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硕 士 学 位 论 文

**An Application of Conversation Analysis to the
Communication between Salespeople and Prospects**

**从会话分析的角度看推销员与潜在顾客的交流
对销售结果的影响**

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Abstract

Following three basic findings (turn-taking model, adjacency pairs and overall organization) proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) through the analysis of daily conversation, and taking the sales process and communication pattern between salesperson and prospect into full account, the study has explored turn-control strategies, adjacency pair manipulations and overall organization manipulations employed by salespeople in door-to-door selling. Through the analysis of talks taking place in the documentary film *Salesman* and the first season of an American reality show *The Apprentice*, the thesis focuses on how conversation analytic strategies integrate into the selling-and-buying talks and selling techniques.

The turn-taking system comprises three basic strategies: taking the turn, holding the turn and yielding the turn. The study reveals starting up, taking over and interrupting are general devices used by the salesperson to take the turn. Holding the turn dominates the sales presentation step. In order to introduce his/her product or service fluently and fully, the salesperson uses various strategies to maintain his/her turn. Popular turn-holding strategies consist of filled pause, utterance incompleter, repetition and pre-structuring. Conversation is two-way interaction, so the salesperson needs to yield the turn and listen to the prospect as well. Adjacency pairs, nominating and addressing and tag-questions are turn-yielding strategies used by salesperson. Price is a unique turn-yielding device found in sales talk.

Adjacency pair manipulations concentrate on the application of pre-sequences. The research shows how salespeople use pre-sequences to effectively prevent the prospect's dispreferred seconds.

The overall organization manipulations study the opening and closing section of sales process. Apart from greeting-greeting/ farewell-farewell pairs and polite formulae, the salesperson adopts different methods when approaching the prospect, and produces some closing implicative topics before closing the sale.

At the end of the paper, the study also points out the limitations of the study and offers some suggestions to the further studies. Considering the data come from the film and TV, it is feasible to record and make a more comprehensive study of

selling-and-buying talk in daily life. And research focus may shift to the prospect, analysing how they use the conversation strategies.

Key words: Conversation Analytic Strategies; Sales Interview; Salesperson

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摘要

本文根据 Sacks 等人在研究自然会话结构时提出的三大会话系统（话轮替换、相邻对和整体结构）为理论框架，结合销售人员的销售面谈过程以及交流模式，以美国电影纪录片《推销员》和真人秀节目《学徒》第一季为语料，通过研究推销员如何运用话轮和相邻对的操纵策略以及对整体结构的控制来说服潜在顾客购买产品或服务。在推销过程中，推销员如何有效地将推销面谈技巧与会话分析策略相结合将是本文分析的重点。

话轮替换系统包括开始发话、持续发话以及放弃发话三大基本策略。研究表明，推销员会通过开口发话、接话和打断以获得话轮。持续发话的情况主要出现在推销洽谈环节。为了在最短的时间内最大限度地向顾客介绍产品性能，推销员需要采用各种话轮保持策略来防止其陈述被打断。搪塞语、话语未结束语、重复、前置结构等等都是常见的话轮保持策略。会话是一个双方互动的工程。在必要的时候推销员会主动把话轮让给顾客。常见的放弃发话策略有：相邻对、提名选定和反意疑问句。推销面谈所特有的放弃发话的策略是谈论价格。

相邻对的研究集中在处理顾客异议的环节上。推销员有效地适用前置序列去避免顾客提出说出不合意的第二部分。

整体结构方面侧重于推销员接近顾客和促成交易两个阶段。研究表明，初次接近顾客时除了固定的问候程序外，推销员会针对不同的顾客人群采用不同的方式。结束拜访前，双方会有一些暗示会话接受的话题。

同时论文也指出了本研究的局限性和未来研究的方向。鉴于语料来自编辑过的电影电视片段，观察录制现实生活的推销过程将更有利于针对性的研究，同时可以从顾客的角度分析其会话策略的使用。

关键词：会话分析策略；销售面谈；推销员

Transcription Conventions

- (0.5) The number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenth of a second.
- (.) A pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second
- = latching between utterances
- [] the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk
- hh indicates an audible out-breath
- :
- indicates that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater the extent of the stretching.
- () uncertain passages of transcript
- ↑ a marked rising intonational shift
- Under speaker emphasis

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Chapter1 Introduction

1.1 The Rationale of the Study

Developing from Sack's initial studies of the organization of calls to a suicide prevention centre, Conversation Analysis (CA) has been established as the pre-eminent social scientific method for the analysis of ordinary conversational interaction. And since then, researchers have applied the principles of CA in the analysis of forms of talk which are far removed from everyday conversation. Furthermore, CA continues to evolve as an interdisciplinary field of study, contributing to questions that emerge in specific disciplines but turn out to have a wider relevance (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998:229).

Personal selling, an interpersonal persuasive process designed to influence some persons' decision, is dynamic, flexible, and volatile (Chosen, 1982). With the multiplication and high frequency of selling activities in recent years, more and more researchers have shifted their attention to this issue and conducted various researches from different aspects with diverse purposes. However, these researches are mainly in the business-related fields, and no study is directed at the specific perspective –selling-and-buying conversation, from the CA's point of view.

Unique from other kinds of conversation, selling is the activity involved in providing products or services in return for money or other compensation. It is an act of completion of a commercial activity. It is considered by many to be a sort of persuading "art". However, without probing into the differences and similarities of the local structure and overall organization of this interactional process, it is difficult to explain the peculiar features that these two systems exhibit in the selling.

Although CA generally attempts to describe the orderliness, structures and sequential patterns of interaction, no systematic study on the corresponding strategies has been done. Meanwhile, a large number of selling techniques are provided by sales books, and most of them are concerned with communication and interaction with customers. Lacking linguistic analysis and supports, these techniques seem to be unsatisfactory and not persuasive enough, and hard to put into effective use. In addition, both linguistic and business reasons why such strategies are chosen by

salespersons in different circumstances remain vague. Consequently, the present study aims to fill some of these gaps.

1.2 The Objective and Significance of the Study

Well aware of the importance of an outstanding performance in the personal selling interviews, the salesperson works hard to ask for advice to improve the probability of success. Since language is the direct way to create “commonness” between salesperson and customer, language is obviously the best tool that should be made full use of. In this regard, for the salesperson, it is necessary to have basic understandings of CA, which provides rules in conversations. Accordingly, the study will first identify the way how conversation is organized and managed by participants, i.e. the turn-taking features in personal selling communication. Adjacency pairs, another basic finding of CA, will also be analyzed and explained, exhibiting its characteristics in selling.

Considering few tips and suggestions offered to salespeople are related to the linguistic aspect, this study attempts to do some researches from the perspective of conversation analysis in sales process, focusing on applying pragmatic strategies to selling communication. Integrating the selling techniques with conversational strategies is a new attempt. The author aims to select the best combining points to maximize the possibility of success for the salesperson during selling interview, which is the core of the thesis.

Furthermore, this study will look into the overall organization of selling interview, that is, the opening and closing sections, thus examining the characteristics of the selling conversations, which may be edifying for the salespeople as well.

Hopefully, the findings of the present study would bring forward some selling strategies, reveal the deep-stated reasons for both sales successes and failures, and provide some principles of CA for selling. The findings can be helpful to salesperson’s self-promotion and training programs held by various institutions to promote salespersons communicative skills.

1.3 Research Methodology

The present study on pragmatic strategies of conversation analysis in personal

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