

Study on Sales Language Based on the Perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

A Case Study of the Furniture Customization Industry

Lusiyao Zhang¹

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University of Science & Technology, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China

¹Corresponding author.

ABSTRACT

The success of a transaction is greatly influenced by the usage of sales language in commercial communication. But unlike other businesses, the necessity to satisfy each customer's unique specifications is more critical in the bespoke furniture sector, making customer communication even more crucial. Using a body of work in the furniture customization sector as an example, this paper explores the implications of the cooperative principle and politeness principle in the context of conversational commercial interaction. The application of the cooperative principle and politeness principle in sales discourse is analyzed by dissecting the deeper meaning of the conversation through the adherence or deliberate violation of the principles in the corpus, thus exploring how it achieves its transactional purpose.

Keywords: *The Cooperative Principle, The politeness principle, Sales language, Furniture customization industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Object

The concept of the cooperative principle was introduced by linguist Paul Grice in his pragmatic theory. Grice researched the ways in which people derive meaning from language. In his essay *Logic and Conversation* (1975)[1] and book *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989), [2]Grice outlined four key categories, or maxims, of conversation — quantity, quality, relation, and manner — under which there are more specific maxims and sub-maxims[3].

- Maxim of quantity (content length and depth)

In simple terms, the maxim of quantity is to be informative.

- Maxim of quality (truth)

In simple terms, the maxim of quality is to be truthful.

- Maxim of relation (relevance)

Be relevant — i.e., one should ensure that all the information they provide is relevant to the current exchange; therefore omitting any irrelevant information.

- Maxim of manner (clarity)

In simple terms, the maxim of manner is to be clear. Whereas the previous maxims are primarily concerned with what is said, the maxims of manner are concerned with how what is said is said.[4]

Politeness principle was originally proposed by Leech, a leading British scholar, in his book *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983)[5], which argued that the principle of politeness and Grice's cooperation principles are two principles of communication.

- Tact Maxim: try to reduce the price paid by others; try to maximize the benefits to others.
- Generosity Maxim: try to minimize the benefits to oneself; try to magnify the price you pay.
- Praise Maxim: try to minimize criticism of others; try to exaggerate your praise.

- Modesty Maxim: try to minimize self-praise; try to exaggerate your own criticism.
- Agreement Maxim: try to narrow the disagreement with others; try to exaggerate agreeing with others.
- Sympathy Maxim: try your best to reduce your dislike of others; try to expand your compassion for others.[5]

This essay also focuses on sales terminology in addition to these two hypotheses. Sales terminology is an act of speech of a sales nature[6], a conversational behavior that takes place between the operator and the consumer. Its specific object and context determine its purposefulness, authenticity, topicality, artistry, immediacy and adaptability.[7] The operator's intent is to sell the product and complete the transaction with the customer, therefore before the conversation even starts, the operator has already developed the proper ideas in his head to guide the conversation and subsequently shape the customer's thinking as soon as he begins to speak. This reflects the operator's purposefulness. Authenticity is demonstrated by the need that the language used to promote the product be accurate and not deceptive. It must be both clear and unambiguous at the same time so that the client can grasp the product profile. In order for customers to feel welcoming and approachable, the sales process must also demonstrate genuineness. Topicality is reflected in the strongly contemporary nature of sales practices. As society develops, market trends change rapidly and information is updated quickly, operators need to keep abreast of market trends and current information, and keep up with the times in terms of language, so as to achieve the goal of getting closer to customers. The deliberate deliberation needed to display the art of the spoken word in order to avoid alienating the consumer and losing the business can embody artistry. Sales language also has Immediacy and, unlike written language, does not allow for reflection or change. It occurs in the context of dialogue between the operator and the customer and is a prompt expression of honest emotions that leaves no space for error. Adaptability is reflected in the fact that consumers are in different groups, have different personalities and preferences, and have different consumer needs. It is by adapting to the needs of different consumers that operators are able to make the deal work.

1.2 Research Objective

With the rapid development of society, people's demand for furniture products is becoming more and more diversified. With its advantages of individuation, low risk and low inventory, custom-made furniture is well suited to meet this spiritual consumer demand. Custom-made furniture products, able to focus on customer involvement, are more inclined to grasp the customer's requirements, inner needs, etc.[8] This is why you will find that the sales language used by the furniture customization industry when communicating with customers is different from that used by other furniture and building materials industries and even other sales industries. How does the bespoke furniture industry meet the individual needs of its customers and at the same time ensure a successful transaction? In this thesis, it will be analyzed from the perspective of the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, there are not too many sales-related studies in the field of pragmatics, and the existing research focuses on advertising language. Few studies have been carried out on sales language in the context of pragmatics, using the principles of cooperation or politeness as the theoretical basis. However, there is a gap in the research on the use of sales language as a corpus in the customized furniture industry. In this paper, we present a summary of the current state of research on the topic, the existing research ideas and results, and a short introduction to the main contents and innovations of this topic.

2.1 Research on Sales Phrases From a Pragmatic Perspective

Research on sales phrases from a pragmatic perspective is mostly concerned with the analysis of the characteristics of sales phrases and the syntax used. For example, taking the FMCG product Master Kong instant noodles as an example, the study concluded that by the corpus collected, the interrogative sentence, the comparative sentence and the omitted in the form are more, the imperative sentence, the passive sentence and the chief statement are less.[9]

Or adopt other pragmatics theories for research, such as: research on the language of selling alcohol products based on the perspective of association theory[10]; research on the language of e-

commerce marketing based on the perspective of presupposition, taking Taobao.com as an example [11].

2.2 Research on Sales From the Perspective of the Cooperation Principle or Politeness Principle

The main language pool comes from fast-selling goods such as clothes and food, e.g., the language use of salespersons involved in foreign sales under the principle of politeness, using the Ningbo Small Commodity Market as an example.[12] Either the language of promotion is studied directly, in terms of the four basic forms of promotion: advertising, personal-selling, salespromotion, and publicity.[13] Alternatively, the education industry was used as a corpus, and the discourse of consumers in the corpus was more oriented towards consultation.[14]

This paper differs from the above studies in that it focuses more on sales. Promotion differs from sales in that it is the use of effective methods and means to make consumers aware of the company's products, to stimulate their desire to buy, and to motivate them to make a final purchase. Selling, on the other hand, is the process of presenting the benefits offered by a commodity to meet the specific needs of the customer. In this paper, the furniture customization industry is used as an example, all the more so because the furniture customization industry consists of satisfying customers' needs for tangible goods such as furniture, but also for an intangible service that puts into practice the design ideas of customers' houses. This is what makes the choice of the furniture customization industry as a corpus unique. It differs from the rest of the sales industry and the service industry in that it needs to satisfy two different needs and focuses more on the communication between the seller and the consumer.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Methods

An interview with the owner and designer of a furniture custom-made store:

1. Do you deliberately design what you say when you talk to customers?

2. Are you trained to use sales language when talking to customers, or is it something that comes from experience, or does it just come naturally to you?

3. Do you think that using sales language when negotiating a deal contributes to the success of the transaction?

3.2 Research Results

1. Do you deliberately design what you say when you talk to customers?

A: Of course, the whole process of negotiating a single order is a game of chance. Before talking to the client, I have a meeting with the whole team to simulate the problems that may arise when talking to the client. The overall sales process is divided into three parts: design sketches, CAD drawings, and quotations. Both the design sketches and CAD drawings will be explained in advance. For the quotation part, the pricing process will be predetermined in advance.

Are you trained to use sales language when talking to customers, or is it something that comes from experience, or does it just come naturally to you?

A: There are some sales talk that have been trained. I have read books on sales before and there are some useful points. For example, the "three-sentence principle" is that the first three sentences of communication with a customer can initially build goodwill, so the first few sentences with a customer are very important and need to be carefully crafted. Also when I train my staff I pass on some common phrases used in sales.

But most sales phrases come from experience. Practice makes perfect, and learning theory without practice is no way to close a successful deal. Experience is divided into two main areas, the first is experience in decoration, and when you talk to customers about this experience, you will naturally gain their trust. For example, when I was renovating a house for an old professor, he praised me as an expert in this field. This proves that when experience is accumulated to a certain extent, customers will feel that you are professional and will naturally develop trust in you. The second is the experience of facing different types of clients. For example, when facing housewives, they will not be able to listen to some professional content, but when talking about children, they will immediately feel that they have something in common. Only with a certain amount of experience can I determine the identity and preferences of the client.

3. Do you think that using sales language when negotiating a deal contributes to the success of the transaction?

A: Of course, it has a facilitating effect. As I said before, the whole process of negotiating a deal is a game. Only advanced predetermined plus on-site experience supported by improvisation can lead to the conclusion of the deal. And all this relies on the words we say when selling, so it is an art to speak, and it is an art to say what you say when selling.

4. CASE ANALYSIS

4.1 Case Analysis Based on the Cooperative Principle

- Case one

顾客：柜子里加这个层板这几个就够给孩子放玩具了吧？

商家：您目前这个柜子的层板没什么问题。但是考虑到可能之后给孩子买的玩具高低不同，现在也没办法提前计算玩具的高低。我给您再加上一个活动层板。多加一个层板也不多收费用，就当赠送给您。

Customer: The cabinet with this laminate is enough to put toys for children, right?

Seller: There is nothing wrong with the shelves in this cabinet at the moment. However, there is no way to calculate the height of the toys in advance, considering that the toys you buy for your child may be of different heights. I'll add another movable shelf for you. The extra shelf will not cost you anything, it will be a gift.

This case demonstrates a violation of the maxim of quantity. The maxim of quantity requires that no more than the required information is answered, no more and no less than just right. However, it is clear from the above example that the merchant could have simply answered enough or not enough. But by deliberately violating the quantity principle, the merchant is showing that it is not only satisfying the customer's needs, but that it is also thinking about the customer and considering issues that the customer has not considered, which is more likely to win the customer's trust. This, coupled with the fact that the merchant offers to give the customer a free gift at no cost, satisfies the customer's desire to take advantage of the situation. Such a dialogue allows customers to feel both the price of the concessions, but also to feel the service on the thoughtful. This increases the customer's

trust in the merchant and the recognition of the goods and services.

- Case two

顾客：我比较担心甲醛释放量的问题。

商家：这个您放心，我们的板材甲醛释放量能达到欧洲E0级标准，甲醛释放量为0.1，相当于人喝的矿泉水，有颜色的衣服里面含的甲醛，平时是闻不到甲醛味道的。

...

Customer: I am more worried about the formaldehyde emission problem.

Seller: This you can rest assured that our sheet formaldehyde emissions can reach the European E0 level standard, formaldehyde emissions of 0.1, equivalent to people drink mineral water, colored clothes contain formaldehyde, usually can not smell the smell of formaldehyde.

This case demonstrates adherence to the maxim of quality. The maxim of quality requires that truth be told, not empty words and that statements must be based on facts. Instead of saying that our products are fine, the merchant presents the customer with specific data standards and analogies to items that the customer is familiar with to give them greater peace of mind.

- Case three

客户：（展示社交媒体上看到的效果图）这个卧室的装修好看吗？符合我们家的装修风格吗？你们可不可以做？

商家：您看的这套效果图很好看的，也很符合你们家整体的装修风格。我记得我们之前的客户就做过类似的。（展示之前客户家的装修后效果图）

Customer: (showing a design sketch he saw on social media) Does this bedroom look good? Does it fit the style of our home? Can you do it?

Seller: The design sketch you have found is very nice and fits in with the overall style of your home. I remember our previous client had installed a similar one. (showing the results of a previous client's installation)

This case demonstrates a breach of the maxim of relation. The maxim of relation requires that speech be contextually relevant and not answer a question that is not the question asked. The merchant's deliberate violation of the relational principle appears to leave the question of whether it can be done unanswered and introduces a previous client as an irrelevant factor in the current context. In fact, it is more convincing to show a current client the results of a previous client's work than to

simply answer that the client can do it. By visually viewing previous success stories, the customer is more confident in the success of their own home renovation to seal the deal with the business.

- Case four

客户：我的卧室里想要放一个柜子、一张一米八的床、两个床头柜。

商家：不行，你这个卧室的尺寸限定了你只能放一个床头柜不能是两个。如果放两个床头柜的话，柜子的柜门就打不开了。

Customer: I want to put a chest, a 1.8m bed and two bedside tables in my bedroom.

Seller: No, the size of your bedroom limits you to one nightstand, not two. If you put in two nightstands, the doors of the cabinet won't open.

This case demonstrates adherence to the maxim of manner. The maxim of manner requires simplicity and clarity without ambiguity. The merchant's direct dismissal of the customer's idea without ambiguity demonstrates a responsible attitude towards the customer. It also shows that the bespoke furniture industry is not just about meeting customers' needs, but also about thinking about aspects that customers would not expect and giving them professional advice.

4.2 Case Analysis Based on the Politeness Principle

- Case one

商家：咱家这个装修风格您有什么样的想法呢？您这个房子的布局跟我家的差不多，我给您看看我家怎么装的。

Seller: What kind of ideas do you have for this style of decoration in our house? The layout of your house is similar to mine, and I'll show you how my house is decorated.

This case exemplifies both the agreement maxim and the sympathy maxim. The agreement maxim emphasizes that "people are divided by groups", and that people with the same attributes can only resonate together, while the sympathy maxim achieves the ability to empathize emotionally with each other and helps to gain the trust of others. By using "we" instead of "you", merchants invariably close the distance between them and their customers, allowing them to feel a sense of closeness during the communication process. At the same time, the merchant uses his own home as an example, directly classifying the

customer into a group with himself, making it easier for the customer to empathize.

- Case two

商家：帮您做了这是第三版效果图，相比较之前的效果图，我们改变了这些地方。

客户：不用这么麻烦。

商家：为了给您直观的看到装修效果，我们不计较麻烦，达到您满意的效果是最重要的。

Seller: We've made you the third version of the sketch, and we've changed these areas compared to the previous sketch.

Customer: No need to go to all this trouble.

Seller: To give you a visual effect of the decoration, we don't care about the trouble, it's important to achieve a result you are satisfied with.

This example exemplifies the tact maxim and generosity maxim. The tact maxim is the principle of "altruism", maximizing the benefit to the other party, while the generosity maxim is giving of oneself to help others. The two principles complement each other in the sales process. As a service provider, the merchant should uphold the principle of customer first and take the customer's ultimate satisfaction as the aim, so as to achieve the ultimate transaction purpose. At the same time in the process of conversation, you can express the payment for the customer, and you can make the customer feel valued psychology.

- Case three

客户：（提出新的要求）

商家：您这个想法很好啊，连我们这种专业设计师都没考虑到。

Customer: (makes a new request)

Seller: That's a great idea you've got, even a professional designer like us hasn't thought of it.

This case exemplifies the praise maxim and modesty maxim. Praise and modesty refer to the inseparability of praise for others and less praise for oneself in dialogue. For most customers, furniture customization is an area that is completely new to them, and in the unknown, customers are often wary of being ripped off by unscrupulous merchants. The merchant's initiative to praise the customer's actions can meet the customer's small vanity, to dispel the customer's wariness, so that customers grasp the initiative in the transaction process with the merchant.

5. CONCLUSION

The survey and case studies in this paper suggest that the adherence to or deliberate violation of the principles of cooperation and courtesy in sales language can help to close deals. At the same time, it can be found that the principle of cooperation is both followed and deliberately violated in sales language, while the principle of courtesy is mostly followed.

For the furniture customization industry, unlike other sales industries, it is possible to carefully design scenarios and questions to communicate with customers in advance to better facilitate a smooth transaction. At the same time, because it is an industry that combines products and services, communication with the customer is even more important.

However, the establishment of a successful business relationship depends not only on the professionalism of the sales staff, but also on the combination of the customer's consumer psychology and the rational use of the principles of cooperation and politeness from the point of view of pragmatics and consumer psychology, so that the customer develops a sense of trust in the business and gets an emotionally pleasant experience, thus becoming friends with the business and forming a good buyer-seller relationship. This is what we are talking about here.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Lusi Yao Zhang.

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