

The Functioning of Politeness and Refusal in Trade Interactions

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The refusal, in verbal exchanges is considered as the denial of what is proposed. This act of refusal expresses the interpersonal relationship on a double horizontal and vertical plane. Interacting is producing a denial threatens both positive and negative sides. The refusal, which can be formulated either by the customer or by the seller, thus demonstrates the functioning of linguistic politeness and engages the interlocutors in a kind of negotiation where each one tries to save his own face and / or to endanger the face. on the other, by resorting to various formulations and the use of softening and hardening markers, and bearing in mind the goal of the interaction which is to sell (for the seller) and to buy (for the customer). Commercial exchanges, which are environments where the discourse is illocutionary, highlights the games of different interests and in this context allow the study of interactions not only concerning linguistic units but rather the extralinguistic context.

Keywords: Interaction, politeness, refusal, exchange, speech acts.

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INTRODUCTION

The act of refusal is "the illocutionary denial of acceptance or consent. To refuse is not to accept what is offered. It is to decline, reject or reject an invitation, a tip, a gift [1]".

In general, to refuse is to reject or decline a request. In the case of commercial exchanges, the act of refusal is considered as a follow-up to a previous illocutionary act through a specific verbal interaction known as commercial which puts in relation the individuals named "customers" and "buyers". It is advisable to use the notion of commercial interaction because according to Goffman, "by interaction (that is to say face-to-face interaction) we mean the reciprocal influence that partners exert on their respective actions when they are in immediate physical presence on each other; By interaction, we mean the whole of the interaction that occurs on any one occasion when the members of a given set are in continuous presence on top of each other: the term "encounter" may also be appropriate [2].

Any commercial interaction is an illocutionary act consisting in the sale of a commodity (or the purchase of it). The language transaction in this communication situation refers to the negotiation of a specific element; although the interactants can talk about other topics. In trade, several types of speech acts

come into play. Affirmation is usually followed by assessment, questioning followed by a response, and the observation of a rationale.

Denial consists of a refusal of the product for sale by the customer or of the price offered by the customer to the seller. In this context, negotiation fundamentally leads to the production of refusals by both the client and the seller. This generates constant threats from the faces [3] and results in a particular type of interpersonal relationship between the partners in the interaction. In this study, we will study these relational phenomena of linguistic politeness by relying on the example of business meetings, and by using the conversational linguistics approach.

We will proceed as a method to the recording of the verbal exchanges as "natural conversations", subsequently to their transcriptions and finally to their analysis. Our study will focus on the external level of verbal denial which concerns the relationships between participants in verbal interaction which is "an action which affects (alters or maintains) the relationships of self and others in face-to-face communication. face [4]".

Context of the study

Our reflection is concerned with verbal exchanges in a medium-sized point of sale. In its social and institutional functioning, the point of sale is

generally reserved for business meetings. It is a public and open place to enter freely. The purpose of business meetings is the sale of a commodity. But there are more occasional refusals corresponding to the different speech acts performed during the interaction. We can oppose.

- Sequences with an external purpose (functional interactions);
- More free sequences (personal interactions) which are more relational than commercial in nature.

In trade, two people are usually involved. The salesperson, the person whose profession is to sell any product by meeting with customers. The place where the interactions take place belongs to the seller. He has the "power" to serve: it is he who holds the good to be provided. All of this data makes it easier to listen to the customer.

For his part, the customer is the "king". The merchant must be at its service and meet its needs. The customer should be the only one in control of the exchange and the seller only has a reactive role. In addition, the customer has the good "will" to buy. Each of this fact has a certain power in trade, because everything changes over the course of the interaction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our corpus is made up of "natural conversations" which were collected by recording in the city of Dschang, in the west Cameroon, in verbal exchanges in a mobile phone point of sale and in a hairdressing saloon for women.

Thanks to this corpus, we were able to study the functioning of politeness and the act of refusal, which enabled us to count a significant number of these two acts. Note that it was in the mobile phone point of sale that we observed the most refusal and very little in the hairdressing saloon. Therefore, we will focus exclusively on the interactions that took place in the mobile phone point of sale.

We were able to transcribe this corpus using the transcription conventions described in two key works Cosnier J et al., [5] and Traverso [6].

All of the transcription rules can be found in these books, but here are some that we have particularly used:

- [] square brackets indicate overlapping lyrics.
- ? The question mark does not represent the intonation but it indicates an illocutionary value of the question ((laughs)) indication of vocal gestures characteristic of diction
- (...) Inaudible words

Analyzes and interpretation of the corpus through the act of refusal

When there is a verbal exchange, this implies the presence of two interactors, having a socio-

emotional link and certain particular priority data. These data capitalize the relationship of the interactants and are very often contextual.

The horizontal relation

This type of relationship determines the degree of closeness of the participants in the interaction; these show themselves to be more or less "close" or, on the contrary, "distant"; the axis of the horizontal relation is a gradual axis oriented on one side towards distance and on the other towards familiarity and intimacy. In the case of business meetings, the act of refusal is a threatening act; it cannot therefore improve the horizontal relation between the interactants. On the contrary, it can degrade this relationship.

The vertical relationship

There is generally an inequality in verbal interactions: one of the two can be in the "high" position of dominant (this is often the case of the seller who is increasingly competent in terms of knowledge of products to sell, in the situation where there is no refusal on the part of the client) while the other, that is the client, is placed in the "low" position of dominated (case of the buyer in principle less expert than the seller). The ratio of the places of the participants also depends in part on the contextual data, but only in part, because we frequently observe on the part of the institutional dominated the implementation of strategies of resistance and untruth which can of course fail or succeed. Business interactions take place in most cases in an unequal context. In such cases, acts of refusal will be the thread of the interaction

The customer is the "king" because he asks for services, and his money is profitable for the seller. The merchant must be at its service and meet its needs. The customer is the one who directs and controls the exchanges the most by producing an act of refusal, the customer puts himself in a "high" position with respect to the seller because he is performing an act potentially threatening his "territory" and his "face". The seller is put or puts himself in a "down" position when he undergoes such an act.

In addition, the act of refusal is an act reactive to a "Face Threatening Act" FTA. In commerce, the seller's proposal, which is a directive act, can be interpreted as threatening, because it threatens the customer's "territory" by the fact that it wastes his time, limits his choice and directly threatens the customer. client's "high" position.

The customer, in general, refuses the seller's proposals when the latter does not bring him the requested product but rather another similar one. In this case, the seller shows a "disobedience", a large FTA for the "high" position of the customer.

To defend their face, the client often uses "hardeners" which have the function of reinforcing the

speech act rather than cushioning it and increasing its impact rather than reducing it" [7].

Hardeners can be:

- Non-verbal markers: Example: "She pushes back with her hand"
- Paraverbal markers: rising voice, agonal tone;
- Verbal markers: repeating negation Example: "Customer: no, no, do not bring this model of phone"
- Lexical-morpho-syntactic markers:

Adverbs: more, not so much

Example: Client: No I don't like it. I don't like it that much ...

Example: Customer: oh no, I'm not interested. Oh, no, that model is too heavy.

Example: Client: No, I am not at all comfortable with this model.

* The modelers: really

Example: Client: Yeah. And that's not really the case.

* Orders

Example: Customer: no, no, no, I don't want it.

5- Various guides as to their pragmatic value:

* Criticism or threat

Example: Customer: if you don't want to serve me I can go elsewhere.

In Dschang mobile phone outlets, prices are usually displayed on the product. The seller may therefore refuse to sell the product when the customer is trying to negotiate it at a very low price. At this level, the seller takes the "high" position because it is him who decides whether or not to sell his products at such and such a price. And he often explicitly refuses:

Customer: if you give me a good price, I'll buy two models otherwise...

Seller: No, no, I can't give you the discount, that's the price.

Client: In this case, leave them to me at 50,000 FCFA per unit as the mark (X).

Seller: No, no, I can't because that's not his purchase price.

Client: OK I'll take but one but euh...

Seller: Okay, but I can't leave them with you less than the purchase price.

In the event that the seller cannot fulfill the customer's request, the latter (the seller) cannot assert his "high" position because he has made an act of confessing his inability to serve the customer well, therefore against his positive side is for him a self-threatening speech act. It goes into the "low" position. This type of act is often followed by an apology.

(Seller returns with others phones): I'm sorry, you may be interested in this phone because it's the same provider you're interested in.

In view of these exchanges, it should be noted that an interactant can occupy different positions during a commercial interaction by being either dominated or dominant. In this game the salesperson must always seek to gain the upper hand over the customer by preventing the latter from perceiving this domination. In the aforementioned exchanges, the customer notices that the seller wants to offer him a brand of phone that he does not want, but the latter explicitly refuses and by this act of refusal takes the position of "king".

The salesperson generally prefers to play the role of a "good servant". He accepts threats from the client without reacting. He puts himself in the "low" position to flatter the positive face of the client. This strategy is far from free. It is carried out in order to obtain the customer's purchasing decision. This is the overall illocutionary goal of the business meeting.

DISCUSSIONS

Politeness is a way to reconcile the mutual desire to preserve faces. The deed of refusal is an FTA and its quality is quite high in business meetings. Politeness is to avoid producing an FTA which is a threatening act. Once the denial is produced, the interactants should in principle choose strategies to soften the expression of FTAs. In this case, can it be said that in a commercial interaction, the seller and the customer are they sparing? Is politeness in order?

The customer's refusal

Most of the time, the customer occupies a "high" place, that of the "king". For many customers, the seller usually has to answer their query. The seller's proposals are not always interpreted by the customer as good intentions, like offers, but on the contrary as acts for the benefit of the seller himself. In addition, the customer comes to the seller with the aim of buying a product of his choice to his liking, at a reasonable price. When this goal cannot be achieved, outright refusals occur.

In commercial interactions, there is a multiplicity of opinions. For the seller, the customer's decision to accept or decline is more important than rituals of politeness. The interactants put aside the rituals of politeness to achieve their goal. This shows why the quantity of categorical and even reinforced refusals is very high.

Direct refusal (explicit)

In trade, stakeholders use the indirect or implied wording much more to soften the FTA of the act of refusal. Other customers, on the other hand, don't hesitate to use the direct formulation.

The explicit refusal is often marked by a categorical "no" as in the examples cited above.

Hairstylist: you can do this hairstyle model.

Client: no

Phone salesman: (Introduces the phone)

Client; no

Salesman: (He walks in and shows one of the phones)

Client: No, no, no don't show me this one, I'm not interested

• Hardeners

Hardeners are verbal processes that the client uses to keep their face. However, in terms of politeness, the higher the severity level of the seller's proposal FTA, the more the customer uses the hardeners to reinforce their refusal.

Each client has their own personal character; this character can be sympathetic or unpleasant. In the phone point sale, we see through the exchange examples cited above that the customer is aggressive throughout the conversation. He explicitly refuses by avoiding negotiation

It should be noted that the straightforward formulation of the use of softeners shows one of the limitations of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness; "So there are many situations where the exercise of the rules of politeness is suspended [8] ". This is a case of strongly agonal interaction, interpersonal conflict or social confrontation as Anne Frank pointed out to Hitler: "There is no politeness to be had towards vis-à-vis people who are not polite [9]." Accompanied by softeners, the acts of refusal are much more implicit. Softeners can be presented in two main categories

The indirect wording of the act of refusal

When the customer in a commercial interaction makes an act of implicit refusal, this makes it possible to erase the non-acceptance or the negation of this one. By doing so, the customer qualifies his refusal and contributes by this action to the proper functioning of the interaction. He opens his voice to the salesperson who, through persuasive methods, can change his mind.

Salesperson: If you agree, can you come back in two weeks, because we will have arrivals that will surely interest you?

Client: okay, but will it be possible? because in a week, I could still... but two weeks there [] Well I'll see. Here in this exchange, the client produces a partial refusal which allows him to express his request. The refusal appears to be just a pretext for issuing another request.

Implicit formulations are distinguished from direct formulations only by the absence of a categorical "no". Let's take and look at these two examples:

- Implicit formulation (customer casually looks at the phone)
Client: he looks very big, it looks like an old phone
- explicit wording

Seller: I offer you the one, it detects networks even in countryside

Client: no thank you it is huge it looks like a brick.

The implied refusal can also be final. In this case, it is at the end of the interaction. It makes it possible to conclude without clearly indicating a refusal. This is a strategy that helps to spare your own face and that of the seller.

Seller: (...) This phone is very powerful and corresponds to your price

Client: it's true but I'll think again

Seller: ok I don't have any more for you.

C: no problem, I'll see.

Phrases like "we'll see" and "I'll think about it" are conventional implicit acts which are always interpreted by the seller as final and as a closing of the conversation, and they leave him no chance of sale.

The customer replaces a refusal with another request

Client: Don't you have any other brands that may interest me?

Seller: there are some but which are more expensive

Client: gosh !!!

The customer can also soften an FTA by using a temporal deactivator

Seller: I offer you this because I like this phone

Client: ... it's true that,euh ...

- rhetorical processes like understatement:

Client: (observes, discreetly admiring the phone) It's not bad

Client: (the client is handling the phone in question), that sounds a bit complicated to me

Seller: I have another one that you may like,like what you are asking for (the seller presents the question phone)

Client: this is still very small!

The accompanying procedures

The first way to cushion an act of refusal is to announce it with a "preliminary" statement

Seller: (it comes with different phones) I show you.

Client: I will see the phone here (he takes the TECHNO brand), to see, it's beautiful but it's very vulgar on the market

The client often uses a "but" argumentation connector before the act of refusal:

Seller: this phone is very good because its battery can withstand more than three days

Client: Yes ... it's nice but I'm afraid it will spoil quickly ...

The second way to cushion an act of refusal is to proceed with reparations, for example justification.

Client: ... It's beautiful but it's very vulgar in the market

-The coaxers aiming to swallow the too bitter pill of the FTA

Client: ... it's beautiful but ...

Client: ... it's nice but ...

-The client often uses the "yes" which does not have its usual meaning, it is an attention marker that follows and somewhat mitigates the act of refusal. To avoid a too

brutal refusal, the client can use the justifications by considering the refusal as his own fault.

Salesman: Is it good?

Client: yes yes it's big I can't even put it in my pocket

Salesman: ... I only have these phones, if you can't find your choice, well ...

Client: Ok. It's okay, I can come back another day

The number of refusals at the seller is much lower than at the customer. Its refusals can be divided into two main categories:

- The seller refuses when the customer wants to negotiate on the price

When the customer wants to negotiate the price, he directly threatens the seller's overall aim in the interaction. He always wants to sell as many products as possible and at the highest possible price. To achieve this goal, the salesperson can do everything: play the role of a servant, endure threats from the customer... If this goal is not reached, it is a total defeat for him and the interaction will not worth nothing.

On the other hand, it is the seller who knows and who sets the price. This is the area where he takes the place of the dominant. So in the case of price negotiation, the refusal is final. In order to avoid any negotiation, the seller explicitly rejects the customer's request.

Client: If you give me a good price I will take two phones otherwise ...

Seller: I can't give you a discount, that's their price.

Client: can you leave this to me at 50,000FCFA?

Seller: no, that's not even the purchase price.

Client: I wanted two but euh ...

Seller: sorry, I can't sell lower than this price

In this example, the customer makes three attempts to lower the price but the seller's refusal is still absolute. Only the "power" modal makes it possible to attenuate one's act, to make it less threatening. He lets her know that he doesn't have the power to decide even if he wants to. The implicit formulations of these refusals are also used by the seller to mitigate the impossibility of fulfilling the request. This is a way of saying that the request can always be fulfilled, but not immediately.

CONCLUSION

In short, our study will have focused on the internal level of verbal interactions in that it constitutes a complement to linguistic theories. Just like linguistic units, the relationships between interactants in an exchange situation are very important. It must be noted that in business meetings, the command suppressed is not that of linguistic politeness, but that of the overall goal of this type of interaction, which is above all transactional. In other words, as Kerbrat-Orecchioni said, "Cooperation and conflict generally coexist with varying proportions throughout the interaction [10]". Failure is a final refusal where the interests of one party (seller or customer) are threatened. In this case the dosage of conflict is much more important than that of cooperation. The higher the degree of seriousness of the FTA, the more the directive acts cause refusals. But this degree of severity depends very much on the external contextual data and the interpretation of the participant in the interaction. This results in very diverse formulations of refusals as well as the use of many and varied markers softeners and hardeners.

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