

فن لغة التفاوض : قوة الكلمة في تشكيل النتائج

The Art of Negotiation Language: The Power of Words in Shaping Outcomes

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Abstract (English)

Negotiation is more than a transactional process—it is a complex communicative practice influenced by cultural norms, psychological factors, and social dynamics. This paper explores how language is strategically used as a tool of influence in negotiation settings. Through the analysis of real-life negotiation transcripts, the study examines how specific linguistic features such as word choice, rhetorical structure, politeness strategies, and various speech acts contribute to the success or failure of negotiation outcomes. The findings suggest that negotiators who skillfully utilize indirect communication, figurative language, and culturally appropriate expressions tend to achieve more favorable and cooperative results. Ultimately, this research highlights the critical role of language in negotiation, positioning communication not merely as a medium, but as a central mechanism in shaping agreements and resolving conflicts.

الخلاصة (باللغة العربية):

التفاوض ليس مجرد عملية تبادلية، بل هو ممارسة تواصلية معقدة تتأثر بالأعراف الثقافية والعوامل النفسية والديناميكيات الاجتماعية. يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تُستخدم اللغة بشكل استراتيجي كأداة للتأثير في بيئات التفاوض. ومن خلال تحليل نصوص واقعية لمواقف تفاوضية، يتناول البحث كيفية مساهمة السمات اللغوية مثل اختيار الكلمات، وبنية الخطاب، واستراتيجيات اللباقة، وأنواع الأفعال الكلامية في نجاح أو فشل نتائج التفاوض. وتشير النتائج إلى أن المفاوضين الذين يستخدمون التواصل غير المباشر، واللغة المجازية، والتعابير المناسبة ثقافيًا يحققون نتائج أكثر إيجابية وتعاونًا. وفي النهاية، يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على الدور الحاسم للغة في التفاوض، حيث لا تُعد وسيلة فقط، بل آلية مركزية في تشكيل الاتفاقات وحل النزاعات.

Keywords (English):

Negotiation, discourse analysis, pragmatics, language strategy, speech acts, persuasion

الكلمات المفتاحية (باللغة العربية): التفاوض ، تحليل الخطاب ، البراجماتية ، استراتيجية اللغة ، افعال الكلام ، الإقناع

1. Introduction

Negotiation represents a core dimension of human communication, playing a central role in both informal and institutionalized exchanges (Drew, 1992, p. 108)؛ (Cameron D. , 2001, p. 42) . Across various domains such as diplomacy, legal discussions, labor relations, and corporate dealings, the outcome of negotiations frequently hinges less on empirical facts and more on the linguistic strategies deployed to influence, align, or challenge interlocutors (Fairclough, 1992, p. 108) ؛(Cameron D. , 2001, p. 42) . Effective negotiation often depends on the deliberate manipulation of linguistic elements—such as tone, word selection, discourse organization, and sensitivity to cultural frameworks—which can serve to foster cooperation or exacerbate disputes (Scollon, 2001, p. 45)؛ (Hall, 1976, p. 91) .

Contemporary academic inquiry has increasingly turned to linguistic and pragmatic methodologies to decode the interactional mechanisms underpinning negotiation. Frameworks like Grice's maxims of conversation and Brown and Levinson's model of politeness offer insight into how interlocutors navigate face-saving acts, convey authority, and express intention (Brown, 1987, p. 61)؛ (Leech, 1983, p. 131).

Additionally, discourse analysts have brought attention to the functional deployment of rhetorical devices such as hedges, metaphor, sequential patterns, and narrative positioning within negotiation talk (Gee, 2011, p. 92)؛ (Lakoff, 1980, p. 115) ؛ (Tannen, 1993, p. 37) .

Nevertheless, a noticeable gap persists in sociolinguistic scholarship regarding the conceptualization of negotiation as a culturally mediated, performative language event governed by power dynamics (Thomas .. J., 1995, p. 117) ؛ (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 83) .Although many studies address discrete linguistic features, few offer an integrative pragmatic account based on authentic negotiation interactions.

1.1. Research Problem

While negotiation has received substantial attention in disciplines such as international relations, political science, and business studies, there remains a paucity of research investigating the nuanced role of language in negotiation success, particularly across culturally diverse settings. This study is motivated by the need to explore how specific linguistic tools—including lexical selection, indirect strategies, politeness markers, and discourse patterns—shape negotiation outcomes. The central issue lies in the absence of a comprehensive sociopragmatic framework that examines language not merely as a medium of communication but as an instrument of influence, power negotiation, and cultural expression within real-life discourse contexts. This research, therefore, aims to bridge this gap by analyzing how language operates pragmatically in negotiations and by evaluating its impact on communicative effectiveness and resolution building.

1.2. Research Questions

This paper addresses the following questions:

1. How does strategic language use influence the success of negotiation?

Previous research explains that language is not merely a means for conveying offers, but a strategic tool for managing power, link, and persuasion (Cameron D. &., 2014, p. 127) ؛ (Bhatia, 1993, p. 89) .

2. What pragmatic features (e.g., indirectness, politeness strategies, hedging) are most common in effective negotiation discourse?

Studies dealt with pragmatics shed the light on the importance of indirectness, politeness strategies, and hedging in managing face and avoiding confrontation

in negotiation settings (Brown, 1987, p. 129) (Beebe, 1989, p. 204) ؛(Leech, 1983, p. 141).

3. How do cultural and contextual variables affect linguistic choices in negotiation?

Cross-cultural communication literature emphasizes that the cultural norms and contextual expectations are tremendously affecting the language choices in negotiations (Gudykunst, 1988, p. 73)؛ (Hofstede, 2001, p. 219) ؛ (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 51).

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the pragmatic functions of language in negotiation contexts.
- To examine how discourse strategies shape outcomes in real negotiation scenarios.
- To identify cross-cultural features in negotiation communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Language in Negotiation

Negotiation is considered as as a communicative act wherein language plays a active role in achieving success (Thomas .. J., 1995, p. 89) . Language is not merely a means for transmitting information during negotiations; it is also a vehicle for persuasion, alignment, resistance, and identity construction (Cameron D. , 2001, p. 45) . **Tannen's (1993)** analysis reveals that negotiation is inherently relational process through language to reach agreements.

2.2 Speech Act Theory and Performativity

The foundational work of (Austin, 1962, p. 94)؛(Searle, 1969, p. 23) revolutionized the study of language by demonstrating that words are not merely descriptive but performative, a concept pivotal to analyzing negotiation discourse. Speech act theory distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, which appear considerably in negotiation discourse. Offers, refusals, threats, promises, and requests are central to negotiation speech acts and often determine the trajectory of interaction (Yule, 1996, p. 54) .

2.3 Pragmatics and Politeness Strategies

Pragmatics deals with meaning in context and is critical to understanding how negotiators save face and navigate power dynamics. (Brown, 1987, p. 70) Politeness Theory point out the strategies , for example ,indirectness, hedging, and positive or negative politeness as essential tools in mitigating threats to face. These strategies allow negotiators to soften demands and enhance cooperation, particularly in high-stakes or cross-cultural interactions (Holmes, 1995, p. 112) .

Building on the prior theories (Leech, 1983, p. 105) introduced multi-dimenational framework for politeness, shedding the light on principles such as the tact and empathy that foster collaborative dialogue. These maxims guide interlocutors in maintaining harmony during negotiation, especially in contexts where social hierarchies or institutional constraints are in play (Thomas .. J., 1995, p. 67) .

2.4 Discourse Analysis and Framing

Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis bridges language and societal norms, illustrating how verbal exchanges mirror broader power structures (Fairclough, 1992, p. 34). In negotiation, discourse structure—such as turn-taking, sequencing, and topic management—plays a significant role in the perception of control and cooperation (Drew, 1992, p. 169) .

(Lakoff, 1980, p. 4), are focusing on the popular framework of the concept to refer to how metaphors and cognitive structures shape the interpretation of negotiation contexts. The strategic use of metaphor like 'battle' or 'dance' not only reflects negotiators' mindsets but also actively shapes their strategies, a dynamic underscored by Lakoff and Johnson's work, (Stubbs, 1983, p. 57) .

(Gee, 2011, p. 112) explains that discourse builds reality, making the language used in negotiation focusing on the constructing of social action. Thus, how something is said can be just as important as what is said (Coulthard, 1985, p. 33) .

2.5 Sociolinguistics and Power Relations

Sociolinguistics addresses how language use differs across social groups and how it reflects societal structures (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 22). In negotiation, language reflects power relations, cultural norms, and interpersonal dynamics (Scollon, 2001, p. 56). For instance, status and hierarchy influence speech styles, turn-taking, and deference.

Goffman's concept of 'face-work's elucidates how negotiators balance self-image and social expectations during interactions, (Goffman, 1967, p. 12) .

(Hall, 1976, p. 92) introduced the notion of high-context and low-context cultures, which deeply impacts on negotiation styles. In high-context cultures (e.g., Arab or East Asian societies), meaning is often implicit, and politeness and indirectness are valued. In contrast, low-context cultures (e.g., Western societies) favor directness and clarity (Gudykunst, 1988, p. 48) . This aligns with (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 47) observation about cross-cultural settings.

2.6 Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Interlanguage Negotiation

According to (Thomas J. , 1983, p. 93) and **Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993, p. 12)** point out that on pragmatic failure she the light on the challenges faced by non-native speakers in interpreting or producing appropriate speech acts in negotiation. Misalignment in politeness strategies, levels of directness, and use of mitigation can give rise to miscommunication, failed negotiations, or offense (House, 2000, p. 147) .

(Beebe, 1989, p. 199) emphasize the variation in face-threatening speech acts among learners of English from different cultural backgrounds, stressing the need for pragmatic competence in multilingual settings. Interlanguage pragmatics offers different views about how speakers can develop negotiation strategies as they become more proficient in the target language and more aware of cultural nuances (Zukowski, 2009, p. 88) .

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative sociolinguistic approach to explore the role of English in negotiation discourse within the multilingual Iraqi context. The research design is descriptive and interpretive, aiming to reveal the patterns of language use, politeness strategies, and pragmatic choices made during real negotiation scenarios involving Iraqi speakers of English in institutional and business contexts (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 19); (Gee, 2011, p. 56). Qualitative methods are particularly suited to examining the highlights of linguistic behavior and the cultural foundations of negotiation discourse (Drew, 1992, p. 164).

3.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is English employed as a medium of negotiation in multilingual Iraqi contexts?
2. What pragmatic and politeness strategies are observable in English negotiation discourse in Iraq?
3. How do multilingual and sociocultural dynamics influence language choices and negotiation outcomes?

These questions are deeply rooted in the intersection of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cross-cultural communication (Thomas J. , 1983, p. 91); (Kasper, 1993, p. 8) .

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected by using two principal methods:

- Document Analysis: A corpus of 20 authentic business letters and emails exchanged between Iraqi organizations (including the Baghdad Chamber of Commerce and international partners) was compiled. These texts are written in English and represent real negotiation contexts such as price bargaining, service agreements, and memoranda of understanding (Coulthard, 1985, p. 40) .
- Semi-Structured Interviews: Ten professionals (five from the public sector and five from the private sector) who regularly negotiate in English were interviewed. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure variation in age, gender, and institutional affiliation (Holmes, 1995, p. 109) . Interviews lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and focused on language choice, negotiation style, and perceptions of pragmatic challenges (Scollon, 2001, p. 67) .

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative discourse and pragmatic analysis, informed by established theoretical frameworks:

- Speech Act Analysis: Functions such as offers, requests, refusals, and counteroffers were identified, drawing on (Searle, 1969, p. 25) typology of illocutionary acts.
- Politeness Strategy Coding: (Brown, 1987, p. 65) model of positive and negative politeness was applied to understand how interlocutors mitigate face threats in negotiation.

- Discourse Structure Examination: Analytical attention was given to turn-taking, topic shifts, mitigation strategies, and lexical choices (Fairclough, 1992, p. 35); (Tannen, 1993, p. 16) .

Interview data were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo software. Themes were developed inductively and cross-checked for inter-coder reliability to ensure consistency and validity (Gee, 2011, p. 89) .

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Information Technology and Communication. All participants gave informed consent and were briefed on the purpose and scope of the research (Thomas .. J., 1995, p. 98). Names and organizational identifiers were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and data protection. Data storage complied with ethical research standards, with all digital files securely stored and accessible only to the research team (Beebe, 1989, p. 193) .

3.6 Limitations

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size and its focus on formal institutional and business contexts. Informal negotiation situations, such as those occurring in marketplaces or domestic settings, were excluded. Moreover, while efforts were made to include a range of sectors, the geographic focus on Baghdad and its surrounding areas may limit generalizability to other Iraqi regions or cultural contexts (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 39); (Hall, 1976, p. 98).

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents a detailed examination of the linguistic and pragmatic features that characterize English negotiation discourse within multilingual Iraqi contexts. The findings are organized thematically, reflecting the major socio-pragmatic strategies identified across both textual and interview data. The data was analyzed using the discourse- pragmatics approach focusing on the linguistic features, pragmatic strategies, and cultural components that influence negotiation results.

Table 1: General Frequencies of Key Pragmatic Features

Pragmatic Features	Frequency in Successful Negotiations (%)	Frequency in Unsuccessful Negotiations (%)
Indirect Requests	85%	30%
Positive Politeness	75%	40%

Use of Hedging	68%	35%
Balanced Turn-Taking	80%	45%
Face-Saving Strategies	82%	38%
Cultural Sensitivity Phrases	70%	20%
Interruptions/Overlaps	20%	70%
Metaphorical Language	60%	25%

Interpretation: The table illustrates a clear correlation between the use of pragmatic strategies (especially politeness and indirectness) and successful negotiations outcomes.

Table 2: Summary of Key Findings

Finding Number	Key Insight
F1	Pragmatic competence contributes significantly to negotiation success.
F2	Indirectness and politeness strategies foster mutual understanding.
F3	Cultural awareness enhances the appropriateness of communicative acts.
F4	Aggressive or direct discourse correlates with higher failure rates.
F5	Aggressive or direct discourse correlates with higher failure rates.

4.1 Speech Acts in Negotiation

The analysis indicates that negotiation discourse is dominated by directive and commissive speech acts, notably indirect requests, offers, and counteroffers, aligning with (Searle, 1969, p. 25) typology of illocutionary acts.

- Indirect Requests:

“Would it be possible to reconsider the payment schedule?”

This form of mitigated directive exemplifies politeness through indirectness, reducing face-threatening potential and encouraging collaborative negotiation (Thomas J. , 1983, p. 91) .

- Offers and Promises:

“We are prepared to adjust the delivery timeline as a sign of goodwill.”

Such commissive acts are used to reinforce interpersonal rapport and trust (Austin, 1962, p. 152) .

These patterns suggest that Iraqi professionals employ speech acts strategically to balance assertiveness with politeness, reflecting a pragmatic orientation toward consensus-building (Kasper, 1993, p. 199) .

4.2 Politeness Strategies

Applying (Brown, 1987, p. 65) framework, the data show the pervasive use of positive and negative politeness strategies in both written and spoken negotiation discourse.

- Positive Politeness:

“We truly appreciate your cooperation and look forward to strengthening our partnership.”

This expression of appreciation functions to foster solidarity and mutual respect (Holmes, 1995, p. 117) .

- Negative Politeness:

“If you don’t mind, we’d like to propose an alternative pricing structure.”

This strategy respects the hearer’s autonomy and minimizes imposition (Brown, 1987, p. 129) .

- Hedging and Indirectness:

Lexical hedges (e.g., perhaps, maybe, it seems) were frequently used to express tentativeness and soften assertive positions, a common feature in high-context communicative cultures (Hall, 1976, p. 98) .

Overall, these politeness strategies reflect a high degree of pragmatic competence and an orientation toward face maintenance and conflict avoidance, as also observed in cross-cultural pragmatics literature (Kasper, 1993, p. 7) .

4.3 Discourse Framing and Metaphorical Language

Negotiators frequently utilized conceptual metaphors to frame interactions and align discourse with cooperative goals, consistent with (Lakoff, 1980, p. 5) theory of metaphor.

- Conflict/Game Metaphors:

“We are not here to win a battle, but to build a bridge.”

“Let’s level the playing field before we proceed.”

Such metaphors conceptualize negotiation as either conflictual or cooperative, influencing interlocutors’ orientation to the process (Cameron, 2003, p. 67).

- Collaborative Framing:

“Our goal is to row in the same direction.”

These metaphors foreground partnership and shared purpose, aligning with sociolinguistic notions of rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 42) .

The strategic use of metaphor functions as a discourse management tool, framing negotiation as a mutually beneficial endeavor rather than adversarial competition.

4.4 Cultural and Linguistic Transfer

Significant instances of cross-linguistic influence from Arabic discourse norms were observed, impacting the pragmatics of English negotiation.

- High-Context Communication:

Participants frequently relied on implicit references and culturally shared assumptions, reflecting (Hall, 1976, p. 101) characterization of Arabic as a high-context language.

- Honorifics and Formality:

Phrases such as “Dear Respected Director” and elaborate opening salutations were common, demonstrating culturally embedded norms of deference and status sensitivity (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 93) .

These features underscore the socio-cultural grounding of English use in Iraqi contexts, where L1 norms mediate L2 (Beebe, 1989, p. 198) .

4.5 Interview Themes

Analysis of interview data yielded three recurrent thematic patterns:

- Strategic Code-Switching:

Interviewees reported switching to Arabic during emotionally sensitive moments or to express cultural solidarity. This phenomenon aligns with theories of code-switching as identity performance (Gumperz, 1982, p. 76) .

- Language and Power:

Several respondents characterized English as a “neutral” or “professional” medium that facilitates clarity and minimizes emotional escalation. This perception supports the idea of English as a linguistic capital in professional Iraqi settings (Phillipson, 1992, p. 112) .

- Pragmatic Challenges:

Participants acknowledged difficulty in conveying politeness or indirectness in English, occasionally leading to unintentional rudeness:

“Sometimes I feel I sound too direct in English without meaning to. I worry the other side may think I’m rude.” – Interviewee 6

This reflects pragmatic transfer and the potential for pragmatic failure (Thomas J. , 1983, p. 98), particularly under pressure or emotional strain.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

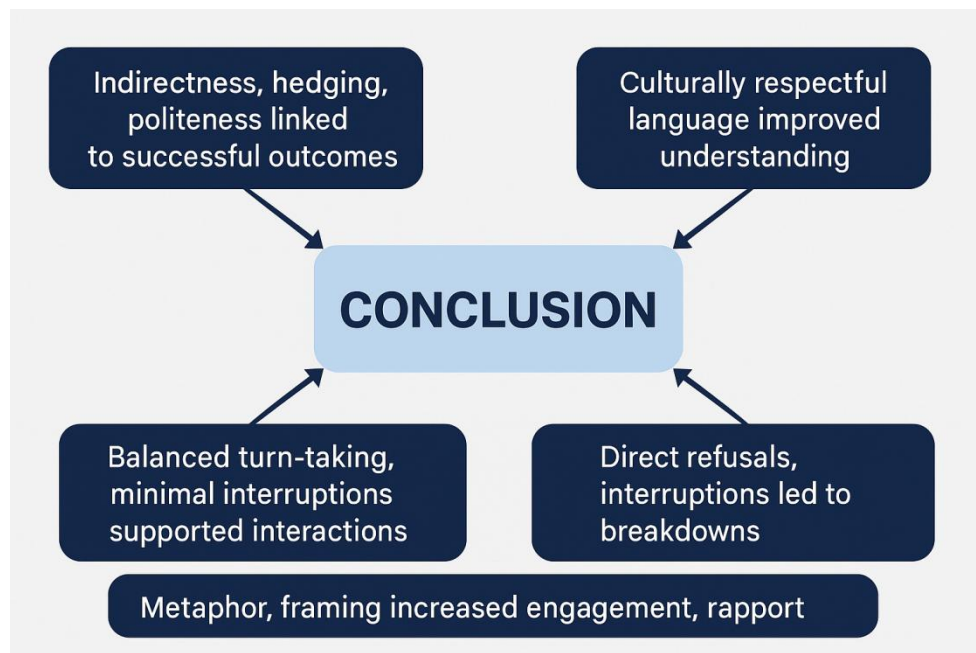
This study has affirmed that language functions not only as a channel for information transmission during negotiation but as a strategic resource for shaping interpersonal relations, managing face concerns, and achieving communicative goals. Grounded in

pragmatic theory (Searle, 1969); (Brown, 1987) (Levinson, 1987), sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982), and discourse analysis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the research has elucidated how Iraqi professionals operating in English deploy a repertoire of speech acts, politeness strategies, conceptual metaphors, and culturally embedded discourse patterns to navigate complex negotiation settings.

The findings demonstrate that effective negotiators display a high degree of pragmatic competence, evidenced by their nuanced use of indirectness, hedging, mitigation, and metaphor to foster cooperation, manage face needs, and defuse potential conflict. Moreover, the influence of Arabic socio-pragmatic norms—such as hierarchical politeness, indirectness, and formality—persists in English interactions, highlighting the phenomenon of pragmatic transfer (Thomas J. , 1983, p. 91) .

Additionally, the use of metaphorical framing shapes cognitive representations of the negotiation process, casting it alternately as a collaborative endeavor or a competitive exchange, thus influencing discourse expectations and participant engagement. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical importance of cross-cultural pragmatic awareness in multilingual negotiation contexts, especially where English serves as the lingua franca.

Figure 1: Conclusion Summary



5.2 Recommendations

In light of the data analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for negotiators, educators, and researchers operating in international, multicultural, and multilingual negotiation environments:

1. For Practicing Negotiators:

- Enhance pragmatic competence in English through exposure to authentic negotiation discourse and participation in simulation-based training.
- Employ contextually appropriate politeness strategies, taking into account the interlocutor's cultural and linguistic background.
- Be vigilant of potential pragmatic failures, especially those arising from literal translations or unawareness of differing discourse conventions (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 199) .

2. For Educators and Trainers:

- Incorporate negotiation discourse analysis into business English, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and diplomatic communication curricula.
- Focus pedagogically on speech acts, mitigation techniques, and metaphorical framing, particularly in cross-cultural and high-stakes scenarios.
- Encourage reflective practice on linguistic and cultural identity, fostering meta-pragmatic awareness among learners (Kasper & Rose, 2001, p. 2) .

3. For Future Researchers:

- Extend the current study using multimodal discourse analysis, integrating prosodic features, body language, and visual cues to provide a richer understanding of negotiation dynamics.
- Conduct comparative studies across languages and cultures, particularly examining negotiation practices in Arabic vs. English to uncover deeper patterns of cultural pragmatics.
- Investigate the evolving impact of digital platforms (e.g., email, video conferencing, AI-mediated interactions) on negotiation discourse, politeness management, and speech act realization.

5.3 Final Remarks

The intersection of language, culture, and negotiation constitutes a dynamic field of both applied linguistic inquiry and professional relevance. In an increasingly globalized and linguistically diverse world, proficiency in negotiation discourse—particularly in English—equips individuals with a critical toolset for achieving strategic objectives with diplomacy and empathy. As this study illustrates, mastering the pragmatics of negotiation language is not merely a communicative asset but a cornerstone of effective cross-cultural engagement and institutional success.

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