

The Use of Politeness in Online Merchandising Businesses from the Perspective of Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle

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ABSTRACT

With the development of online merchandise, more and more trades and deals are completed through online means via electronic devices. At the end of last century, Geoffrey Leech illustrated his Politeness Principles briefly known as six main maxims as "Tact, Generosity, Praise, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy." A typical phenomenon for current online merchandising is that excessive and abnormal politeness is used during the process of purchasing such as the using of "Dear" and this proposal is going to have a brief study of this phenomenon and manage to offer an explanatory answer to this phenomenon.

Keywords: *Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principles, Online merchandising business, Excessive politeness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Object

As far as we are concerned, politeness principles are adequately used in daily communications. Many industries and businesses, somehow, have a direct and indirect reliance with these principles, some are even globally known due to a well master of these principles. This thesis is based on Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principles:

1. Tact Maxim: try to reduce the price paid by others; Try to maximize the benefits to others.
2. Generosity Maxim: try to minimize the benefits to oneself; Try to magnify the price you pay.
3. Praise Maxim: try to minimize criticism of others; Try to exaggerate your praise.
4. Modesty Maxim: try to minimize self-praise; Try to exaggerate your own criticism.
5. Agreement Maxim: try to narrow the disagreement with others; Try to exaggerate agreeing with others.

6. Sympathy Maxim: try your best to reduce your dislike of others; Try to expand your compassion for others [1].

Despite the theoretical basis mentioned above, this thesis is also a data-supported one based on a number of practical researches which are an inquiry on people's understanding about the PP using condition in online merchandising businesses, an online interview about the PP training and using feelings with the customer service workers in a couple of selected online shops.

1.2 Research Objective

Maybe you have heard a lot of such sayings as "Qin" (English version as Dear) during your experience of online shopping, you may wonder why this kind of saying is implemented in your conversation with the shopper and this thesis is going to accumulate attention on this topic. This thesis is based on Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principles, using them to discuss the probability, necessity and practical significance of the use of politeness principles in online merchandising businesses. It aims at revealing the reasonable, theoretical and psychological causes of online

merchandising businesses' politeness using phenomenon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far, there aren't many researches focusing on the targets as service industry, the existed researches are mostly concerned with the domestic or international adaptability of this theory and its practical usage in commercial socialization. The remained materials that are able to be used as references are limited, concentrated and indirect, so I will explain the reasonability of referring to this theory by briefly illustrating the developing process of it.

In 1978, B&L put forward their study as the relationship between face and politeness, illustrating that during communications people would manage to protect the "Face" for others in order to fluently and successfully process a whole conversation [2]. In terms of completing this circumstance which is the so called "protecting one's face", polite expressions have to be implemented and used. This marked the beginning of the study of politeness principle, based on this, Leech proposed his own politeness principles as the six maxims above [3]. Leech explored the pragmatic meaning of politeness at the lexical and grammatical levels. He split the study of politeness into relative and absolute politeness [4]. The first one, social pragmatic politeness, is concerned with the communicative situation. The second one, pragmatic politeness, is about the communicative situation [5]. The former emphasizes the listener's polite judgment of a speaker's speech act in a certain communication, while the latter focuses on the default pragmatic meaning of the speech act [6].

Apparently, Leech's theory has a close connection with people's speech act and is assistant while studying some practical polite phenomenon. So it's reasonable to base this theory to study the politeness using phenomenon in online merchandising businesses [7].

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

The reason of presenting these two researched are: Do people realize and emphasize the use of particular use of polite expressions in online merchandising businesses? Are the businesses trained or endowed with the ability to use these polite expressions?

3.2 Research Methods

- An inquiry which contains four questions (the former three ones are single choice questions and the last one is multiple choice question):

1. Do you discover the intentional use of polite expressions in online merchandising business?

Yes or No.

2. Do you think these polite expressions are trained or endowed with the founding of online merchandising business?

Trained or Endowed.

3. Do you think polite expressions are crucial to online merchandising business?

No, To some extent or Very important.

4. What do you think are the significances of these polite expressions to the consumers?

Improving trust, comfortable consuming experience, feel respected, no exact meaning and too excessive.

- An interview with a worker at the consumer service department in an online shop with three questions:

1. What do you feel about the polite expressions when you use them?

A: At first I thought this kind of act behind screen was meaningless and repeated, so I was a little reluctant to communicate with consumers like that way. But with the passage of time, I realize that owing to my persistence in being polite, more and more consumers rebuy and come. This makes me feel accomplished and I now think that these polite expressions used are vital to our business especially we are people we work behind the screens and customers can not see our expressions, we have to ensure trust to our customers in this way.

2. Are you trained to make these polite expressions or it's a sense of occupational duty?

A: I think this kind of act in our businesses are intestinal, I don't think there is a existing saying that we do this without guidance. Most of the time I am trained how to adapt to new technologies online and the necessity to be polite is only now and then mentioned during the training process, but I hear that in some online shops that belong to international or chained, famous corporations, being polite and how to be polite in different conversational situations are taught to workers in

consumer service, but some online shops like mine don't have adequate money to pay for the extra training fees so being polite can only be promoted in the form of a slogan.

3. What are their meanings to you and your business?

A: To me, I think that I have learnt the occupational patience and duty of our business and the basic skills and importance of coping with people politely. They also teach me to manage to calm myself down in face of obstacles. To my business, I think that these years of being polite and never give up earn me a great many of loyal customers and apparently economic benefits are indispensable.

3.3 Data Collection

- About the inquiry itself, here are the data collected by now:

Totally 216 recipients participated in the inquiry. About the first question, the answer "Yes" receives 200 and covers a ratio at 92.59%, which means that consumers are mostly aware of the intentional use of polite expressions in online merchandising businesses. About the second question, the answer "Trained" receives 180 which covers a ration at 74.07%, which means that most online shop customers regard their politeness as intentional and managed behavior. About the third question, the answer "Relatively important and very important" receive 206 which covers a ratio at 96.3%, which means that customers refer to their politeness as a crucial standard for an online shop though they already know that their politeness is intentional. about the last question, none of the recipients choose the latter two choices and the most choice picked are "A comfortable shopping experience and a feeling of being respected" which respectively cover a ration at 92.59% and 77.78%, which means that most customers feel positive about this intentional act of politeness and they think it is an important portion of the customer-shop owner relationship.

- About the brief interview with a random online shop consumer service worker:

The worker obviously think that this kind of intentional politeness do a great beneficial influence to both himself and the whole business. From this interview, it can be concluded that a training intention and system exist and being polite to consumers is vital among online shop workers.

4. CASE ANALYSIS

- Case one

顾客：(发送了一张收到产品试穿后的图片)是不是因为我的身材问题，所以这个衣服不合身？

店家：亲，当然没有啦！应该是我们给您的尺寸参考有问题，我们将为您提供满 100 减 30 元的优惠券以作补偿并免费为您替换合适尺寸的产品，您看可以吗？

顾客：好的好的，谢谢！

店家：不客气呢，亲！

Customer :(sending a picture of the product received after trying on) Is it because of my figure, so this dress doesn't fit me?

Shopkeeper: Dear, of course not! It should be that the size reference we gave you is wrong. We will provide you with a coupon of 30 yuan per 100 yuan as compensation and replace the product with the appropriate size for free. Is that ok with you?

Customer: Ok, ok, thank you!

Shopkeeper: You're welcome, dear!

This case is a clear example for Generosity Maxim in which the shopper give many benefits to the customer in order to minimize the uncomfortable feeling of the customer so that the deal will be still on.

- Case two

顾客：这个产品发货地太远了，运费有点高，我想了一下还是退款买另一家的类似产品吧！

店家：亲，这个产品真的很合适您哦，我们可以为您免运费并免费提供两年保修哦，一年的保修费用原本为 289 元。

顾客：那这样的话还是你们家实惠，那我不退款了！

Customer: The shipping place of this product is too far, the freight is a little high, I think about it and refund to buy another similar product!

Shopkeeper: Dear, this product is really suitable for you. We can provide you with free shipping and two-year warranty. The one-year warranty cost was originally 289 yuan.

Customer: There are more discounts here and I will not refund!

Tact Maxim is clearly used in this conversation in which the online shop worker tries to reduce the price paid by the customer and tries to maximize

the benefits to the customer in order to keep the deal.

- Case three

顾客：（发送试衣照片）这个衣服我穿着好丑啊，我可能永远也驾驭不了这种色号的衣服了……

店家：亲，没有的哈！在我这看已经很好看了！可能是产品不适合您的风格呢。或许您可以搭配一个紫色的围巾和深黑色的厚长裙，或许会有不一样的感觉呢！

顾客：哇塞！真的诶！谢谢！以后还常来你们店购物！

Customer: (sending trying photo) this dress looks ugly on me, I may never be able to take control of this color

Shopkeeper: Dear, of course not! It already looks good on you in my view! Maybe the product doesn't suit your style. Maybe you can match it with a purple scarf and a thick black dress for a different feel.

Customer: Wow! Really!! Thank you very much! I'll shop in your store more often!

In this conversation, the Praise Maxim is used to maximize the praise to the customer so that a positive atmosphere will be contained and the deal will be successful.

- Case four

顾客：虽然你们回复的较迟导致产品交接时间延后，但是你们的产品质量很有保障，我还是会选择以后再来的。

店家：亲，实在对不起！虽然我们一直以提供高质量产品为宗旨且一直贯彻，但是我们的物流服务和在线服务仍有十分大的改正空间，我们下次一定会避免这些问题，并为您的下次购物提供足够的优惠！

Customer: Although your late reply has delayed the delivery time of the products, but the quality of your products is very guaranteed, I will choose to come back later.

Shopkeeper: Dear, I'm really sorry! Although we have always been committed to providing high quality products, our logistics services and online services still have a lot of room for correction, we will avoid these problems next time and provide you with enough discount for your next purchase!

In this case, the Modesty Maxim is used under the circumstance that though the customer is satisfied with the quality of the products under the fact that the receiving date of the projects is delayed due to the late reply from the shop, the shop worker

still seriously commits his apology and make a pledge to self-correction.

5. CONCLUSION

The intentional politeness used in online merchandising businesses is both beneficial to the customers and the businesses. The Leech's Politeness Principles do have a close connection to this conversational act due to the reasonable exemplification of certain cases illustrated by the maxims. By discovering the fact that PP is actually adaptable to the online merchandising business we can have a better knowledge about the business and the psychological movements in both the customers' and businesses' minds [8].

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Huanzhang Lin.

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