance of a speaker,

while a rising tone in questions denotes inferior and subordinate social status.

As intonation patterns in sentences reflect social status of participants in a verbal interaction, it can be inferred that participants with different social status have their own ways to get access to intonation patterns in sentences. According to the general convention, powerful participants in an institutional dialogue have priority to ask questions with falling tones to exercise their power and they are prone to utter falling tones in sentences to convey dominance, superiority and authority. Less powerful participants tend to ask questions with rising tones to show their inferiority, deference and subordination when they face powerful participants. In other word, falling tones in sentences are a means to exercise power. However; powerful participants can also ask questions with rising tones to mitigate status and power difference between participants or to show their interest or care. For example, the sentence in the second "D" and the second sentence in the third "R" is in a falling tone and the dominance of the speaker can be easily felt. However, the status and dominance in business negotiations is somewhat different from courtroom discourses, classroom discourses and discourses between adults and children and so on because negotiators are both helpful to each other and they have to concede sometimes. Of course, the dominance and status can be felt sometimes but this tendency changes all the time with the proceeding of the negotiations.

III. ANALYSIS FROM THE LEXICAL LEVEL

As the lexical item is an important device for people to convey different attitudes and stance and to construct social identity and social status, the critical analysis of spoken business negotiations at the lexical level is primarily concerned with appraisal lexes in sentences, which involve three kinds — evaluative lexes, modal expressions, and vocatives.

A. Evaluative Lexes

A: I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

B: But I'm a little worried about the prices you're asking.

In the example, the speaker expressed his willingness to attend to the questions raised by the listener by using the evaluative word "happy". In example 5-3, the evaluative word "worried" showed the attitude of the speaker to the prices. It is obvious that the meaning of the sentences will not be so explicit without the two evaluative words. Emotional lexes generally occur in polar pairs, i.e. one positive and one negative. Therefore, emotional lexes imply a negative or positive assessment or invite a listener to supply his/her own negative or positive assessments. "Happy" in example showed the positive attitude of the speaker to the questions of the listener and "worried" in example expressed the negative attitude of the speaker to the prices. According to the division of Martin (1997) and White (2001) about affect appraisals, lexes to express emotion generally cover three main subtypes, i.e. un/happiness, in/security and dis/satisfaction. For example, Happiness/unhappiness. "If we are happy with your quality,

we might increase our purchase to 100,000 a year, for a two-year period."

In/security. "Yes, but it's hard to see how you can place such large orders."

Dis/satisfaction. "Our clients are very satisfied with your air-conditioners."

The three subtypes respectively encompass positive and negative items, for example, un/happiness is concerned with words, namely "happy, cheerful, joyous, buoyant, jubilant, etc." as positive items and "down, sad, and distraught, etc." as negative items. In/security is concerned with words such as "together, confident, assured, composed, etc." as positive items and "uneasy, anxious, out, worried, etc." as negative items. Dis/satisfaction involves words such as "interested, absorbed, caught up, grossed, like and so on" as positive items and "tired, fed up, hate, exasperated, etc." as negative items.

Lexes to assess behavior correspond with judgment in the appraisal system, which pertains to normative assessments of human behavior, involving the ethics, morality or social values. For example, "We're already well-established in the medical products business". "The Medic-Disk would be a good addition to our product range."

Therefore, lexes to assess morality of behavior often refer to attitudinal evaluation in which human behavior is negatively or positively assessed in accordance with social norms, or human behavior, which conforms to or deviates from a speaker's social norms. Lexes to assess behavior have a positive and negative dimension. Its positive dimension pertains to admiration, while its negative dimension is concerned with criticism, which is ratified and divided in terms of social esteem and social sanction.

B. Modal Expressions

Modal expressions in sentences as a prominent evaluative device to illustrate a speaker's opinion and attitude, not only reflect degrees of politeness, but also the hierarchy of power relations. In general, a speaker with higher status may adopt high or medium value modal expressions to show his/her decisiveness and assertion, whereas a subordinate participant may use low or medium value modal expressions in his/her sentences to show his/her respect and to give more space to his/her partner to make decision. Therefore, the access to different value modal expressions in sentences reflects the difference of power and status between participants. However, it can be found out in the following analysis that because the business negotiation is an institutional discourse and the purpose of the negotiation is to conclude a business which is mutually beneficial, the modal expressions are mainly used to express politeness and of course somewhat show the dominance and power of the speaker.

According to Halliday (1985, 1994) and Perkins (1983), modal expressions are concerned with finite modal operators, (e.g. can, may, could, will, and should), e.g. "Sounds OK, if we can come to term on how much is fair." They also include mood adjuncts of probability or usuality (e.g. usually, always, certainly, probable), e.g. "As for service support, we usually

pay a yearly fee, pegged total sales." What's more, they are concerned with adjective predicators (e.g. be determined to) and nominal equivalents of mood adjuncts (e.g. probability) e.g. "I think you know already, that the purpose of my visit here is to discuss the possibility of acting as the sole agent of your air-conditioners on our market."

C. Vocatives

Vocatives in sentences are evaluative devices, which can construe social identity and social distance. Vocatives in sentences are used to designate a person in formal and informal interaction. According to Hactmann & James (1998/2000:58), vocatives include a range of devices from pronouns and personal names to professional, honorific and social titles as well as nicknames. Biber et al. (1999/2000:1108) assume vocatives are important in defining and maintaining social relationships between participants in a conversation. They divide vocatives into several scales covering the most familiar or intimate relationship to the most distant and respectful one, namely, A. endearment: e.g. baby, darling, honey, love, sweetie; B. family terms: e.g. mummy, mom, daddy, pop, pa, grandma, granny; C. familiarizers: e.g. guys, bud, mate, folks; D. familiarized first names, e.g. Jackie, Paulie, Tom; E. first names in full: e.g. Marjorie, Paul, Jennifer, Thomas; F. title and surname: e.g. Mrs. Johns, Mr. Graham, Ms Morrissey; G. Honorifics: e.g. sir, madam and H. others including nicknames, e.g. boy, red dog, lazy.

As a whole, vocatives maintain and reinforce an existing relationship. Endearments, familiarizers and familiarized first names clearly have a special role and usually mark a bond of closeness and affection between close family members and other favorite people, whereas title plus surname vocatives and honorifics stand for a more distant and respectful relationship between speaker and addressee. According to the corpus findings shown by Biber et al. (1999/2000), first- name terms amount to 60% of all vocatives and are quite often used between not only friends but colleagues and even casual acquaintances and therefore first-name vocatives have an important social role in showing the recognition of individuality among participants in conversation. Comparatively, honorifics, occupational or status vocatives such as doctor, nurse, Mr. President, and title plus surname vocatives are often used in formal encounters. Especially, title plus surname vocatives and honorifics have a distancing or deferential function in Biber et al.'s (1999/2000) view.

The author collected twelve negotiations; vocatives are mainly realized by title plus surnames (Mr. Smith, Mr. Hughes, Mr. Robert Liu, Mr. Liu, Mr. Davis, Mr. Hansen, Mr. Spenser, Mr. Wang, and Mr. Hbdula). It can be concluded that business negotiations are institutional ones and formal, therefore the usage of vocatives should show the formality and politeness. What's more, the two parties both want to gain something from each other and have to maintain the proper distance, not too close and not too far in order to get the best result. So the title plus surname is the best choice. Of course, there are exceptions with the employment of

"Dan" and "Robert" which are both first names to express closeness. Now let's look at the extract:

R: That seems to be a little high, **Mr. Smith**. I don't know how we can make a profit with those numbers.

D: **Please, Robert, call me Dan.** (pause)

In this extract, Robert at the beginning used the title plus surname vocative (Mr. Smith) to show his politeness and the willingness to maintain a distance. But Dan wants to make their relations closer and he first used the first name vocative "Robert" to greet his partner and advise Robert to call him "Dan". Therefore, in the following negotiations between the two persons, they called each other by their respective first names. In fact, this can be analyzed by intertextuality.

The term "intertextuality" was coined by Kristeva in the late 1960s in her influential accounts for western audiences of the work of Bakhtin. Kristeva (1986:39) observes that intertextuality implies the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history. Kristeva points out that the insertion of history into a text lies in two senses. On the one hand, it involves the text absorbs and is built out of texts from the past. On the other hand, it means that the text responds to, reemphasizes and reworks past texts in order to help to make history and contribute to wider processes of change as well as anticipate and try to shape subsequent texts.

Casual conversations and institutional dialogues are distinct from each other due to their respective features. The former are less formal than the latter one. Business negotiations belong to institutional discourse and the vocatives should be realized by title plus surname or even more polite ones. However, in this example, the first name is used, which is the feature of casual conversation. So it is obvious that this business negotiation is intertwined with casual conversation and possesses the characteristics of casual conversation. During the process of intertextuality, the degree of politeness and power demonstration is lessened. Take this extract as an example, by using the first names, the two negotiators seem less polite to each other but in fact they become nearer and the cooperative atmosphere is established, which will be beneficial to their negotiation. If negotiators adopt this kind of vocatives for an enough long time, the intertextuality discourse will become the proper one just like the place of the normal negotiations now. As a matter of fact, intertextuality discourses play a very important role in changing the generic characteristics of discourses.

IV. ANALYSIS FROM THE CONVERSATIONAL STRUCTURE LEVEL

The critical analysis of business negotiations at the conversational structure level primarily deals with the analysis of turns that sentences take and the analysis of moves or speech functions that sentences act as.

A. Theory Basis

When a conversational structure of business negotiations is analyzed, it is essential to number turns used by participants, and to encode turns with speech functions, and then a comparative analysis is made concerning the items

such as the number of turns, moves and interrogatives, speech functions taken by participants, etc. As a result, the analysis of business negotiations at the conversational structure level will reflect the role relation between participants and disclose social status difference.

B. Analysis

Now a conversational structure analysis of the business negotiation is made below and speech functions, moves and turns in it are marked (see "Table I").

TABLE I. SPEECH FUNCTIONS, MOVES AND TURNS OF THE CONVERSATION

Speaker	Turn/ move	Conversational structure	Text
Yang:	1/a	O:A	Good afternoon, Mr. Hansen.
	1/b	O:A	It's so nice to see you again.
Hansen:	2	R:S:A	It's a pleasure to see you again, too.
Yang:	3	O:I:question:information	How are you getting along in the business?
Hansen:	4/a	R:S:answer	Not bad, I <i>should</i> say.
	4/b	C:elaboration:statement	Our customers are quite satisfied with your eider down coats.
	4/c	C:elaboration:statement	They find the color and style to their tastes.
Yang:	5/a	O:I:statement	Thank you for your favorable comments on our products
	5/b	C:extension:statement	To be frank, we have also received similar comments from other Canadian buyers
Hansen:	6/a	R:S:compliance	That's just what I want to discuss with you
	6/b	C:extension:statement	I know you are selling the same products to some other Canadian importers.
	6/c	C:extension:statement	This tends to make our sales difficult.
	6/d	C:extension:statement	So the purpose of my visit here is to discuss the possibility of signing a sole agency agreement with you on this item
Yang:	7/a	O:I: statement	We appreciate your good intention and your efforts in pushing the sales of our down coats.
	7/b	C:enhancement:statement	But I must say your proposal has come as a surprise to us.
Hansen:	8/a	O:I:information:question	Why?
	8/b	O:I:information: question	Do you doubt our ability as agent?
Yang:	9/a	R:S:answer	No, not in the least.
	9/b	C:extension:statement	We know that you have specialized in this line- of business for many years and you are quite experienced.
Hansen:	10/a	R:S:acknowledgement	Yes.
	10/b	C:extension:statement	And we have good connections with all the leading importers and wholesalers in our country.
Yang:	11	O:I:information:statement	But Mr. Hansen, as far as we know, the total amount of your order last year was only moderate.
Hansen:	12	R:S:compliance	We'll increase the annual turnover if you propose for the agency agreement.
Yang:	13	O:I:information:question	What annual turnover <i>would</i> you propose for the agency agreement?
Hansen:	14	R:S:answer:question	How about 10,000 pieces for a start?
Yang:	15/a	R:confronting:contradiction	Oh, Mr. Hansen, don't you think this figure is too small for an agent?
	15/b	C:extension:statement	To tell you frankly, the average annual quantity we sold to your country in the past few years is much larger than what you proposed.
Hansen:	16/a	O:I:statemnt	We'll do our utmost to promote your products and enlarge the business.
	16/b	C:enhancement:statement	But I want to play it safe at the beginning.
Yang:	17/a	O:I:statement	Mr. Hansen, we have done only a few deals with you.
	17/b	C:extension:statement	And the annual turnover you proposed is really too small.
	17/c	C:enhancement:statement	We don't think it's proper to consider the matter of sole agency at present.
Yang:	18/a	R:confronting:rejection	Oh, that's just too bad.
	18/b	C:enhancement:statement	We intended to make great efforts to sell your products.
	19/a	O:I:statement	Well, we <i>can</i> still expand our business without an agency agreement.
Yang:	19/b	C:enhancement:statement	When we have worked together successfully for a longer period of time, we <i>may</i> come round and discuss the subject of agency.
	20/a	R:S:acceptance	OK.
Hansen:	20/b	C:elaboration:statement	We <i>may</i> discuss the matter again later.

Then, it is necessary to figure out the total numbers of turns, interrogatives and at the same time summarize opening initiating moves, continuing moves and responding moves

by the two participants are done. The summary of speech functions in the negotiation is as follows (see "Table II"):

TABLE II. THE SUMMARY OF SPEECH FUNCTIONS IN THE NEGOTIATION

speech function	Mr. Yang	Mr. Hansen
No. of turns	10	10
No. of moves	18	20
No. of interrogatives	3	3
Opening initiating moves	9	3
Continuing moves	7	9
Responding moves	2	9

Next, with the help of the summary of speech functions in this dialogue, a critical analysis of this business negotiation can be made at the conversational structure level. As introduced in the dialogue, Mr. Hansen is a Canadian salesman, who intends to be a sole agent of Shanghai eider down coats factory. Mr. Yang, a salesman of Shanghai eider down coats factory. Mr. Yang and Mr. Hansen both have 3 interrogatives. In some institutional dialogues, questions can be used as a tool to impose power on others. But in this business negotiation, the number of questions is the same so it can be concluded that the power and status difference from the perspective of questions' usage can not be detected in this business negotiation. From the analysis it can be seen that Mr. Yang and Mr. Hansen takes nine and three opening initiating moves respectively, therefore Mr. Yang takes the priority to raise questions and topics and possess more power than Mr. Hansen who wants to be the sole agent for the company of Mr. Yang. As for responding moves, Mr. Hansen possesses much more responding moves than Mr. Yang, which demonstrate that Mr. Hansen wants to be the sole agent of Mr. Yang's company and he must go through the scrutiny of Mr. Yang. Besides, the moves taken by Mr. Yang and Mr. Hansen are almost the same, from which it can be concluded that they have the same opportunity to speak.

The critical analysis of business negotiations at the conversational structure indicates that there exists unequal relationship between Mr. Yang and Mr. Hansen. This inequality can only be seen in some aspects because the purpose of business negotiations is to gain mutual benefit and the two parties both have to concede somewhat.

As a matter of fact, when a critical analysis of business negotiations is carried out at the conversational structure level, the first step is to number turns in a dialogue taken by participants and encode turns with speech functions, which are undertaken according to the speech function network in a dialogue. Then the total numbers of turns, moves, and interrogatives by participants are to be figured out, and at the same time summarize participants' speech functions. These findings should better be presented in a table for the sake of our analysis. At last, with the help of the findings, the analysis of turns and speech functions can be made and at the same time a comparative analysis of participants in a dialogue as far as turns, speech functions and interrogatives concerned can be made. Generally speaking, if a participant dominates opening initiating moves or occupies most of turns, s/he will play a dominant role in a dialogue. If a participant produces only responding moves or takes least of turns, s/he will act as a role of deference. Therefore, the conversational structure analysis of business negotiations

will facilitate us to detect role relations and power relations between participants.

V. CONCLUSION

In this paper, a three-level analytical framework of spoken business negotiations was set up. The three levels are phonological level, lexical level and conversational structure level respectively. For the first level, rising and falling tones and the power they expressed are mainly discussed in business negotiations. In the second level, the analysis is conducted from three aspects, that is, evaluative lexes, modal expressions and vocatives and in each aspect there are examples and detailed analysis. For the last level, the conversational structure of a business negotiation is analyzed in details and the hidden power is found out. Through the detailed analysis, it is concluded that business negotiation is a kind of special institutional discourse which features that negotiators strived to maintain good relationship and harmonious atmosphere to achieve their business goals. Therefore they tend to use polite expressions and euphemisms and the power and status disparity is not very obvious.

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