

Application of the Politeness Principle in Business Negotiation

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Abstract. With the accelerated development of economic globalization, economic trade has become increasingly popular and business negotiation is an important part of economic activities. The ultimate goal of business negotiation is to reach a mutually beneficial agreement on both sides. So some certain strategies are needed for successful negotiations. The politeness principle is one of the most essential skills which plays a vital role in business negotiation. In business negotiation, following the politeness principle can help a company set up positive business image, which can bring eventually unexpected business opportunities. Based on previous research results, this paper deals with the definition and origin of the politeness principle, elaborates the significance of the politeness principle for business negotiation and analyses the application of the politeness principle in business negotiation. It suggests that there are many manners which should be paid attention to in business negotiation. By comparing the application of the politeness principle under different cultural background, it reflects that the politeness principle is not always the same in business negotiation from different countries. The objective of this paper is to make readers know the importance of the politeness principle and suggests the politeness principle be appropriately applied in business negotiation so as to gain great benefits.

1. Introduction

With the rapid economic growth in China, trade between China and the world is becoming more and more frequent. Business negotiation has become an important form of communication with other countries. As a basic trade principle, politeness principle plays a significant role in business negotiation. Politeness principle can enhance friendship, make more friends, create an equal and friendly atmosphere and increase the possibility of cooperation, so it contributes to stand out from the competition and more helpful to establish and strengthen trade relations. Following certain politeness principle can help a company to set up good business image and then bring huge business opportunities. Otherwise, it will give a negative impact on a company, cause misunderstanding between the both sides and lead to the failure of the business. Therefore there is no denying that it is necessary to apply the politeness principle in business negotiation. In reaction to the phenomenon, the domestic and foreign monographs, journals, magazines keep emerging to study the politeness principle. Erving Goffman put forward the concept of “face”. Lakoff pointed out that “Politeness dominated by three rules: not to impose, give people a choice, being friendly.” [1] Brown and Levinson proposed “Face Theory” in 1978 and they claimed that “The face is composed of positive face and negative face.” [1] Geoffrey Leech asserted “the six principles of politeness” in 1983.

2. The Politeness Principle

2.1 Leech’S Politeness Principle

Leech put forward six maxims of the politeness principle, which runs as follows (1) Tact Maxim: minimize the cost to other, maximize the benefits to other; (2) Generosity Maxim: minimize the benefits to self, maximize the benefits to other; (3) Approbation Maxim: minimize dispraise of other, maximize praise of other; (4) Modesty Maxim: minimize praise to self, maximize dispraise to self; (5) Agreement Maxim: minimize disagreement between self and others maximize agreement instead; (6) Sympathy Maxim: minimize the antipathy towards other, maximize sympathy instead.

In a word, Leech's politeness principle requires speakers to minimize the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize the expression of polite beliefs. These maxims can help to explain why Leech's politeness principle is more acceptable than others in the study of politeness.

2.2 Gu'S Politeness Principle

China is known as "the nation of rites" and being friendly to others is one of the basic Chinese traditional virtues. Gu Yueguo is a famous linguist in China, who thinks there are four characteristics of Chinese language and culture: respect, modesty, enthusiasm and elegance. Based on these four characteristics and the historical origin of politeness, Gu Yueguo puts forward his own five maxims about the politeness principle, including the self-denigration maxim; the address maxim; refinement maxim; the balance maxim; the generosity and tact maxim. He thinks these maxims are more suitable to the Chinese society than Leech's six maxims of the politeness principle. Gu Yueguo has contributed significantly to the study of politeness in modern China.

3. The Importance of Politeness Principle for Business Negotiation

3.1 Create Favorable Atmosphere

The politeness principle can create favorable atmosphere of negotiation. Negotiation atmosphere directly affects psychology and emotion of negotiators. Creating a respectful and harmonious atmosphere can alleviate nervous psychology of negotiators and make the negotiation successful. In a relaxed and harmonious atmosphere the distance between the two sides will be naturally shortened and it is easy to find a solution that is acceptable to both sides.

3.2 Set Up Good Enterprise Image

Today, it is the common opinion that any corporation must shape good corporate image if it wants to succeed in business activity. Corporate image is the intangible asset of an enterprise which relates with the rise and fall of a company. The politeness principle can help a company establish a good corporate image. Both sides may not know much about each other in business negotiation, so personal image has been regarded as the representative of the enterprise image. Whether negotiators know or not how to use the politeness principle in modern business activities not only reflects the quality of staff but also mirrors the enterprise image and the state of management. In business negotiation, one party often judges a person by observing his appearance, demeanor, conversation and body language, and then the party analyzes the credibility of the enterprise that he stands for. Obviously, polite demeanor and decent courtesy will leave a deep impression to the other side, then produce a good sense to the enterprise, reduce the drag of negotiation and promote the success of transaction. The international retail giant Wal-Mart is a typical example of shaping a good image in society by keeping good staff etiquette. This is why Wal-Mart stands out in many supermarkets.

4. The Application of Politeness Principle in Business Negotiation

Business negotiation is a complex business activity. It involves many skills, such as decent business image, sophisticated language, rational feeling and reasonable concession. The politeness principle can guide us to use these skills correctly.

4.1 Negotiator'S Image

Leech's Tact Maxim and Gu's the generosity and tact maxim also call for negotiators pay attention to personal image. Negotiator's image is conducive to make a good impression on one another in the beginning of business negotiation and will have a positive impact on the later business activities in the long run. Thereby negotiators should attach much importance to personal image. Negotiator's image refers to the decent posture and clothing in business activities, which manifest respect to others. Posture and clothing is the most basic part of business image. Good posture and clothing can foil a good temperament and demeanor. The basic requirement of standing posture is to keep the body upright and keep body gravity fall on two feet. Stagger, shrug and leaning on a wall is not suitable when standing. Don't put hands in pocket or cross in the chest on formal occasions. The requirement of sitting posture is to keep the upper part of the body upright. A man should keep knees together or slightly keep knees and feet apart on the ground naturally at the same time. A woman should keep

knees together, legs crossed at the ankles and hands in the lap. Walking posture of negotiators should be steady and at ease. Keeping eyes looking straight ahead, arms comfortably swinging by sides and legs in rhythm without over-striding. Dress is the decorative symbol, which reflects one's status, taste, temperament. So appropriate attire can leave a good impression to others. The general requirement of dress is simple, generous, clean and tidy. TPO (Time, Place, Occasion) principle is the principle of wear that advocated by European and American countries. That is to say, negotiators should take time, place and occasion into account when dressing and make their clothing harmonious with the time, place and occasion.

4.2 Negotiator'S Language

Talking is essential in the process of business negotiation and it is also an inevitable stage to sign a contract. The effectiveness of negotiating skills can be improved by the art of language. Proper and felicitous language can contribute to a win-win situation for sellers and buyers, rather than lead to the deadlock of an internecine plight. Appropriate language can support the hearers' positive or negative face as well as the speaker himself, while inappropriate language can do nothing but hurt self-esteem or impose restriction upon the hearers. In the context of business negotiation, an experienced negotiator gives full play to the functions of language, which serve his goal much better. As it is known to us communication is the core of negotiation process. The better you are able to express your points of view, the more chances you have to reach goals. The way you present the things you want to say can make all the difference, so negotiators have to pay attention to the input and feedback of information and timely adjust their language. It is very important for negotiators to duly apply some effective language strategies and tactics to achieve their goals, such as correct appellation, careful listening, vague language and appropriate body language.

4.2.1 Decent Address

A successful business negotiation starts with polite and friendly appellation. Gu Yueguo puts forward his own five politeness principles, which includes the address maxim requiring negotiators to use appropriate address in business negotiation. The choice of appellation should be consistent with the routine and sound cordial and natural. In accordance with the practice, three formal appellations are seen most often in business meeting:

- (1) Administrative position: called by one's title, such as "manager" "director" and so on. Besides, you can add a name or a surname behind one's position, such as "Manager Liu", "Director Zhang".
- (2) Technical title: you can only call titles. Such as "professor" "lawyer" and so on. And you can add a name or a surname behind one's technical title, such as "professor Wu", "lawyer Wang".
- (3) General term: you can call someone according to their gender, such as "Mr. Li", "Miss Ellis".

4.2.2 Attentive Listener

Listening shows respect to others and reveals an individual's modesty at the same time, the self-denigration maxim is Gu's first politeness maxim about politeness principle. Listening is an art and it is vital to really understand what the other person is saying and their points of view. To listen carefully shows respect and good intentions and will make the other person feel valued. So negotiators must learn to be a good listener in business negotiation and only in this way can they understand each other's real demand and find out weakness and cards of opposite side, because one who knows his own strength and that of the rival is invincible in battle.

4.2.3 Vague Language

The objective of business negotiation is to reach an agreement, so language skills must be flexibly used at negotiation table. Being good at vague language using is one of the most important parts of language skills. Vague language is based on cooperation principle in business negotiation. At the same time, it also embodies Gu's refinement maxim, which forms a friendly negotiation atmosphere to reach a win-win situation. Even though both parties cannot make a deal, at least they can keep a good business relationship for future cooperation. Gogue, a professor at the University of California has said "fuzzy expression is not always a bad thing; on the contrary, sometimes it can convey enough information with the least amount of words." Vagueness can improve the efficiency of business negotiation. Proper fuzzy words can make language sounds more acceptable as it makes utterance more objective, expands the scope of the information contained in language expression and provides

a broader thinking and imagination space. Adopting fuzziness in business negotiation may achieve the effect of increasing credibility and appropriateness. Speech vagueness can often be used as a kind of polite strategy, which usually plays a positive part in business negotiation. Vague speech can ameliorate the negotiation atmosphere and help the negotiation go on smoothly. By this way, the negotiators seek and enlarge the common points to achieve the ultimate agreement.

4.2.4 Nonverbal Language

Business negotiation is actually the process of communication, mainly oral communication. But it is not only the words and sentences that perform the function of building a bridge from person to person. As a matter of fact, body language can convey more information in several cases, because body language exhibits far more information about how people feel than verbal language does. All the physical gestures we make are subconsciously interpreted by others. A survey reveals that 30% of what is communicated in business negotiation is communicated non-verbally through tone of voice, facial expression, body gestures, grooming and clothing. When it comes to expressing emotions through body language, we might naturally think of the meaning of many idiomatic actions. For example, clapping represents excitement, rubbing hands anxiety, stamping anger, chest-bumping agony and sprawling frustration. Body language plays an important part in business negotiation which cannot be substituted by vocal language. The expression of vocal language should integrate with body language. The common body language in business negotiation includes behavior, posture and facial expression of the negotiators. Just as an old saying goes “Eyes are the window of the mind”. For the negotiators, eyes are the most obvious and natural body part to display people’s psychological activity. Negotiators should be sincere, frank and kind and look at other’s eyes when making eye contact, because such gaze seems to be serious, careful, and thus the other party will feel your sincerity. Smile is an important form of expression. Negotiators need to keep smile in the course of business negotiation because smile is the most attractive and valuable facial expressions in negotiations. If negotiators really realize the value of smile and use smile appropriately in the negotiation process they can mesmerize and conquer the other party easily.

4.3 Negotiator’S Emotion

Business negotiation is a kind of argument, in which both sides hope that the other side would accept the point they make. But dispute is inevitable in business negotiation. Therefore, it is necessary for negotiators to apply Leech’s agreement maxim and the balance maxim of Gu Yueguo. Whenever negotiators should keep reasonable control of emotions rather than being controlled by negotiation rivals. Negotiators should show respect for the other person’s opinions and never say “you are wrong”. You can tell people they are wrong by a look, an intonation or a gesture just as eloquently as you can in words. Do not get overheated emotionally for rude attitude and insulting deeds of opponent, just stay calm, control emotions and give counter-attack at the right moment. This will warm them up and melt any tension between two sides. Even if you are about to become a winner do not show complacency as no one likes to feel they have lost.

4.4 Negotiator’s Concession

As An Old Saying Goes, “Take A Step Back, You Will Have A Brighter Future”. Therefore We Should Make concessions in business negotiation to achieve one’s own goals and interests. Both sides should respect interests of others firstly. Minding others interests is a good way to express sincerity and others can be moved comparatively easily. Making concessions can satisfy the opposite side and seek initiative for oneself at the same time. Especially when business negotiations sink into deadlock, concession is a better method to solve problems. Concession strategy means generous to others and it also makes others feel sympathy for your sincere concession, which reflects Leech’s generosity maxim and sympathy maxim. Of course, concession is a risky negotiation strategy, but once you succeed, the return is beyond your imagination.

Due to the strategy of concession, China had made great success in the negotiation of joining the World Trade Organization. The negotiation about joining the WTO encountered some difficulties, Premier Zhu Rongji had summarized most difficult seven questions and decided to negotiate with America. In the beginning of negotiation, Premier Zhu Rongji made a concession about the first question, and then he made another concession concerning the second question. The Chinese

representatives were very nervous at that time. If they failed, they would lose the whole game. At this critical moment, Premier Zhu said that “we had made concessions about two questions of the related seven questions, which was the greatest concession that we could make. Premiers’ concession made the opposite side generate a sense of trust and cooperation. Finally, American representatives agreed China to join the World Trade Organization.

5. Conclusion

The politeness principle is a significant element in business negotiation, which is a social compass for judging negotiator’s words and deeds in a certain culture. Furthermore it is not only necessary for business negotiation, but also benefits the entire social harmony. Based on the previous research results, this thesis first explains the definition, importance of the politeness principle, and then it elaborates the application of the politeness principle, such as negotiator’s image, negotiator’s language, and negotiator’s emotion. Especially presents the application of politeness principle in different countries. In this thesis, readers will have a better and overall understanding of the politeness principle; negotiators should take full advantage of the politeness principle in business negotiation and spare no effort to promote the success of business negotiation.

It is concluded according to the study that the politeness principle plays an important role in business negotiation and decent manners and language skills will promote the success of negotiation. Therefore the politeness principle can be efficiently applied to business negotiation to ensure the success of negotiation.

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