

Using Negotiation Model in Teaching Business English

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1 Introduction

Pragmatics describes the structure and function of language beyond the level of the sentence. One of the major concerns of discourse analysis is to describe and explain how spoken discourse is formed. This pragmatic approach to language use has generously contributed to the development of linguistic research into the field of English for Specific Purposes, encouraging researchers to consider business discourse as a specific type of social interaction and business speech events as specific genres. (Mulholland, 1991).

Many linguists agree on the fact that speech events can be grouped into: (a) written genres such as poetry, narrative, report-writing, letter writing, etc.; and (b) spoken genres like the telephone call, the interview, the negotiation, etc (Mulholland, 1991, 39). Genres seem to be, in general terms, recorded in the different scripts making up the speaker's communicative competence mental database. For example, we have scripts for what normally happens in all kinds of speech events, from the general ones, such as "going shopping" or "going to the doctor's surgery", to the specific ones, e.g. "the employment interview", "the telephone call", "the business meeting", "the sales negotiation", etc. Each time people are involved in social interaction, they select and activate a particular script from their memory stock and begin to work only with that file, setting out their expectations about what may and may not happen. These expectations will affect the production, reception and understanding of the activities and processes. The generic sense of a negotiation acts, in Mulholland's words: 'as a familiar framework for participants and so provides them with the comfort of a ritual, within which they can address the peculiar needs of any particular negotiating instance' (Mulholland, 1991, 41).

2 Model of Negotiation

Negotiation can be seen as a problem-solving discourse in which mental models guide behavior. Negotiators who reach better outcomes have mental models that reflect greater understanding of the negotiation structure, and of the processes of trading and exchanging information, compared to negotiators who do not reach optimal settlements. There are common patterns and regularities of interaction between the parties in negotiation irrespective of the particular context or the issues in dispute (Gulliver, 1979, 64).

The discourse structure of business negotiations includes business negotiation, transactions, exchanges, moves and acts. The following layered pattern of discourse transactions is suggested to be used when negotiating: Preparation, Relationship building, Agreeing procedure, Exchanging information, Questioning, Options, Bidding, Bargaining, Settling and concluding and Final greetings. Transactions are essentially topic units governed by two mechanisms: prospection and encapsulation. Each discourse transaction sets out expectations about the next one. In order to understand the meaning of each transaction one needs to

retrieve the preceding one. These transactions, when applied successfully, create cohesion, coherence and smooth flow of information rounded up by optimistic closure.

Preparation includes researching standards and principles by which negotiating parties may reach common ground. It is important to be aware of our own bargaining style as well as that of the other party. In Relationship building transaction the negotiators establish rapport. It is important to show interest in what other side has to say and to create a positive climate for the whole negotiation process. During Agreeing procedure transaction the negotiators state the objectives clearly and agree on them with the other party in order to create a climate of cooperation. Exchanging information transaction starts with a short account of the company's history and activities or move on to stating each side's interests. This transaction may lead to another series of exchanges in which the seller will often ask questions to get more information about the customer's needs and the emphasis placed on different factors. These exchanges will give shape to Questioning transaction. Many observational studies since 1978 have confirmed the importance of these basic communications skills in effective negotiation. Henry Ford gave advice on such communication: "If there is any one secret of success" he said, "it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own. Having exchanged information and clarified positions, it is important for negotiators to generate ideas and options before making decisions. This creative process will give rise to Options transaction. Once options have been evaluated, negotiators should put forward proposals and bids. This forms Bidding transaction. If new offers, counteroffers are made in response to the other side's proposals and the time has come to make concessions linked to conditions, these will be the typical Bargaining. After this, it is advisable for negotiators to summarize what agreements have already been reached and what responsibilities have already been assigned. Besides, it is essential to identify any areas which have not yet been agreed on and any further action which needs to be taken. Preliminary signal (AOB), reference to the next meeting should be given in the first of two terminal transactions, that is, Settling and Concluding. Finally, when the negotiation has come to an end, negotiators will exhibit a ritualistic behavior again by exchanging final greetings in Final Greetings.

All these transactions comprise structural variables, such as repair, pause, overlap, interruption, clarifications, reformulations, etc. Of higher importance are content variables such as suggestions, recommendations, promises, warning, threats, commitments (agreeing to do something), self-disclosure, conceding to the opponent, shields (I don't know. Maybe), etc, which can facilitate the use of negotiation phrases and thus enrich the vocabulary used during the negotiation process. The model of negotiations shows what constitutes the process of negotiation. However, more information can be gathered by looking at what goes on within this process. Five factors, i.e., underlying behaviors, emerge and are interpreted as Giving information, Promoting interaction, discussing procedural matters - Metatalk, conceding to the opponent - Concession, and Agreement. Interestingly, almost all the factors contain a mix of both structure and content variables, indicating that certain functions (content) in negotiation are systematically accomplished by certain ways of speaking (structure). It is important during which transactions these behaviors occur as they have fundamental impact on the quantitative (profit margin) and qualitative (satisfaction) outcome of the negotiation. The Bargaining Process Analysis (BPA), integrates a series of categories to which utterances are ascribed depending on the strategic function they implement, either expressing 'substantive behaviors' when they are understood as the messages that facilitate the negotiation process, or else 'persuasive behaviors' when they constitute the messages that function as arguments and evidence in the support of the claims a negotiator makes. A third

category corresponds to 'strategic behavior' when the messages are designed to influence the expectation and actions of the opponent. The maxims of a good negotiation are: a) separate the people from the problem, b) focus on interests, not positions, c) generate a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do, d) insist that the results be based on some objective standard (Firth, 1995, 12). Negotiation model generically will enable the students to study the principles underlying its discourse framework better. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the particular realizations of this broad pattern may differ considerably every time speakers engage in a sales negotiation because one of the special properties of spoken discourse is that it is self-monitored. This means that negotiators have the power to select or change their own discourse route when they interact according to a wide variety of factors such as: (a) their negotiating styles, whether collaborative or confrontational; (b) their personal relationship; (c) the external circumstances in which the speech event is embedded, etc. (Firth, 1995)

3 Phrases

Negotiation Model does not emphasize any style of communication. It does not matter whether students use short or long phrases, simple or complex sentences. The model is used only as a tool to help them create such a negotiation process with which they will accomplish a positive settlement. Listed here are some negotiation process phrases that can be used during the activity.

Welcoming: On behalf of ... I would like to welcome you to ... It's my pleasure to welcome you to ... Welcome to ... Suggesting a procedure: I would like now to begin by suggesting the following procedure (agenda). To start with, I think we should establish the overall procedure. Checking for agreement: Does that fit in with your objectives? Is that compatible with what you would like to see? Does that seem acceptable to you? Is there anything you'd like to change? Is this okay with you? Giving the discussion leadership to a colleague: I will now hand you over to Mr. Brown____, who is ... I will now hand the floor over to Mr. Adams, who is ... Now let me hand the meeting over to my colleague, Ms. Jones, who ... General outline of a proposal: May I ask, please, what your proposal is in connection with our company? What in general terms are you looking for here? Dealing with digressions: May we leave that till later and first look at ... Can we deal with ... first? Reviewing the previous session: At our last meeting, we discussed ... Perhaps you will recall that during our last discussion, we decided that ... Moving on to the next point: Could we now move on to the next subject, which is ... Let's go on to the next subject, shall we? Putting forward future possibilities: We foresee ... We envisage ... We see ... Seeking clarification: Could you clarify one point for me? I'm not sure I fully understand your point. What exactly do you mean by ...? Could you be more specific? Defining a proposal more specifically: It involves ... It covers ... It includes ... It leaves out ... Reassuring: Let me reassure you that ... I can promise you that ... Have no doubts that we will ... Asking why: Why would you want to ...? What would you do with ...? What is the reason for wanting to ...? Asking why not: Why couldn't you ...? What would be wrong with doing this? Why would you object to ...? Summarizing positions up to this point: Can we summarize your position up to this point? Would you care to summarize your position up to this point? Confirming a negotiating position: Is that an accurate summary of where you stand? Would you say that is a fair representation of your position? Probing / Looking for options: Just for the sake of argument, what if ... Can I ask a hypothetical question? Suppose that ... Signaling the start of bargaining: We've looked at what you have proposed, and we are ready to respond. After serious consideration, we are prepared to respond to your proposal. Bargaining: If you do that, we'll / we can do this. OK, we'd be prepared to do that, but only if you did this. We could accept that, but only on one condition.

Would you be willing to accept a compromise? OK, we can agree to that. That sounds reasonable. I think that should be possible. I'm not sure about that. That's not really a viable option for us. That would be very difficult for us because ... I'm sorry, we can't accept that. Let's just take a moment to review what we've discussed. Can we just go through / go over what we've agreed so far? So, ... I'd like some time to think about it. I think that's as far as we can go at this stage. I don't have the authority to make that decision by myself. If you can, we can close the deal today. I'm ready to sign that if you can ...

Responding to a proposal: Regarding your proposal, our position is ... Our basic position is ... As far as your proposal is concerned, we think that ...

Making and qualifying concessions: We would be willing to ..., provided, of course, that ... We'd be prepared to However, there would be one condition.

Making counter proposals: May we offer an alternative? We propose that ... We'd like to make an alternative proposal. We propose that ... From where we stand, a better solution might be ...

Identifying obstacles: The main obstacle to progress at the moment seems to be ... The main thing that bothers us is ... One big problem we have is ...

Analyzing an obstacle: What exactly is the underlying problem here? Let's take a closer look at this problem. I would like to analyze this situation and get to the bottom of the problem.

Asking for concessions: In return for this, would you be willing to ...? We feel there has to be a trade-off here.

Declining an offer: Unfortunately, we must decline your offer for the following reason(s). I'm sorry, but we must respectfully decline your offer.

Asking for further information: Would you like to elaborate on that? Could you go into more detail on that?

Checking: Let's just confirm the details, then. Let's make sure we agree on these figures (dates / etc.). Can we check these points one last time?

Delaying: We would have to study this. Can we get back to you on this later? We'll have to consult with our colleagues back in the office. We'd like to get back to you on it.

Accepting: We are happy to accept this agreement. This agreement is acceptable to us. I believe we have an agreement. That's it then. I think we have a deal.

4 Conclusion

Using Negotiation Model in Business English teaching encourages students to be more creative, to imagine a real business situation and act accordingly, and to upgrade and enrich the vocabulary of business English. The model does not give preference to any style of language. Students are free to use short as well as long phrases, simple as well as complex sentences, sophisticated as well as ordinary vocabulary and communicative styles. The model is used only as a tool to help them retrieve the negotiation script from their mind, follow it and produce an effective negotiation process which brings profit and satisfaction and leaves them with a feeling that the negotiation process has been conducted on a high quality level.

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