

## **On Interpersonal Meaning in Business English Negotiations**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Being the main channel to establish and develop trade relations, international business negotiations play a significant role in company businesses and foreign trade environment. On the basis of the interpersonal grammatical metaphor theory, the paper gives an analysis of interpersonal meaning in business English negotiations through examples. It illustrates the metaphorical expressions of mood and modality in business English negotiations and explores the textual function of interpersonal grammatical metaphor in business English negotiation with the purpose to observe and study how interpersonal grammatical metaphor help establish and coordinate interpersonal relationship with the allocation of grammatical resources in order to help negotiators achieve communicative purposes.*

**KEY WORDS:** *business English negotiation; interpersonal meaning; function*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

With the increasing frequency of economic trade between regions, business negotiation has become an indispensable practice in the economic and trade field. Commodity trade and service provision are conducted through business relationships established through face-to-face exchanges between negotiators. The establishment of good interpersonal relationships contributes to the success of the negotiations. When negotiating parties want to achieve a certain purpose, they often use metaphors to communicate and communicate in case of emergency or difficulties. Metaphors can help negotiating parties understand the current situation and how they should respond to the situation. The metaphors that appear in the negotiations will show the conscious and unconscious opinions and attitudes to each other. Therefore, an interpersonal metaphor plays a decisive role in business English negotiation. Halliday (1985) [1] uses the concept of grammatical metaphor to explain the complex relationship between language form and function, pointing out that language expression can be divided into congruent and non-congruent. In real life, non-congruent expressions that violate the state of the objective world are often used, that is, metaphorical expressions. At present, domestic and foreign scholars have done a lot of research on the pragmatic strategies in business English negotiation, and have achieved fruitful results. However, the study of interpersonal grammatical metaphor in business English negotiation is rare. In view of this, this paper makes a tentative study on the interpersonal meaning of business English negotiation from the perspective of interpersonal metaphor, and analyzes the expression and function of interpersonal meaning in business English negotiation, in order to understand negotiations in different cultural backgrounds and linguistic environments. The cognitive method effectively solves the problems arising in business activities and provides relevant reference for business negotiations in foreign trade enterprises.

### **II. INTERPERSONAL GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR**

Metaphor is the fundamental characteristic of language and is the indispensable foundation of human language or thinking. Halliday (1994: 342) [2] proposed the concept of grammatical metaphor according to the meta-function of language. Grammatical metaphor is both a semantic and a formal variant. He believes that grammatical metaphor can be divided into conceptual metaphor and interpersonal metaphor. The interpersonal metaphor expresses the function of the speaker to use the language to participate in social activities, influence the behavior of others, and express opinions and evaluations on things. Metaphor as a "variation of meaning expression" contains a significant grammatical component in "rhetorical transformation." Thompson (2004:30) [3] believes that interpersonal function mainly refers to people using language to communicate with each other, establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, and influence other people's behavior. Interpersonal metaphor refers to the metaphor of modality and mood. The interpersonal function of discourse is mainly realized by two semantic systems: mood and modality. The mood system divides English sentences into declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. According to the four variables of goods, services, giving and taking, Halliday divides language functions into such four kinds as offerings, commands, statements, and questions, which are embodied by the mood system. Its congruent form is realized by statements for declarative mood, interrogatives for questions and imperative for commands. Halliday (1994) [2] pointed out that in the process of communication, in addition to expressing the two possibility poles of affirmation and negation, there is a possibility between the two, which is called "modality" in systemic functional linguistics.

In traditional grammar, modal meaning is generally represented by modal verbs, modal adverbs, and extended parts of predicates. At the same time, modal meaning can also be expressed in a clause form. The former is a congruent lexical grammatical expression, while the latter is non-congruent, that is, metaphorical. As one of the means of expressing the interpersonal function of language, modality can be used to express the individual will, ask others to bear the obligation, and evaluate the success and validity of the proposition. Halliday divided the modal system into modalization and modulation. The modalization is the speaker's judgment of the possibility of the proposition, divided into the probability and frequency of different magnitudes. It includes the probability (possible, probable, certain) and the usuality (sometimes, usual, always). Modulation is the speaker's judgment on the hopefulness of the proposal. It is divided into different levels of obligations and inclinations, including obligation (allowed, supposed, required) and inclination (willing, keen, determine). Whether it is modalization used to exchange the information, or the modulation used to exchange goods and services, they need to be realized through the lexical grammatical clauses, expressing the function of probabilities and frequencies, responsibilities, obligations and inclination of speech. Modalization is usually achieved by definite modal verbs and modal adverbs that express probability and frequency, or both while modulation is achieved by definite modal verbs and the extended parts of predicates. Halliday (1994: 357) pointed out that it is the orientation of the modality that determines how modalization is realized. The modality orientation can be divided into four types: explicit subjective, implicit subjective, explicit objective and implicit objective.

### **III. INTERPERSONAL METAPHORS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH NEGOTIATION**

Halliday believes that a clause has three meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Among them, interpersonal function establishes and maintains interpersonal relationship through language, and tends to influence other people's attitudes and behaviors. At the same time, it expresses social relationship related to the situation among speakers, that is, the roles speakers and listeners play in the process of communication. Interpersonal meaning is mainly composed of mood and modal elements. When people express subjective thoughts and attitudes, the choice and collocation of subject, modalization and modulation are restricted by the subjective communicative purpose of the action doers, namely the responsibilities of modality (Shihua Niu, 2018) [4]. Language, as a tool for human communication, plays a variety of functions in business activities. In addition to the correct vocabulary and grammar, the decent business English negotiation is also very particular about the choice and use of mood and modality.

**Mood System:** Functional linguistics holds that a meaning can have multiple forms of expression. The form is the embodiment of meaning, and the meaning comes from the combination of form and function. "There is no one-to-one correspondence between mood and speech function. One speech function can be expressed by different moods, and one mood can also reflect different speech functions." (Chenguang Chang, 2001) [5] In business negotiations, on the one hand, the speaker gives the recipient information about the company and the product or service; on the other hand, the speaker wants the recipient to take action to purchase the product or service. Therefore, the choice and use of mood is very important, and the wording should be polite, courteous, and cordial. Imperative mood is used to express commands, and statements and interrogatives can also be used to express commands, as follows:

- a. Summarize the basic terms of your agreement in writing! (imperative mood)
- b. Could you summarize the basic terms of your agreement in writing? (interrogative mood)
- c. We'd like you to summarize the basic terms of your agreement in writing. (declarative mood)

The three clauses in example (1) express the command function. (to outline the basic terms of the agreement in writing). Sentence a uses imperative mood directly, a congruent expression of the command function, thus the blunt tone. Sentence B and c use the interrogative and declarative mood respectively to express the command function, and the sentence b appears more modest in the way of inquiry. Therefore, the mood metaphor reflects the complex relationship between the speech function and the mood system. One mood can reflect different speech functions and one speech function can also be expressed by different moods. The mood metaphor is essentially a transfer from one mood domain to another. Just as the command function can be expressed in a declarative or interrogative mood, the statement in an interrogative or imperative mood, and the question in a declarative or imperative mood. In order to adapt to the context and achieve specific effects, the negotiating parties often use non-congruent mood to express and complete various functions. The mood metaphor extends the speech function at the semantic level by coding the metaphor of speech function. In the congruent manifestation of speech function, only semantic meaning constitutes sentence meaning, while in the metaphorical representation of speech function, both semantics and grammar constitute a network of meaning. Therefore, the mood metaphor reflects the complex state of mind of the negotiators and provides great help for us to understand the semantic coherence among discourses.

Choice is an important concept in systemic functional linguistics, and choice is meaning. The choice of metaphor is itself a meaningful one since the choice of metaphor adds semantic features. Negotiators make different choices based on factors such as context, style, roles, relationships, and attitudes of both parties. Therefore, analyzing the mood metaphor in the negotiating discourse can enable the negotiators to analyze their personality characteristics, state of mind, language style, and the relationship between the two sides, so as to better understand the negotiation context.

**Modality System:** Modal expression involves almost all areas and aspects of business activities. The modality system is a semantic system that expresses the speaker's judgment or evaluation of things. As one of the important components of interpersonal meaning, the meaning expressed by the modality is the judgment of the success and validity of the proposition from the speaker's own point of view, the obligation for the other party required in the command or the personal will expressed in the proposal. The modality metaphor can make the negotiating parties choose in the potential of interpersonal meaning by reasonably arranging grammatical resources to achieve their communicative purposes and create special context effects. It is the modality orientation system that determines how each kind of modal meaning is embodied. Halliday pointed out that the manifestation of modality is determined by its orientation system. Generally speaking, the implicit modality orientation is represented by the modal verb, the modal adverb or the extended parts of the predicate, which is a non-metaphorical modal expression; while the explicit modality orientation is represented by the clause, which is a metaphorical modal expression. E.g:

- a. As our products are in your line, I think we can do business with you through compensation trade. (explicit subjective)
- b. As our products are in your line, we will do business with you through compensation trade. (implicit subjective)
- c. As our products are in your line, it is likely that we will do business with you through compensation trade. (explicit objective)
- d. As our products are in your line, we probably do business with you through compensation trade. (implicit objective)

In sentence b and d, the judgment on the probabilities of propositions is represented by the modal verb "will" and the modal adverb "probably", which is an implicit objective expression. It is a congruent expression of modal meaning. However, in sentence a and c, the judgment of the possibility of modality appears in the form of a proposition, forming a metaphorical structure at the grammatical level. The expression of modality in sentence a is a clause of "I think", expressing cognitive psychological process, while in sentence c a clause of "It is likely", expressing relative process. Therefore, it can be seen that both the explicit subjective and explicit objective forms of modality possibility are metaphorical. Generally speaking, explicit objective is expressed by a psychological process clause, such as "I believe", "I think", "I want", etc. while explicit objective by a relational process clause, such as "It is likely", "It is usual", "It is expected", and so on. In business English negotiation, modal auxiliary verbs are one of the main means of expressing interpersonal functions such as politeness, elegance, obligations and rules to convey emotions, helping to achieve the purpose of business negotiation. For example:

- (3) The goods must have got wet after they arrived in Hong Kong. (possibility)
- (4) The specific quantities, specifications, prices, terms of payment, time of shipment, etc. shall be stipulated in detail in separate sales contracts. (obligation)

The modal auxiliary verbs "must" and "shall" respectively express the meaning of possibility and obligation, but the modal meaning can also be expressed by the metaphorical form. The modal metaphor can be expressed by a clause. The above examples (3) and (4) can be rewritten as: It is certain that the goods had got wet after they arrived in Hong Kong. It is necessary that we stipulate the specific quantities, specifications, prices, terms of payment, time of shipment, etc. in detail in separate sales contracts. The modality metaphor is actually a way for the author to conceal his point of view. He tries to make his point of view objective without any subjective evaluation, and adopt a prudent and objective attitude. In addition, nominalization (e.g., the possibility/likelihood/probability/certainty of...) is another way to generate modality metaphors. By nominalization, modality is constructed into a "thing", which masks the source of modality and becomes an explicit objective orientation. The existence of English modality metaphor has important social and cultural significance. Complex modality systems are often directly related to different communication needs, complex interpersonal relationships or subtle social customs. In order to achieve a particular purpose or effect, the speaker sometimes deliberately adopts the explicit subjective metaphor, emphasizing the uncertainty of his or her opinion or judgment so as to make his or her own judgment or assertion objective.

The rich and complex modality system in English offers a wide range of choices for the speaker to choose the most appropriate modality from. In metaphorical expression, due to the metaphorical features of modality, it expresses the interpersonal evaluation of modality although it is a proposition, and acts as a modal adjunct in the proposition or proposed clause. E.g: (5) As a token of good faith, we have already deducted 6 percent from your bill. We hope this will help compensate for any inconvenience this problem caused. In the example (5), the speaker's main sentence structure is "we hope". From a functional point of view, the real proposition should be "this will help compensate for any inconvenience this problem caused". If you add a tag question, the sentence should become: "We hope this will help compensate for any inconvenience this problem caused, won't it?" The projected clause in the example plays a leading role grammatically, but semantically the projected clause becomes dominant of "this will help compensate for any inconvenience this problem caused", instead of the projected clause of "we hope". "we hope" is functionally equivalent to the tag comment of "hopefully".

#### **IV. THE FUNCTION OF INTERPERSONAL MEANING IN BUSINESS ENGLISH NEGOTIATIONS**

The essence of interpersonal function is to reveal the process of information transfer between the two parties in terms of their intentions, attitudes and emotions in the process of communication. There are a large number of interpersonal metaphors in business English negotiations, making the negotiator's language more concise, formal and objective. For this reason, interpersonal metaphors are also widely used in business English negotiations and they have the following functions. 4.1 Expressing the Principle of Politeness Language is an important means of expressing politeness, and politeness strategies are often achieved through language. The proper use of modality in verbal communication is to make the discourse more implicit, euphemistic, and polite. For example: (6) Don't you think the annual turnover of US\$20,000 is too conservative for a sole agent? This is a mood metaphor. It uses interrogative sentences to express the fact that "annual sales of \$20,000 are too conservative for an exclusive agent." The wording is more sloppy and polite, avoiding the feeling of being overly straightforward, thus giving people a sense of arrogance. It appears modest and polite, having more room for consultation, which is conducive to reaching a trade agreement. The modality represents the speaker's perspective and attitude toward the possibility and necessity of the proposition or proposal. Explicit subjective modality is a metaphor, and modality is expressed by a single clause that constitutes a modality proposition (Thompson, 2004: 232) [3]. A modality clause usually uses "I" or "we" as a mental process of the sensor to project another clause, thus emphasizing the speaker's perception or uncertainty of judgment. Therefore, negotiators often use modality metaphors of explicit subjective orientation such as "we believe", "we trust", "we are confident", "we assure", "we assume", "we hope", which express their own subjective will and attitude, and avoid their arbitrariness. Therefore, it gives the other party a good impression and is conducive to future cooperation. E.g: (7) I believe that your company continues to be successful because of the skill of your management in analyzing the direction of market trends. In example (7), the negotiators aim to express their deep impression on your company and appreciate the company's ability to manage market trend analysis. Here negotiators use "I believe", this explicit subjective metaphorical expression, which is equivalent in function to the comment adjunct of "certainly". It indicates that they are appreciative of your company, thus achieving the communicative purpose of promoting cooperation between the two parties. Another example:

(8) We trust you will ship the order within the stipulated time as any delay would cause us no little inconvenience and financial loss. (9) In view of the wide connections which we are fortunate enough to possess, we think you will agree that a 5 percent commission on net sales is quite reasonable. In example (8), the negotiator uses the metaphorical form of the explicit subjective orientation of "we trust" to express the modulation, believing that the other party will deliver the goods on time, because any delay will inevitably cause great inconvenience and economic loss. In example (9), the negotiator attaches an explicit subjective metaphor of "we think" to the projected clause of "you will agree that a 5 percent commission on net sales is quite reasonable." It shows that he is not quite sure whether the other party thinks that "a 5% commission on the net sales is reasonable". Emphasizing that what he said is his own personal opinion, it increases the space for discussion, which is conducive to the realization of the communicative purposes of the two parties.

**Emphasis on Objectivity :** As an interpersonal metaphor, the meaning of explicit objective modality is empirical. At this time, the proposition is packaged as a fact, and the modality evaluation of the speaker seems to be regarded as a modifier of the fact (Thompson, 2004: 233) [3]. In business English negotiations, the negotiators will also use such explicit objective metaphorical expressions as "it is likely", "it is obvious", "it is usual", making their assertions objective. E.g: (10) It is obvious that you want to find a product that is not a direct competitor, but one that complements your product. In the case of (10), the negotiator projects a clause "it is obvious" to emphasize the proposition or judgment --- you don't want the product to be a direct competitor, but to complement your

product. In addition, the nominalization can also reflect the explicit objective orientation. It is used to embody nouns with the modal meaning such as “possibility”, “probability”, “likelihood”, “certainty”, “need”, etc., to construct a modal meaning into an unquestionable “fact” so as to cover up the source of modality, leaving no room for negotiations. (11) Considering marketing your joint venture partner’s products to your customers as part of the whole cooperation, there is a certainty of a win-win situation for both partners. The modal noun “certainty” portrays a win-win situation as a fact, indicating that as long as the joint venture partner's products are sold to their customers, “win-win” will become an indisputable fact, thus, enhancing the persuasiveness of speech. The nominalization of the modal meaning can not only express the explicit objective orientation, but also play a role of cohesion. In the process of negotiation, after the interpersonal meaning in the communication of negotiators is agreed, the modal meaning can be nominalized, making the discourse connected. E.g: (12) We are very concerned that our efforts to ensure punctual delivery should be frustrated by delays in transit. There is a possibility that other customers are also affected and we are taking up this whole question with our carriers. In the second clause of example (12), the noun “possibility” actually summarizes the possibilities of modality in the context, has semantic cohesiveness, and enhances the coherence of the discourse.

**Maintenance of Face:** According to Halliday's theory of speech function, communication mainly involves the functions of giving information and providing services and sometimes involves asking for information and command. In business negotiations, it is often the case that one party of the negotiations raises requests or advice to the other party. From Brown's and Levinson's point of view, such business negotiations with command functions are inherently mandatory to the other party and are detrimental to the face of the other party. Therefore, the negotiators must rely on negative courtesy strategies to reduce the negative influence to the other party. (Xirong Chen, 2012) [6]. Typical expressions of modal metaphor are “we suggest”, “we advise”, “we recommend”, “we hope”, etc., which can make the proposed discourse polite and euphemistic without hurting the other's face. E.g: (13)

As your complaint does not agree with the result of our own test, we recommend that you conduct another examination to show if there is any ground for claim. In the case of (13), the negotiator used the form of the modal metaphor---“we recommend”, to express euphemistically the imperative function—requesting the other party to do another test in order to understand whether the claim was well-grounded. The word “recommend” is used to suggest that the negotiating party expects the other party to give a positive feedback. Compared with the congruent expressions such as “you must” or “you are required”, the metaphorical form of modality is obviously more euphemistic, thus, well maintaining the other's face. Negotiators sometimes use the expressions of clauses such as “it is expected”, “it is imperative”, “it is required” to perform command functions. These metaphorical expressions of modality eliminate the negotiator's intervention to appear objective, avoiding absolutes and extremes, which can make your own opinions and suggestions easy to be accepted by the other party. E.g : (14) It is imperative that the proper and prompt action on every warranty claim should be taken in order to fulfill customer satisfaction. In the case of (14), the negotiator's subjective attitude was “non-personalized”, obscuring the source of the order, and at the same time making it difficult for the other party to raise questions and objections to the order—the proper and prompt action on every warranty claim should be taken. Through the explicit objective form of modality, the modality is dressed as a proposition in the form of a clause, or the modal meaning is nominalized, so that the personal point of view seems to become an inherent feature so that it will be easier for the listener to accept its view. The modal expression not only expresses euphemistically and politely the will of the two parties and clarifies the rights and responsibilities of both parties, but also eases the atmosphere of tension and maintains each other's face.

## V. CONCLUSION

The theory of interpersonal metaphor not only conveys information, but more importantly, through this process of information transmission, it influences the other party to respond accordingly, making the fierce propositions more euphemistic, polite, and decent, and effectively defining and clarifying the rights and responsibilities of both parties. It enriches the language of communication in a euphemistic tone, greatly expands the potential of English dialogue and helps to grasp the use of modality functions in business negotiations. Therefore, it can promote the smooth development of business activities, enhance the negotiator's cultural awareness of decoding and encoding in both languages, and successfully complete the interpersonal interactions in business negotiations.

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