Faculty of Humanities

School of Social Sciences and Asian Languages

Department of Asian Languages

Investigating the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations

Xiaohua Zhao

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

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Abstract

Chinese has long been perceived as being a *hánxù* (含蓄 'inscrutable') language with indirect ways of communicating. This study aims to investigate indirectness in Chinese communication by exploring the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations where vagueness plays a vital role in the communicative process. Vague language in this study is defined as inexplicit expressions used strategically, exemplified by *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little'), *kěnéng* (可能 'possibly'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *hěnduō* (很多 'many'), and *jīngcháng* (经常 'often'), etc. It should not be confused with 'misused language'. On the contrary, it is an integral part of the language and is indispensable in communication. This is one of the first attempts to study the use of vague language in real-life Chinese business negotiations, providing insights into the vagueness in Chinese language and developing possible models for effective communication in Chinese business discourse.

This research is conducted by examining linguistic representations of vague language as they occur naturally in Chinese business negotiations. Through investigating the roles vague language plays in the real-life data with salient characteristics of inexplicitness, and its socio-cultural features, the research holistically addresses the questions of what lexical and syntactic patterns of vague language are frequently used in Chinese business negotiations, how negotiators interact in the realization of vagueness using sequential patterns, and what the pragmatic and cultural reasons for the use of vague language are.

It is concluded that being communicative strategies, vague expressions should be as, or more, conventional and effective as non-vague expressions. Very often they may be preferable to non-vague expressions, because of their greater efficiency and relevance. The findings in this study are that while vague language is used for a combination of practical and interpersonal purposes, the priority is the practical functions. The ways in which it is mobilised are, in different shapes and forms and to lesser or greater degree, influenced by the social factors of age, social distance and gender. The findings of this study add an important dimension to the study of vague language and also have implications for the exploration of effective communication in general.

Acknowledgements

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Transcription conventions

(0.5)   The number in brackets indicates a time gap of five seconds.

(.)   This indicates untimed pause which is noticeable but too short to measure.

=   This indicates latching between utterances.

(overlap)   This indicates overlapping utterances. No gap between lines.

…   Dots indicate a pause.

(indistinct) This indicates inaudible.

(?)   This indicates that the preceding word is not 100 percent clear.

(laugh)   This indicates a laugh sound.

【…】   This indicates a section of the extract is left out.

List of Abbreviations

VL: vague language

VEs: vague expressions

A+: older age

A-: younger age

F: female

M: male

D-: friends

D=: acquaintances

D+: strangers

N: negotiations

S: speakers

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the study

Popper (1992 p. 24) points out that 'One should never try to be more precise than the problem situation demands.' Similarly, Jucker, Smith and Ludgec (2003) state that when we speak or write, we are rarely very clear, precise, or explicit about what we mean - and perhaps can not be - but are, on the contrary, vague, indirect, and unclear about just what we are committed to. The ability to vary the precision of utterances and to use them in appropriate contexts is thus part of the speaker's communicative competence, and the interpretation of such expressions is a natural part of language use. It follows that an understanding of the nature and the role of vagueness in language use is critical to an understanding of language itself.

In this study a vague expression (VE, hereafter) is defined as a linguistic unit without clear-cut meaning boundary, and vague language (VL, hereafter) refers to language which has an inherently unspecified or underspecified meaning in the context in which it occurs and can be utilized as a communicative strategy (Zhang 1998, Cheng and Warren 2003 and Ruzaite 2007).

Traditionally, vagueness in language use is something considered to be undesirable. The perception of vagueness as a negative feature of language is mainly based on the essentialist attitude to meaning (Plato 1914; Aristotle 1946, 1963). However, this tradition contradicts with the fact that VL is used pervasively. Rather than being undesirable, it is regularly employed and is regarded as an effective means in communication. Channell (1994) is considered to be one of the earliest researchers to investigate vagueness systematically, based on English data. According to Channell, 'a complete theory of language must have vagueness as an integral component'

(1994, p. 5), suggesting the understanding of VL use is of significance. Using an empirical approach, Jucker *et al.* (2003) and Cutting (2007) demonstrated that VEs could be more effective than precise expressions in conveying the intended meaning of an utterance in our daily life.

Chinese has long been perceived as being an inscrutable language with indirect ways of communicating. Wu (1999), Chen and Wu (2002) and Zhang (1998, 2004, 2005), among others, investigated the phenomenon of vagueness in Mandarin Chinese. They state that VL is part of our normal everyday language, and it is just as important, if not more, as so-called non-vague language. Although VL is an indispensable part of language, it has been ignored for quite a long time. In particular, few previous works have been done on the use of VL in real-life Chinese business negotiations. This study intends to fill this gap, by providing insights into the vagueness in Chinese language and developing possible models for effective communication in Chinese business discourse.

China has a long history of civilization and its language use is full of cultural elements and traits. China's rich and profound socio-cultural influence contributes to the intricacy of the Chinese language. It would be intriguing to see how social and cultural factors impact VL's linguistic representations and pragmatic use in Chinese business negotiations, which are practical as well as deeply culture-influenced.

China is fast becoming one of the most important powerhouses in the world, with an ever-increasingly large market. To establish and maintain a good business relationship with the Chinese requires well informed and effective communication strategies. As the Chinese people are very culture-rooted, which has great influence on their communication behaviours, the awareness of communication strategies and their cultural root is crucial in business negotiations with the Chinese, in order to achieve mutual understanding and good business deals. This study intends to explore the linguistic patterns from the perspective of VL use, to enhance the understanding

of the Chinese business culture, and to promote communicating with Chinese business people in a more effective and efficient way. The findings will add an important dimension to the study of VL and also have implications for the exploration of effective communication in general.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The research question of this study is how VL is employed strategically in naturally-occurring Chinese business negotiations. It is addressed by the following four objectives:

1. Identifying the lexical and syntactic patterns of VL used in Chinese business negotiations, including their forms and frequencies;

2. Investigating the pragmatic functions of VL and the underpinning socio-cultural factors for the use of VL in Chinese business negotiations;

3. Exploring the negotiators' interactive moves using sequential analysis;

4. Speculating on the implications of the findings on the study of Chinese business communication and communication in general.

The four objectives are interlinked and dependent on each other. The first one lays a basic foundation for the rest of the three, and the second and the third are both looking at VL through an interactive approach. The last objective will be addressed after the first three are dealt with. The achievement of the above four objectives will explicate how and why the Chinese use VL as communicative strategies in their business negotiations, the relevant socio-cultural factors, and how effective these communicative strategies are.

This research attempts to more holistically study the use of VL at the lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and interactional level respectively in the context of Chinese business negotiations. Furthermore, this study investigates interactional aspects of vagueness and uses spontaneous language data to provide a more natural account of language use. To do this, the researcher has collected a corpus that consists of real-life data of business negotiations held by native Mandarin Chinese speakers in the People's Republic of China.

What distinguishes this research from previous studies on vagueness is that this study explores sequential flow and accomplishment of effective interaction using VEs, among others. It also addresses an important problem in the existing study of vagueness: focusing primarily on single and isolated utterances. This study adopts an interactional framework, i.e. exploring VEs by studying their roles in sequential organization (unfolding interaction). A comprehensive analysis of sequential organization in this study reveals more than isolated utterances, in terms of the negotiating efforts of the speaker and the hearer, and linguistic patterns underpinned by relevant socio-cultural factors.

1.3 Approach and methodology

The primary approach employed in this research is Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974, Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998, ten Have 1999). Conversation Analysis (CA, hereafter) is an empirical approach to the study of spoken conversation which examines what happens in actual talk and expounds the participant's own methods for production and interpretation of social interactions. The central goal of CA is to discover a system of talk by offering the description and explication of recurrent structural characteristics of talk-in-interactions. CA is employed as the foremost approach in terms of the choice of data and the method of data analysis in the present study. This research is an empirical study, and the data

were naturally recorded using a digital voice recorder. There were in total five business negotiations by native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, and the events occurred and were recorded in China from January 2008 to March 2008. Based on the objectives of this research mentioned above, five suitable companies were selected, with the support of managers and willing participants in the five respective business negotiations.

Although it would be challenging to collect spontaneous spoken data of any business negotiations due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of commercial information, the researcher sought necessary assistance in a reciprocal way by ensuring to share the research findings while guaranteeing no breaching of privacy and confidentiality. The findings would be of interest to the companies in that they may get to know which VL strategies are effective and which are not, and that may enhance their future success in business negotiations.

Four levels of data analysis were undertaken, including parts of speech and combinational analysis at the lexical level, syntactic analysis, pragmatic analysis and sequential strategy analysis involving sequential organization (turn-opening, turn-holding, turn-taking and turn-yielding) and strategies of turn change, shift, drift and resumption.

The core framework of the coding system of this study is primarily based on the works of Channell (1994) and Zhang (1998, 2004a, 2004b and 2005). See Chapter 3 for details.

1.4 Organization of the study

The present study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant and significant works in the fields of VL and business communication from five

perspectives. Chapter 3 describes the approach and methodology of this study. Chapter 4 discusses the parts of speech analysis. Chapter 5 presents the results of the combinational lexical analysis. Chapter 6 analyzes VL at syntactic level. Chapter 7 explores pragmatic and socio-cultural factors of VL use. Chapter 8 studies the sequential strategies of interaction through VL. Finally, Chapter 9 presents the conclusions and implications of the present study.

Chapter 2 Previous studies

This chapter reviews the most relevant and significant works in the fields of VL and business communication from the following five perspectives: definitions of VL, the development of VL studies, linguistic vagueness, business communication and VL, and social functions of VL.

2.1 Definitions of VL

While Zhang (1998) distinguishes the following four concepts: fuzziness, vagueness, ambiguity and generality, most researchers use vagueness and fuzziness interchangeably. Generally speaking, fuzziness tends to be used in science-related fields, such as mathematics and logic, and vagueness tends to be used in other fields including linguistics and psychology. As Cotterill (2007), and Adolphs, Atkins and Harvey (2007) point out that there is relatively little terminological consensus on vagueness; in fact the boundaries of these categories are frequently blurred in the literature.

Black (1949) defines that vagueness of a word is the finite area of its application and lack of specification of the boundary of the area. VL has been referred to by scholars as 'fuzziness, vague language, generality, ambiguity and even ambivalence' (He 2000, p.7), 'imprecision' or 'imprecise language use' (Crystal and Davy 1975, pp.112-14; Dubois 1987). Stubbs (1996, p. 202) places 'vague language and lack of commitment' in opposition to 'certainty and commitment', where VL is equated with uncertainty. Channell (1994, p. 20) defines VL broadly, as language which 'can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition' and which is 'purposely and unabashedly vague'.

Cheng and Warren (2003) discuss the issues involving indirectness, inexplicitness and vagueness. They state that VL covers a closed set of identifiable items which are

inherently imprecise, and which the participants interpret based on an understanding of what the speaker is indicating: that what is said is not to be interpreted precisely (pp.394-395). In other words, VL can be interpreted without recourse to judgments based on the particular context in which they occur. They argue that given that the precise meaning cannot be retrieved by the hearer, the successful use of VL requires the participants in the discourse to have a shared understanding of the relative status of a particular set of vague items. For the purposes of this study, in line with Zhang (1998), Cheng and Warren (2003) and Ruzaite (2007), a VE is defined here as a linguistic unit without clear-cut meaning boundary and VL refers to an underspecified language.

2.2 The development of VL studies

Vagueness is a common phenomenon in communication. However, little attention has been paid to it. Peirce (1902), one of the earlier scholars who discuss the notion of vagueness in language, focuses his attention on natural language. Peirce (1902, p. 748) states:

> A proposition is vague when there are possible states of things concerning which it is intrinsically uncertain whether, had they been contemplated by the speaker, he would have regarded them as excluded or allowed by the proposition. By intrinsically uncertain we mean not uncertain in consequence of any ignorance of the interpreter, but because the speaker's habits of language were indeterminate; so that one day he would regard the proposition as excluding, another as admitting, those states of things.

Peirce suggests that VL is an integral part of language and the speaker's language habits are indeterminate. Peirce stresses the importance of the concept of 'intrinsically uncertain', which is echoed in Channell's (1994) work. It is the speaker's indeterminate interpretation of language that causes vagueness. This point

could be construed to imply that objects in the world are not vague. Vagueness occurs only when they are represented in language and especially interpreted by speakers. Similarly, Zhang (1996) argues for the concept of language vagueness, rather than that of the objective world.

Russell (1923) argues that vagueness is a matter of degree, depending on the extent of the possible differences between different systems represented by the same representation. Vagueness in our knowledge is, as he believes, merely a particular case of a general law of physics, namely the law that what may be called the appearance of an object at different places is less and less differentiated as we get further away from the object. His argument concurs with Peirce's (1902) claim that vagueness is manifested in language. Linguistic vagueness is important to the representation of our knowledge of the world, and the way in which humans prefer to interact with each other, effectively and strategically.

There have been several schools of thought concerning how to deal with this property of natural language. Some philosophers, with Wittgenstein (1967) being a representative, regard this property as a troublesome demerit of natural language, thus they work to find out or construct precise scientific language with mathematics and logic as the remedy for this demerit. On the contrary, other philosophers insist that it is impossible to be absolutely precise, and vagueness of natural language is inevitable and necessary for the sake of being efficient when natural language is used to express various thoughts (Ballmer and Pinkal 1983; Burns 1991). There are still some other scholars who consider vagueness of natural language as people's ignorance of how to define vague words or expressions (Kempson 1977). Ullmann (1972, p. 118) provides an explanation about the sources of vagueness in natural language. He attributes vagueness to four factors:

a. generic character of words;

b. context-bound meaning;

c. lack of clear-cut boundaries in the non-linguistic world;

d. lack of familiarity with what the words stand for.

Along the same line, Wu (1979, 1980), the founder of the study of vague language in Chinese, asserts that vagueness is saturated in the process of man's feeling and thinking. Furthermore, he points out that the vague nature of languages is influenced by geographical areas, politics, economy and society. That is to say, vague words vary with timeframes, nationalities, social status, professions, educational background, political and economic situations, employment, different languages, gender, and the dynamic development of language.

Most of the studies in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are of the 'implicitness' variety; theorists are aware of the social dimension but they are not interested in examining the language itself in any great detail. Garfinkel (1967 p.3) talks of 'unstated understandings', and Bernstein (1971) includes context-dependent sentences. Goffman (1963) examines the way that social and interpersonal contexts 'provide presuppositions for the decoding of meaning' (Schiffrin 1994, p.105). Grice (1975, p. 41) considers implicitness as conversational implicature, in which speakers flout the maxims of the 'cooperative principle' (quantity, quality, manner and relevance), assuming that the hearer understands the implied meaning. Note that whereas conventional implicature is the logical relationship between two utterances where the truth of one suggests the truth of the other, conversational implicature is the indirect, unstated meaning of an utterance, additional to what is said. Gumperz (1982, p. 131) argues that members of social groups use implicitness: 'exclusive interaction with individuals of similar background leads to reliance on unverbalized and context-bound presuppositions in communication'.

Lakoff (1972, p. 183) points out that in phrases such as 'sort of' there is a meaning that 'implicitly involves fuzziness'. Crystal and Davy (1975, pp. 111-112) mention 'vague collectives' ('bags of'), 'number approximations' ('about 30') and 'dummy nouns' ('thing', 'stuff') and acknowledge that 'lack of precision is one of the most important features of the vocabulary of informal conversation'.

In the 1990s, researchers came to see VL as central aspect of the communicative competence. Since then, the study of VL is increasingly becoming more wide ranging, comprehensive and systematic. Channell (1994, p.193), one of the most quoted scholars in the field, affirms that an expression or word is vague if 1) it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition, if 2) it is purposely and unabashedly vague or if 3) the meaning arises from intrinsic uncertainty. Channell agrees with Peirce (1902) that a vague expression is intrinsically indeterminate and also points out, rightly, that VL is used strategically. However, Channell's statement 'it can be contrasted with another word or expression which appears to render the same proposition' (1994, p. 193) is rather vague itself. Zhang's definition, 'a vague word has no clear-cut meaning boundary' (1998, p.14) appears to be clearer.

Channell (1994, p. 193) states that 'Any social group sharing interests and knowledge employs non-specificity in talking about their shared interest'. What she emphasises here is one of the important social functions of vague language, in that it can strengthen solidarity among social groups. Particularly, the vague category identifiers (e.g. 'and all that') can often show the in-group identity, as utterances embedded with vague category identifiers presuppose a group's shared knowledge and interests. Channell's analysis of VEs shows that 'their meanings are themselves vague', that 'speakers share knowledge of how to understand them', and that 'it is apparently impossible to describe their meanings independently of consideration of context and inference' (ibid. pp. 196-198). She lists 'vague additives' ('around ten'), 'vague implicature' such as approximators and quantifiers ('15,000 died'), 'vague placeholders' ('thingy' and 'whatsisname'), and 'tags' ('or something', 'and things' and 'and so on') (ibid. pp. 196-198). Channell's three categories provide a comprehensive description of the various ways of approximating quantities in English, the different ways of referring vaguely to categories (e.g. 'or something like that'), and the totally vague words (e.g. 'thingy', 'whatsisname'). These well-

defined categories have been adopted widely by other scholars in the field (e.g. Cutting 2007, Ruzaite 2007), as well as in this current study (see Chapter 3 for details).

Since Channell, VL has been recognized as 'a pervasive property of texts, and a property of considerable social importance' (Fairclough 2003, p. 55) and 'an important feature of interpersonal meaning / --- / especially common in everyday conversation' (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 202). Carter and McCarthy (1997, pp. 16-19) claim that:

> General words / --- / are widely used in spoken discourse / --- / general words *thing and stuff* are among the most frequent words in spoken English / --- / Vague expressions are more extensive in all language use than is commonly thought and they are especially prevalent in spoken discourse / --- / In most informal contexts most speakers prefer to convey information which is softened in some way by vague language.

Carter and McCarthy's above argument is supported by Biber *et al*. (1999) that the use of VL is more widespread in spoken language. The pervasive use of VL in the data of spoken Chinese in this current research also supports these arguments. One debatable point though is that Carter and McCarthy seem to suggest that VL is preferred more in informal situations than in formal situations. The findings of this study however, indicate to the contrary that VL is favoured by the negotiators in Chinese business negotiations, which is an institutional and formal discourse.

At the end of the twentieth century, VL was finding its way into grammar books. The *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber *et al*. 1999, p. 265) touches on it briefly under the headings of other features, explaining that approximators convey imprecision, that hedges such as 'like' can indicate imprecision of word choice, and that in generic reference the noun 'refers to a whole

class rather than to an individual person or thing'. By 2006, VL had a section of several pages to itself in the Cambridge Grammar of English (Carter and McCarthy 2006, pp. 202-205). There it is seen as a separate, though closely related, category from 'approximations'. VL is described as words or phrases 'which deliberately refer to people and things in a non-specific, imprecise way' (ibid. p. 928), such as 'stuff', 'like', 'or something', 'or whatever', and 'sort of'. Approximations as described as VEs are used with numbers and quantities, as in '<u>around</u> six', 'five minutes <u>or so</u>', 'seven-<u>ish</u>', and 'loads and loads'.

Research on VL has also looked at discourse types such as English plays (Graves and Hodge 1947), advertising (Leech 1964; Myers 1994), bio-medical slide talks (Dubois 1987), academic writing on economics (Channell 1990), a group task that requires coordinated actions among the members (Erev *et al.* 1991), occupational standards (Drave 1995), ESL writing by Chinese students (Allison 1995), patents (Myers 1995), and telephone conversations (Urbanova 1999). Larger-scale studies (such as Kennedy 1987; Channell 1985, 1994) draw their examples from both speech and writing across a number of genres. However, it appears that there is little work which explores the function of VL in business genre, particularly in Chinese business negotiations. There is a need to work on this area; this present study is an attempt to meet the need.

Furthermore, it is generally recognized that the employment of VL is more widespread in spoken discourse than in written (Biber *et al.* 1999), although the use of VL varies across spoken genres. One reason for this is that in spoken discourse, participants are more likely to share a context than in written discourse, and they usually have the possibility of supplementing verbal communication with non-verbal communication. Another reason is the difference in expectations relating to precision: informal spoken genres demand less precision than formal written ones (Cook 1989, p. 71). These fundamental differences between face-to-face spoken communication and written communication have implications for the interpretation

of VL and also form part of the explanation for VL's wider use in spoken discourse. In the same vein, the findings of the present study have underlined the importance and prevalence of VL in spoken discourse. Nonetheless, the use of VL as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations has received relatively little attention and so this study intends to be a small step to strengthen this aspect.

The following will review the most relevant previous VL works to the focus of the present study, which consists of three perspectives: linguistic vagueness, VL in business communication, and social functions of VL.

2.3 Linguistic vagueness

2.3.1 VL as an integral part of language

Channell (1994), who is one of the earliest researchers of VL, studied vagueness based on English data typically in non-institutional contexts. According to Channell, 'a complete theory of language must have vagueness as an integral component' (1994, p. 5). Channell provides a comprehensive description of various ways of approximating quantities in English, of various ways of referring vaguely to categories (e.g. *or something like that*), and of totally vague words, such as *thingy* or *whatsisname*. Channell argues for a more general point that 'vagueness in language is neither all 'bad' nor all 'good'. What matters is that vague language is used appropriately' (1994, p. 3). She notes that the important issue is to identify contexts in which vagueness is appropriate. Channell points out that vagueness in communication is part of our taken-for-granted world, and normally we do not notice it unless it appears inappropriate. Vagueness is present in a great deal of language use. If language were not vague, it would not permit adequate communication (Daitz 1956). Vagueness is caused by the world (in the most general sense) in which language is used. The language system permits speakers to produce utterances without having decided whether certain facts are excluded or allowed by them.

Wu (1979, 1980), the founder of the study of VL in Chinese, who introduced Zadeh's (1965) fuzzy set theory to linguistics in China during late 1970s, asserts that the grade of membership and membership function are two important concepts that describe the transition of differences and they are approximating of precision to fuzziness. Wu (1999), based primarily on Mandarin Chinese language, discusses extensively the impacts of fuzzy language on lexics, lexicology, etymology, rhetoric, and pragmatics. He claims that the function of linguistic hedges can be classified as: the hedges only modifying fuzzy words and the hedges modifying both fuzzy words and precise words. Precise meanings of precise words modified by hedges become fuzzy. The current research supports this claim in terms of the use of pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers (two new terms coined in this study) in the discourse of Chinese business negotiations. (See Chapter 5 for more details.)

In addition, Wu (1999) argues that if a word is fuzzy in a certain language, its counterparts in all languages are always fuzzy. Fuzziness is also a common means of rhetoric, and in rhetorical means, fuzziness can play a role that precision can not play. According to Wu, language (no matter scientific language or everyday language) has not only precise words, but also fuzzy words, and these two contradictory parties also convert into the opposite party under certain conditions, which has been proved by the present study as well. (See Chapter 5 for more details). Fuzziness of language is reflected in many aspects, such as phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary, particularly in the aspects of vocabulary and its meanings.

Wu (1999) asserts that fuzziness is saturated in the most process of man's feeling and thinking. Language description is fuzzy in nature as this kind of description is often a summary description of complex situations (Dubois and Prade 1980). In a sense, there would be no natural language if there were no fuzzy words.

Zhang (1996, 1998, 2001, 2004a, 2004b and 2005) investigates the phenomenon of fuzziness/vagueness, particularly in Mandarin Chinese, from the aspects of semantics, formal semantics and pragmatics. She argues that the vague nature of words is what natural language inherently has. VL is part of our normal everyday language, and it is just as important as so-called non-vague language. VL is something we live by; we need it for communication as we need air to breathe. In fact, we need VL for every aspect of our daily communication, as much, if not more, as we need non-vague language.

Russell (1999) claims that vagueness is a matter of degree, but it is inevitably characteristic of all natural language. Along the same line, the present research treats all language as being unavoidably vague, and supports that language is vague to different degrees (Ullmann 1972) and purposefully or strategically vague as a communicative strategy. Zhang (2004a) asserts that the law of Excluded Middle is impractical, due to the existence of the vague nature of natural language; fuzzy semantics is an indispensable part of semantics, which is also an important aspect of linguistics. It should not be held that natural language should be absolutely precise. Vagueness does not mean abuse or misuse of words. It is a scientific concept expressing the indeterminacy of the extension of meaning boundary. Vagueness is not a defect, but a characteristic of human language and thinking.

Zhang (2004a) states that vagueness tends to occur when we try to figure out their reference or denotation. More precisely, in terms of denotational meaning we tend to agree more on the core member of a VE's denotation. VEs have non-vague sense, an agreeable core part of denotation, but vague peripheral denotation. This claim has been empirically verified by her work, for example, nearly all subjects agreed that 200 belongs to 'about 200', but their answers varied on the membership of 150 or 250 to 'about 200'.

Channell (1994) explicates the concepts of vagueness and ambiguity. Ambiguity has traditionally been identified where a sentence has two or more competing but distinct meanings attached to it, whereas vagueness is seen where distinct meanings can not be identified. Additionally, ambiguity is rarely a factor in real communication because hearers read off a meaning without even realizing that there could have been another one. Zhang (1996, 1998) provides a more comprehensive analysis among four concepts: ambiguity, vagueness, fuzziness and generality. She makes an important point that context cannot eliminate vagueness, while it may remove ambiguity. Vagueness is an inherent characteristic of natural language. More importantly, it is also unnecessary to remove vagueness which is an integral part of language.

Channell (1994) states for a general approach to theories of language and communication, there are two significant implications of research into the use of VL. One is that VL is very frequent. It begins to look as though vagueness occurs as much or more than precision. It clearly is not the case that most language use is precise, with vagueness being occasionally appropriate. The second implication is that language users plainly have no particular difficulties with VL. Human cognition is well set up to process vague concepts.

2.3.2 Pragmatic roles of VL

Crystal and Davy (1975) investigated vagueness from a pragmatic point of view. They point out that the choice of a vague item is deliberate to maintain the atmosphere. Channell (1994, p. 194) states that VL is used for the following communicative purposes and situations:

1. Giving the right amount of information
2. Deliberately withholding information
3. Using language persuasively
4. Lexical gaps

5. lacking specific information

6. Displacement

7. Self-protection

8. Power and politeness

9. Informality and atmosphere

10. Women's language

'The widespread use of vagueness for varied purposes and in varied settings demonstrates what an important aspect it is of language users' knowledge of their language' (1994, p. 194). The current research will adopt some of the above Channell's pragmatic functions in analysis.

Zhang (2005) states that vagueness tends to have invariant sense/core part of denotation and variant peripheral part of denotation, we can then assume that vagueness is closely associated with the real world. The reason is that the denotation or reference of an expression relates to the extralinguistic world, things like entities, states of affairs etc. When we try to define the denotation of an expression, we have to consider pragmatic factors that affect the meaning of the expression in one way or another, which leads to what we call pragmatic vagueness. Vague meaning of expressions is very much a pragmatic matter, as its meaning depends heavily on context (linguistic or non-linguistic) or situation. The interpretation of a VE is influenced by all sorts of pragmatic factors, some of which are listed below.

1. Scale effects

The interpretation of a VE can be affected by the scale onto which they are mapped.

2. The item being modified

The meaning of VEs may also depend on the size and nature of the objects being modified and on the spatial situations surrounding the objects (Zhang, 2005).

In addition, Zhang (2005) points out that very often, cultural differences dominate how we understand and interpret meaning. For example, in China divorce has always been something disapproved of culturally. So, if we compare 'There are *many* divorce cases in China' with 'There are *many* divorce cases in the United States', one would have a lower expectation and give a lower rate for the former but a higher expectation and rate for the latter. Another example, in Chinese culture it is not rare to see married children with their spouse and children, still living with their parents especially in rural areas. Therefore, 'some' in '*Some* married children still live with their parents' would be given a relatively higher expectation and therefore a higher rate if it refers to China. The above two examples demonstrate that cultural influence plays a great role here and we have to be aware of it in order to fully understand/recognize meanings that tangle with cultural factors. This claim by Zhang is also supported by this study with respect to the impact of cultural factors on the use of VL as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations. Zhang (2005) illustrates that there are many more factors which affect the interpretation of VEs, such as sex, location, occupation etc. For example, how tall is a 'tall person', depends on all sorts of factors. In general, men are taller than women; Europeans are taller than Asians; professional basketballers are taller than ordinary people.

From Zhang's (2005) point of view, language users interpret VL according to what is available and what is preferred. That is to say that we should consider both input and context together to render a more appropriate interpretation. While certain VEs' meaning can be measured in numbers (e.g. 'many', 'about 20', 'a tall person' etc), the majority cannot be represented in numbers. Also, sometimes we do not know or cannot agree on the exact numerical value for certain VEs. Even if we know the exact numerical value, for some reason (safe guarding oneself, withholding information etc) we may still not disclose it, just as Sperber and Wilson (2002) point out that speakers might be unwilling or unable to provide certain relevant information.

Guilbaud (1977), a mathematician, also argues the necessity of vagueness for communication, even for life, 'Talking and thinking by means of 'about', 'nearly' is a necessity.' Cutting (2007) states VL can have an informal and socially cohesive function. VL is the central feature of daily language in use, both spoken and written. She insists that the term 'vague language' is greatly different from the term 'implicitness'. In her terms, studies of VL look at language that is inherently and intentionally imprecise, describing lexical and grammatical surface features themselves that may refer either to specific entities or to nothing in particular. Studies of implicitness mention whole bodies of underlying meaning, and language dependent on the context, based on unspoken assumptions and unstated meaning. Implicitness can be expressed with VL and other language features. VL can express implicit meaning but it can also be taken at its face value which is not implicit. Hence, vagueness and implicitness should not be considered as the same thing.

He (2003) claims that vagueness is rather a pragmatic phenomenon than a semantic one and advocates conducting a dynamic investigation from the pragmatic perspective on the basis of affirming the achievements made by the static researches. His early explorations on pragmatic vagueness consist of all the vague concepts that cannot be analysed by two-valued logic, including fuzziness, indeterminacy, probability, ambiguity, and generality, etc. Different types of pragmatic vagueness, such as continuum type, categorical type, appraisal type, and hedging type are also presented. He argues that pragmatic vagueness can make utterance more appropriate and more tactful in certain contexts.

2.3.3 Interactive aspects of VL

Interactive aspects of VL in conversation were discussed by Jucker, *et al.* (2003) within the framework of Relevance Theory (RT, Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 1998, 2002; Wilson and Sperber 2004). Sperber and Wilson (2002) point out correctly that intuitively relevance is a matter of degree, rather than an all-or-none

matter. That is to say that the criterion for picking out the most relevant one is on the principle of the greater positive cognitive effects and the lower processing efforts. Vagueness of language discussed here is similar to what they called 'loose use of language', meaning that people use words in a loose sense.

The analysis of Jucker *et al.* (2003) is based on a corpus of semi-controlled spoken interactions between California students, who were asked to converse on specific topics, such as movies, sports or opera. They draw a special attention to the interactive aspects of VL in everyday conversation. One of the main arguments is that VL can be more effective and preferred than precision and rarely leads to misunderstandings, and the success depends on the exploitation of common ground. That is, VEs may carry more relevant contextual implications than would a precise expression, because of their greater efficiency (Sperber and Wilson 1995, pp. 46-48), and VL may yield the same contextual assumptions for lower processing costs.

An important point made in Jucker *et al.* (2003) is that the speaker entertains only some of the analytical and contextual implications of the proposition. The hearer is expected to construct a subset of analytical and contextual implications as intended by the speaker to achieve shared discourse goals. It implies the speaker's assumption that the hearer is able to discover the implications he wants to convey. Thus, the choice of the propositional form of an utterance also depends on the speaker's evaluation of the hearer's cognitive abilities as well as on her assumptions about the common ground that she shares with him. The hearer always tries to select a subset of implications which are relevant in a particular context. The hearer should not process the utterance in the most literal sense. That is, the utterance can achieve optimal relevance if it is not interpreted literally by the hearer. These premises do not guarantee that communication succeeds. Certainly one might expect that the risk of misunderstandings is higher in vague uses of language than in more precise statements.

Zhang (2004a), along the same line of Jucker *et al.* (2003), also affirms that semantic fuzziness can also be explained by RT (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995), i.e. the application of semantic fuzziness conforms with the principles of RT. Specifically, it conforms with the principle of achieving the optimal cognitive effect with least processing effort. Zhang argues that it is communicators themselves who decide whether optimal relevance is achieved or not, rather than the language form (vague or non-vague) used. People can skilfully adjust the deployment of different language forms (vague, non-vague) or choose appropriate interpretations to suit different situations and their specific communication needs.

Jucker *et al*. (2003) argue that VEs appear to be especially important in managing conversational implicature. Firstly, VEs may serve as focusing devices, directing the hearer's attention to the most relevant information. For example, the speaker who wants to talk about an event involving a house repair can refer to various people involved in a way that just allows the addressee to identify them in generic terms. His purposes in referring to each person – how individual and salient he wants each to be – will determine the level of vagueness selected. Secondly, they may guide the listener in interpreting the goodness of fit of a characteristic to a conceptual category. For instance, speakers try to characterise events and experiences by assigning them to categories (I feel *silly*, He is my *friend*, etc.). Thirdly, they may place descriptions on a scale and thus provide a reference point that may be especially relevant for drawing inferences. For example, speakers often want to quantify the amount, frequency, or probability of events and their characteristics. Finally, they may also convey several aspects of propositional attitude. For instance, speakers may want to convey their level of certainty for a claim or their evaluation of a situation, and convey social-interactional meanings of various kinds. VEs may serve various social functions. They may serve as politeness strategies, softening implicit complaints and criticisms. They also provide a way of establishing a social bond.

Jucker *et al.* (2003) make a distinction between conceptual and procedural meanings. They claim that vague additives (e.g. 'about', 'somewhat') ordinarily convey procedural rather than conceptual meaning. They do not tell the hearer something about the real world, but rather give him processing instructions for the optimally relevant interpretation of the utterance. In Jucker *et al.*'s data, apparent misunderstandings were rare. This seems to provide evidence for the claim that interlocutors generally do not have problems in understanding vagueness. They are apparently able to find an interpretation which they consider good enough for the purposes of the conversation. The analysis carried out in the present research also reflects the more applied approach of Jucker *et al.*, who see vagueness as an interactional strategy, a resource which speakers have at their disposal to draw upon in their talk. Business negotiators are faced with numerous communicative tasks, and the negotiations are certainly interactive and they are often vague for strategic reasons. Smith and Jucker (1998) also argue that speakers constantly negotiate their common ground, seeking and providing cues as to the partner's beliefs and the current accessibility of beliefs that are relevant to the interpretation of a vague utterance. Varying the level of vagueness may help them to achieve the intended goals as well.

The significance of the works of Cotterill (2007) and Adolphs *et al.* (2007) is that they used discourse segments to make their points. Cotterill (2007) states that the extracts chosen for discussion attempt to illustrate a widespread phenomenon found in courtroom discourse. Witnesses and defendants use markers of vagueness of many kinds, but particularly those which express fuzziness in the form of approximators ('some sort of', 'kind of', 'a bit', 'whatever', 'this, that and the other') and 'etcetera' additives or tags ('and everything', 'sort of thing', 'something like that'), are particular sites of interactional trouble in the courtroom, and are invariably picked up by lawyers on both sides of the legal divide. Adolphs *et al.* (2007) investigated the use of VL in naturally occurring everyday healthcare interaction. They have shown how the institutional requirements influence the choice of VL items, and how VL

facilitates the goals of the interactions. It is now well recognized that language behaviors can be better identified through examining turn-management patterns rather than through examining single utterance; therefore, it is necessary that this research attempts to introduce an interactional approach in the study of vagueness in the discourse of Chinese business negotiations, taking sequential interaction into consideration (see Chapter 8 for details), which distinguishes this study from most previous studies on vagueness.

Tannen (1996) considers that VL can sometimes hinder communication, as it may imply a lack of honesty and consideration and can cause misunderstanding , the same line is held in Cutts (2001). R. Lakoff (1990) however disagrees with the above arguments. Based on the case of legal communication, she advocates the necessity of VL in legal contexts, by claiming that laws must be ambiguous to some extent, as it is impossible to foresee all the contexts to which they will be applied in the future. Hence, VL allows laws to be flexible. The aspect of all-inclusiveness of laws as the main justification for the lack of comprehensibility of legal language is a major argument in Bhatia's (1993) study. Cotterill (2007), however, argues that it is important to be cautious in any attempt to interpret a speaker's motivation for producing VL. This is true especially in forensic contexts such as the courtroom or the police interview, where the possibility of deliberate deception is relatively high compared to most other settings. As O'Keeffe (2004a, p. 9) notes, without access to the speakers for personal reflection, and only then assuming sincere responses, 'we cannot know for certain whether they chose to take linguistic shortcuts: a) to be 'deliberately and unresolvably vague' (Powell 1985, p. 31), or b) to be expeditious and adhere to conversational norms of quantity.' Having in mind that VL may be viewed by interlocutors both negatively and positively, it is important to address the question of when VL is or should be used deliberately and when it is an impediment to successful communication and should thus be avoided.

In summary, while works on VL in linguistics reviewed in this section have laid a good foundation for the current research in terms of VL semantic analysis frameworks and pragmatic functions, few works adopted the approach of CA (Sacks *et al.* 1974), where discourse segments are the focus of analysis, which is what this study attempts to do.

2.4 Business communication and VL

2.4.1 Business communication

Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini (1997) state practitioners as well as academics have clearly begun to recognize that 'talk' in its broadest sense is central to the conduct of business at all levels and that there are in existence a number of definable sub-generic types of business discourse, e.g. negotiations, meetings, service encounters, some of which have been studied much more frequently and intensively than others (negotiations) and from different perspectives. The focus of the present study is spoken discourse, on which, as Firth (1995) points out, there is still a paucity of work undertaken in business context.

2.4.1.1 Negotiation

The word 'negotiation' is from its verb 'negotiate', which derives from the Latin infinitive *negotari* with the meaning 'to trade or do business'. This verb itself was derived from another word, *nagare*, meaning 'to deny' and a noun, *otium*, meaning 'leisure or ease' (Korobkin 2003, p. 15).

According to Ike (1968, p. 13), negotiation is 'To begin with, two elements must normally be present for negotiation to take place: There must be both common interests and issues of conflict. Without common interests, there is nothing to

negotiate for, without conflicting issues nothing to negotiate about.' Max (1979, p. 15) defines it as 'a process in which two or more parties, who have both common interests and conflicting interests, put forth and discuss explicit proposals concerning specific terms of a possible agreement.' Korobkin (2003, p. 1) gives his broad definition that 'negotiation is an interactive communication process by which two or more parties who lack identical interests attempt to find a way to coordinate their behaviour or allocate scarce resources in a way that will make them better off than they could be if they were to act alone.'

In short, negotiation is a bargaining situation in which two or more parties have common interests to cooperate, but at the same time have conflicting interest over exactly how to cooperate. To put it differently, the parties can mutually benefit from reaching agreement on an outcome from a set of possible outcomes, but have conflicting interests over the set of outcomes.

No matter whether we like negotiation or not, everybody engages in it almost every day. A housewife with a salesperson over the counter for the price of vegetables, a boy with his parent for changing the broken toy to a new toy, a driver with a police for removing ticket over a traffic violation, a purchasing agent with a supplier for the quality of a product, so on and so forth. Broadly speaking, every facet of human life, from our happiness in families to our satisfaction in careers as well our collective well-being on earth, hinges much on negotiation. And business negotiation is probably the most common type of negotiation. It takes place at the commercial level, which is the focus in this thesis. Business negotiation is a decision-making process that provides opportunities for the parties to exchange commitments or promises through which they will resolve their disagreements and reach a win-win settlement. It is a consultative process between the buyer and the seller. It is conducted either by correspondence or by face-to-face talk, and involves all kinds of terms and conditions of a sales contract including quantity, quality, packing, shipment, payment, insurance, inspection, claims, arbitration and force majeure, etc.

2.4.1.2 Business negotiation

Along with the world is rapidly becoming a global village, the importance of studying business negotiations becomes more salient. Lewicki *et al.* (1994) presented a survey of business negotiation. They state that researchers have increasingly taken interdisciplinary approaches to understanding, interpreting, and integrating negotiation theory and practice. These interdisciplinary efforts have widen the scope of the negotiation phenomenon, and they cover psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, political science, and mathematics, which have all taken different theoretical and conceptual perspectives on negotiation including McCall and Warrington (1984), Lewicki and Litterer (1985) etc..

In China, especially after China's entry into WTO, more and more Chinese researchers realize that it is of great importance to study international business negotiation. Many studies have been made to explore the strategies and skills in business negotiation. Qiu (2000) divides the pragmatic strategies used in international business and trade negotiations into three types and only discusses one of them — the positive pragmatic strategy from four aspects: polite and appropriate, proper praising, implicit and humorous, and tactful and vague. Chen (2001) states the necessity for business negotiators to apply a pragmatic strategy in business negotiation, and the positive pragmatic strategy in the negotiation is also discussed from three aspects: politeness and appropriateness maxims, tactful and humorous, and implicit and VEs. Zeng (2002) discusses the pragmatic strategies in business negotiation, i.e. polite appropriateness, implicature and euphemism, humour and vagueness. Effective methods are put forward to raise learners' pragmatic awareness, and to develop their pragmatic strategy.

Culture has always been the most active element that can exert great influence on the process of business negotiation. Some researchers have paid much attention to the

influence of it. Zhao (2002) argues that understanding correctly the cultural differences and cultural conflicts between China and western countries is the precondition of intercultural negotiations. He studies some of the characteristics of business negotiation and the ways of dealing with the business situation. Liu (2007) attempts to research the characteristic of international commercial negotiation based on the differences between Chinese and Western culture, and seek commercial methods and tactics of intercultural negotiation.

Business negotiation course teaching and learning is also explored by some researchers. Based on the nature, objectives as well as some problems of international business negotiation course-teaching, Zeng (2007) discusses the course setting, course materials, objectives and teaching means in international business negotiation course for business English majors. He emphasizes that language output and negotiation basics should go hand in hand in the course teaching so that it can lay a foundation upon the all-round talents education. Liu (2005) discusses the characteristics and contents of the English language skills in international business negotiation course delivery. He focuses on the trend of the course delivery and issues regarding such teaching activities as the development of the language users' linguistic competence, their communicative performance and pragmatic performance, the awareness of the cross-cultural consciousness, the ability to implement then cross cultural pragmatic strategies, the learner-centred syllabus design as well as the teachers' guiding functions.

As is known that language is a great source of negotiating power, the language in business negotiation is also a hot topic. Gan (2001) analyses the various expressions of emotional language and argues that emotional language can help create a friendly atmosphere for the negotiation. However, he also points out that the expression of friendly feelings is not the aim of the negotiation. If people give away to their feelings while negotiating, they will be caught in the 'emotional gap', thus the aim of the negotiation cannot be achieved. Gan (2004) introduces some mild expressions in

business negotiation according to different sentence patterns. And amicable trade relations are one of the key factors which are used to evaluate the success of a negotiation. The importance of mild expressions in a negotiation just lies in the fact that it can help establish such relations between both parties. Jin (2007) explores the communication practice of politeness in business negotiation. Based on a case study, with Brown and Levinson's (1987) mode of politeness theory as underlying principles, politeness is found not only to save the other party's face, but to exercise some strategic functions in business negotiations. Jin concludes that negotiators who are aware of the rationale of politeness strategy in the negotiation and make use of it correctly are more likely to communicate successfully.

The interpretation of business negotiation is also more and more important with the development of economic globalization. Qin (2006) examines pragmatic equivalence in interpretation and focuses on the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic interpretation in the field of international business negotiation, with an aim to help future interpreters to achieve the pragmatic accuracy and quality interpretation in business negotiation by avoiding pragmatic errors.

All these various studies provide useful insights into aspects of business negotiation and achieve much progress. Although it seems to be recognised that vagueness is a useful and necessary strategy in business negotiation, few of the studies attempt to explore the use of VL in Chinese business negotiations systemically and comprehensively. The current research will be one of the first attempts to fill in this gap.

2.4.2 The use of VL in business communication

It appears that the accuracy of language in business communication is always considered as the most significant and basic factor for the understanding in business world. However, business communication cannot work well without vagueness. For

example, 'many' in There are *many* people in Times Square and There are *many* people in Classroom 208 are different, with 'many' in the former one is far more than 'many' in the latter one. Business communication, due to the specific environment (particularly in business negotiations), is in need of communication skills to achieve final goals of making profits. Proper use of vagueness in business communication can frequently produce positive effects.

2.4.2.1 Pragmatic functions of VL in business communication

Gong (2002) argues while the accuracy of the language is needed in business communication, the necessary and appropriate VL can safeguard communicators' own interests far better in the sharply competitive business circles. In a certain context, a proper and reasonable use of VL can have an incomparable impact on the successful business communication according to the specific needs in the business activities. Some expressions can be used during business communication (particularly in business negotiations), which seem to be vague and obscure in meaning and less relevant to the topic. Thus, addressees (business negotiators in particular) might relax their minds and do not take many precautions. Consequently, the addressors may accomplish their goals by using those expressions.

According to Gong (2002), using VL can also avoid deadlock. For instance, 'That is the last choice', 'Take it or leave it' or 'That is nonnegotiable' etc., forcing the opponents to make the last decision, contrary to that, communicators can increase flexibility of their speech and avoid coming into deadlock. The followings are opposite examples:

(1) If you insist, it will be very difficult for us to reach an agreement.

(2) To this question, I cannot find a solution until now. Could you tell me what you think of it?

(3) That is the market price this year. If you still cannot accept it, please tell me what your target price is.

Hence, negotiators may use VL to describe, to suggest, to complain, to praise, to refuse, to cover, to concede, to inquire, etc. It can function as a weapon, a lubricant, and a disguise, etc. The high frequency of VL's adoption in business negotiation shows it is favoured and preferred by negotiators, who cannot afford to ignore the effect of VL.

2.4.2.2 High-context culture, face and VL in business communication

As Zhu and Hildebrandt (2007) point out, communication issues are a complex phenomenon which involves using appropriate communication strategies to achieve higher levels of competence. In an indirect communication style, which is often seen in 'high-context cultures' (Hall and Hall 1990) where 'much is left unsaid; people expect each other to know what is intended' (O'Sullivan and Tajaroensuk 1997, p. 77) and 'collectivistic cultures' (Scollon and Scollon 1995), where speakers usually hide or hint their intentions during interaction. In high-context cultures, there is no need to tell every message and implicit communication is common. Indirect communication prevents embarrassing moment that might threaten the face of interlocutors. Many Asian countries, such as China, Japan, use indirect style. Saving face and keeping harmony in social relationships are highly valued in these cultures, so they avoid direct expressions of one's needs and desire to lessen the possibility of conflicts.

VL is multifunctional in business communication and can often be used as communication tactics. VL not only makes communicating climate better to help communication go on smoothly, but also makes opponents reveal the truth about the question, in order to know the others' real intentions. It's persuasive and convincing without losing face of the negotiators involved. In the course of business communication, it is impossible for one party to force the other party to sign an agreement. Therefore, they must leave some leeway for each other so that they can change their positions or standpoints without losing their face. VL has this function.

For example: when Party A says 'That is a *high* price! It will be *difficult* for us to make any sales', he not only attempts to persuade his opponent to lower the price, but also leave some room for himself in case of the occurrence of the unforeseen circumstances. Once his opponent does not accept his counter offer, Party A can still accept the original offer without losing his face. If Party A uses the word 'impossible' instead of 'difficult', the agreement is hard to reach and Party A sinks into a dilemma. Take another example, Party B says 'I *should* say the price is *reasonable*.' Before the word 'reasonable', he uses a word 'should', both of these are vague words. In this case, if Party A does not accept his price, he could lower the price a little.

Gong (2002) also points out that sometimes business opponents may ask some difficult questions, which may reveal some inner skills, messages or the real goals. If answer directly, communicators may enter a disadvantage situation. In this situation, they can answer in a vague way. Here are some examples:

(1) I would if I could.

(2) That depends.

(3) It is possible.

(4) I will convey your proposal to my boss to see what he says.

(5) To this kind of question, we usually handle it in this way that--.

(6) I think your question is mainly about (then say something else).

(7) On this aspect, I think your company is more authoritative, could you tell me how you think of that?

In order to avoid misunderstanding and inconvenience, language in business communication, whether it is in the oral form or written form, should have been clear and precise. However, as illustrated in the present research, the use of VL in business negotiations is very pervasive and renders an important aspect for research. As Crystal and Davy (1975) claim, there are following four main reasons for the pervasiveness of VL in people's daily life: 1) memory blank – speakers forget correct

words, 2) the language has no suitable exact word, or speakers do not know it, 3) the subject of the conversation is not such that it requires precision, and an approximation or characterization will do, 4) the choice of a vague item is deliberate to maintain the atmosphere. In the same vein, VL also finds full reasons for its prevailing existence in business negotiations. One case is that the speaker is unable to be more precise. The speaker may use VL due to memory loss or lack of relevant knowledge, just as the first two reasons proposed by Crystal and Davy (1975). The other case is that the speaker is unwilling to be more precise for certain reasons, just as the last two reasons proposed by them.

Business negotiation is a very complicated process. When negotiators reply to some questions which are beyond their authority or when it is inconvenient to give a reply on some issues, VL should be used to deal with or to avoid face-to-face conflict, and it is one of the most effective ways for negotiators to use. The necessity of adopting VL in business negotiation lies in promotion of business relations and realization of commercial purposes. Negotiators also employ VL when it is unnecessary to be exact or when a specific purpose must be achieved. The merits of vagueness help to eliminate absoluteness, directness and openness of a language. With possibly fewer mistakes, negotiators take the initiative firmly in their hands.

The present study investigates the use of VL in Chinese business negotiations. According to Zhang and Li (1999), in Chinese culture indirect and VEs are more acceptable than direct and specific references. Sentences are frequently left unfinished so that the other person may conclude in his own mind. They are layers of soft language with various degrees of courtesy and respect. Bilbow (1997) states Chinese discourse is considerably less direct than Western discourse. Also, Chinese hearers tend to interpret indirectness in more positive ways than Westerners. For example, circumlocutory discourse is often regarded by the Chinese as highly authoritative in a way that is far from common among Western hearers, for whom circumlocutory discourse tends to be 'manipulative' or 'long-winded'.

Bilbow (1997) states that Chinese discourse is markedly more formal than Western discourse, and overt markers of politeness are common. Bilbow also states that 'face' considerations play a greater role in determining whether a speaker's discourse is interpreted sensitive by Chinese hearers than they do for Westerners. The Chinese tend to have business communication in a rather indirect manner. They take time to see whether their prospective business contacts are really reliable as human beings, for example, by inviting them to a party and socializing with them. Moreover, Bilbow points out that the decision-making process of Chinese businessmen is considered to be very slow and time-consuming. This is because most Chinese companies have a bottom-up decision-making system which involves many people in decision-making. While Bilbow's above observations may be the case in 1990s, the dynamic of China's development in recent years may present something different.

Kirkpatrick (1993) argues that both English and Chinese are linear, but while English tends to follow a sequence that develops from a main to a subordinate information sequence, the opposite is true of Chinese. He studied in particular how the subordinate-main sequence in Chinese complex sentences is also found in the textual organization of Chinese request letters. In many instances in his article, he refers to a principle of modern standard Chinese sequencing as the 'Because-therefore' sequence. He far prefers the term 'frame-main' in his later articles. Through analysing the information sequence in Mandarin letters of request, Kirkpatrick (1991) reveals that these letters characterize by a tendency to first provide reasons and then make the requests. These requests, as stated by Kirkpatrick, 'generally conform to the following schema: salutation, preamble (facework), reasons, and then the request itself' (1991, p. 183). The part of facework and the inductive sequence as demonstrated in this schema present the unique features of Chinese request. This notion of uniqueness is questioned in a later study (Kirkpatrick 2007). In comparing the arrangement of both the Ars Dictaminis letters of Medieval Europe and contemporary Chinese letters of request, he showed that they followed a strikingly

similar schema. Kirkpatrick concluded that these similarities resulted from 'the relative importance that societies attach to hierarchy' (p. 255). 'The existence of this inductive arrangement in the Chinese letters of request', Kirkpatrick (p. 255) further argues, 'strongly suggests that hierarchy remains a key variable in contemporary China'.

Zhu (1999, 2005), however, finds that the Chinese adopt a more direct style, and subordinate-main and main-subordinate structures are both prevalent in modern Chinese business communication. She points out that in every culture there is a set of rhetorical options language users can choose from, which is why it is a mistake to make generalizations from a single speech act to the whole of the discourse structure. Choice depends on communicative purposes, genre expectations as well as related issues of politeness, required levels of indirectness and face saving. Reflecting on Kirkpatrick's (1991, 1993) works, she offers evidence to prove that the subordinate-main structure is not the only option in Chinese. Firstly, she points out that the internationalization of Chinese literacy has brought strong Western influences and introduced the main-subordinate structure as an alternative. This is especially evident in business letters, where the persuasive communicative purpose necessitates a main-subordinate structure. Secondly, variety is also present in the different realizations of the subordinate-main structure as claims are mitigated to a different extent in the three main styles of writing in Chinese. What may be interpreted as a 'subordinate' or unrelated introductory part by an outsider may prove to be a required politeness formula, after which the real purpose of the communication is elaborated on according to the main-subordinate logic.

Zhu's (2005) work is particularly relevant to this study. Based on data on business written communication among Chinese, Australians and New Zealanders, she also finds that the Chinese emphasize *guanxi* (connections) and relationship building, and use more of an 'emotional approach' than a 'logical approach'. This could be caused by different genres (business discourse vs. non-business discourse, written discourse

vs. spoken discourse), and the investigation of indirectness from this study may help verify this matter because this study focuses on spoken data as opposed to Zhu's written data.

The research of VL in Chinese business negotiations has been scarce. This study is to investigate comprehensively the roles VL plays in real-life Chinese business negotiations with salient characteristics of inexplicitness, and its socio-cultural features, which will contribute to the study of business communication.

2.5 Social functions of VL

Crystal and Davy (1975, pp. 111 – 112) note that 'the use of lexical vagueness is undoubtedly a main sign of social and personal relaxation.' Brown and Levinson (1987) describing positive politeness strategies, mention ellipsis and in-jokes (jokes between in-group members) among their in-group identity markers, used to claim common ground. Tannen (1984, p. 31) lists ellipsis, indirectness, implicature and unstated meanings as interpersonal involvement signals of 'high involvement style'. Tannen (1989, p. 23) claims, 'the more work / --- / hearers do to supply meaning, the deeper their understanding and the greater their sense of involvement with both text and author.'

Since the mid-1990s, linguists have looked in greater detail at the social usage of VL. Channell (1994) examines the micro-functions: she suggests that general nouns can be used to avoid being offensive, derogatory or pretentious, deliberately withhold information, avoid showing uncertainty or a lexical gap, and protect oneself or somebody /something else. Others talk of the function in more general terms, but they nearly all point to VL as a marker of social cohesion. McCarthy (1998, pp. 108 – 109) says that VL makes 'an important contribution to naturalness and the informal, convergent tenor of everyday talk.' Carter (1998, pp. 118 – 119) sees VL as a social

leveler: it 'puts the speakers on an immediately casual and equal footing with their interlocutors.' Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 202) state:

> Vague language softens expressions so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative or assertive. It is also a strong indication of an assumed shared knowledge and can mark in-group membership: the referents of vague language can be assumed to be known by the listener.

Along the same line, Cutting (2000, 2001, 2002) finds that discourse communities use VL to assert in-group membership and show solidarity, as well as to exclude outsiders.

However, implicitness can be seen as a social divider. Although Fairclough (2003, p. 55) claims that 'All forms of fellowship, community and solidarity depend upon meanings which are shared and can be taken as given', he makes the point that written or spoken texts can carry implicit assumptions that they impose upon the reader or listener by making them bring the same assumptions into the process of interpretation (Fairclough 1989). Wodak (1996) examines the effect of speakers in a position of power using implicit language. Wodak (1996, p. 2) explains that confusion can result when there are 'gaps between distinct and insufficiently coincident cognitive worlds', since these can separate 'insiders from outsiders, members of institutions from clients of those institutions, and elites from the normal citizen uninitiated in the arcana of bureaucratic language and life'. VL can play both roles of social divider and social lumper. Whether it is a role of social divider or lumper all depends on the angle it is being looked at. From insiders' perspective, VL plays a role of social lumper; while from outsiders' perspective, it then plays a role of social divider. They are not contradictory at all.

2.6 Other perspectives of VL studies

In the field of second-language acquisition, Roberts (2003, p. 117) follows on with the view that heavily context-dependent language is associated with the assertion of power. She makes the point that contextualization cues call up background knowledge which relates to social relations, rights, obligations and ideologies. This, she says, is a problem for second-language acquisition of minority-language-speakers:

> Knowing how to use and interpret a particular cue means at least for that interactional moment that you are a 'belonger'. And in contrast, the failure to pick up on a cue not only creates misunderstanding but sets the minority linguistic speaker apart. She is not in that interactional moment an emergent member of the same communicative community. As a result, small interactive differences can contribute to large social consequences. (Roberts 2003, p. 118),

Koester (2007) says that in the teaching of business English, teachers and students should recognize that overly explicit language can be inappropriate or even rude. She says that learners should be made aware that VL can convey information about the speaker's attitude towards the interlocutor or the business at hand, and can be used strategically for politeness or solidarity. Cheng (2007) suggests that students should be taught about VL's role in sustaining relationships through asserting shared understandings, maintaining face, and communicating informality and formality.

Ruzaite (2007) investigates VL in educational settings attempting to offer generalizations about the main patterns of approximators and quantifiers by comparing them in British English (BE) and American English (AE). She argues that the use of VL is distinct in BE and AE in some important respects. Particularly, the frequency of quantifiers and approximators does differ. Quantifiers are more frequent in AE, whereas approximators have revealed the opposite tendency; they are more numerous in BE. Moreover, the linguistic patterns of some quantifiers and

approximators also differ in BE and AE. Negatively loaded lexemes co-occur with quantifiers significantly more frequently in BE than in AE, which may suggest that in BE quantifiers are more frequently used to mitigate negative notions.

Using primarily a cognitive approach, Chen and Wu (2002) studied the issue of semantic fuzziness in relation to categorisation. They argue that the boundary of the prototype category is always fuzzy and cannot be clearly limited and defined, and fuzziness is one of the essential characteristics of semantic category. They affirm that cognitive economy inevitably causes the fuzziness of conceptual and semantic categories; i.e. semantic fuzziness is the result of cognitive economy and human categorization in natural language. In particular, fuzziness of semantic category is originated in the process of human cognition; it is when the family resemblance is formed in the process of human cognitive categorization. The internal structure made up of 'centre' and 'boundary' is the real reflection of fuzzy semantic category and is suitable for describing family resemblance or fuzziness of semantic category.

Another important point made in Chen and Wu (2002) is that similarities and continuities of objective entities do not disappear because of human categorization; they remain in concepts or semantic category, so communication contexts may eliminate ambiguity, but not fuzziness of words. They affirm that the practical value of fuzzy language is that it is more expressive than precise language as it can express both fuzzy information and precise information, which is supported empirically by Jucker *et al.* (2003).

From the perspective of psycholinguistics, Moxey and Sanford (1993) have done research on vague quantifiers in terms of how they are understood, reasoned and used. They aim at investigating what differentiates quantifiers from one another in terms of conditions of use and examining how the understanding of quantified statements might fit into more general accounts of language understanding, and of reasoning (Moxey and Sanford, 1993, p. 111).

Pepper and Prytulak (1974) found that when it was used to describe the frequency with which Miss Sweden was found attractive, the term 'frequently' was considered to mean approximately 70% of the time, due to a higher expected frequency. However, when it was used for the frequency of air crashes, the term was given only approximately 20% of the time, due to a lower expected frequency. Moxey and Sanford (1993) also conducted a series of tests on how expectation affects the understanding of vague quantifiers, and concluded that it has a significant impact on the understanding of VL.

Apart from their contributions to the issue of contextual effects on vague quantifiers, Moxey and Sanford (1993) also investigate quantifiers from a non-numerical perspective. For example, it is argued that when combining with a quantifier, *very* may not intensify numerical value, instead *very* in *very few* enhance the strength of claim. It is argued that vague quantifiers in communication may not be mapped into a numerical value in a fine-grained scale.

Moxey and Sanford (1993) argue that vague quantifiers could be different in terms of attention and focus. Their work shows empirically that expressions serve to put focus into different subsets of the superset upon which they operate. For example,

(1) *Few* friends attended Mark's party. *They* went to a movie instead.
(2) *A few* friends attended Mark's party. *They* enjoyed it.

'Few' puts emphasis on the set of friends who did not attend Mark's party; 'a few' on the other hand focuses on the set of friends who did attend his party. It shows that the quantifiers have a major function in manipulating attentions and patterns of inference.

This current study will be enhanced by investigating a wider range of issues, such as the intention of speakers, attentional focus, certainly worthwhile pursuing. However, it has to be noted that while we emphasize the importance of cognitive and psychological approaches, we cannot disregard totally the importance of numeral aspect (Zhang 2005). There would be situations where 'few' and 'a few' do mean different numbers; hence, the non-numerical assertion cannot be a universal claim. Another point is that Moxey and Sanford's research was based on controlled experiment, which could be appropriate with regard to their goals but not natural. The Conversation Analysis approach, looking at the linguistic patterns and turns, adopted by this present study is expected to be more authentic and adequate.

In summary, in the current literature of VL studies, there is a lack of a more holistic linguistic approach to the study of vagueness, and of empirical study based on naturally recorded language data. This study attempts to adopt a more holistic approach covering lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and discourse analysis. One feature of this study is that it studies VL in naturally-occurring context of Chinese business negotiations with distinct vague characteristics, which is most authentic and creditable. Another feature is employing the CA (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) framework into the analysis of interactive aspects of vagueness, such as turn management and interpersonal aspects of the unfolding conversations. The ultimate goal of this study is to examine interactional aspects of vagueness in spontaneous language data to provide a more natural account of VL use.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework and methodology

The primary approach employed in this research is CA (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974, Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998, ten Have 1999). It will be used throughout in the analysis of VL data of spontaneous Chinese business negotiations.

3.1 Theoretical Framework: Conversation Analysis

The theoretical framework for this research is based on CA. It is an empirical approach to the study of spoken conversation which examines what happens in actual talk and expounds the participant's own methods for production and interpretation of social interactions. The central goal of CA is to discover a system of talk by offering the description and explication of recurrent structural characteristics of talk-in-interactions. CA is employed as the foremost approach because it fits in with the way in which the present study is conducted.

3.1.1 Sequential interactions

CA is an approach to the study of talk in interaction which grew out of the ethnomethodological tradition in sociology developed by Garfinkel (1964, 1967, 1988). Ethnomethodology is a sociological discipline which examines the ways in which people make sense of their world, display this understanding to others, and produce the mutually shared social order in which they live. The term was initially coined by Garfinkel in the 1960s. Liddicoat (2007) points out that the social organization can only be understood by examining actual instances of social interaction. In each instance of social interaction, members need to make available to others their understanding of the activities in which they are engaged and participants routinely monitor each other to confirm and test shared understandings of the activity as it unfolds. For this reason, in studying social interaction, ethnomethodology tends

to ignore the information actually transmitted during interaction, concentrating more on how the interaction was performed.

The emphasis on studying actual instances of social interaction is also developed in the work of Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1981), who asserted that the ordinary activities of daily life were an important and non-trivial subject for study, from which the ways in which human beings engage each other can be observed. Goffman's approach distinguishes itself in the sociology and social psychology studies by utilising qualitative method rather than quantitative method (e.g. hypothesis testing) to explore how social processes work. Goffman (1964) in particular drew attention to the need to study ordinary instances of speaking, which had in his view been neglected:

> Talk is socially organized, not merely in terms of who speaks to whom in what language, but as a little system of mutually ratified and ritually governed face-to-face action, a social encounter. (Goffman 1964, p. 65)

Goffman argued that the study of speaking was not simply a matter of narrowly focused linguistic descriptions of language, but rather that interaction had its own system of rules and structures which were not intrinsically linguistic in nature. This means that the study of language in purely linguistic terms could not adequately account for the nature of language-in-use.

The work of Garfinkel and Goffman as discussed above provided an impetus for the development of CA by investigating the orderliness of everyday life (Sacks 1992). Harvey Sacks let the way through his lectures on conversation from the early 1960s. In these lectures, Sacks developed an approach to investigate social order as it was produced through the practices of everyday talk. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, through the work of Harvey Sacks and his colleagues Emmanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, CA began to emerge from sociology as an independent area of

enquiry oriented towards understanding the organizational structure of talk in human communication (Lerner 2004). CA drew from ethnomethodology a concern for understanding how order was achieved in social interaction, (Clayman and Maynard 1995).

Liddicoat (2007) notes that Sacks' approach to the study of conversation is characterized by a view of talk as activity through which speakers accomplish things in interaction. Talk can, therefore, be strategically employed to achieve communicative goals. For Sacks, this strategic use of talk is not a set of rules or recipes by which actions are accomplished, but rather the production of interactional effects which are achieved through the use of talk in a particular context; and for Sacks, conversation was orderly and this order was manifested at all points (Schegloff 1992a). Wooffitt (2005) asserts that conversation is neither random nor unstructured; however, the order observable in conversation does not imply an overarching uniformity in conversational structure which is generalizable across conversations. Instead, the participants themselves construct conversations in orderly ways.

3.1.2 Recipient design

Recipient design refers to the idea that participants in talk design their talk in such a way as to be understood by an interlocutor, in terms of the knowledge that participants assume they share (Sacks and Schegloff 1979, Schegloff 1972). The notion of recipient design, which Sacks, Schegloff and Jackson (1974) characterize as the most general principle of conversational interaction, is a key idea in CA. This means that conversational contributions are designed with a recipient in mind and are designed as appropriate for that recipient. As Boden (1994) states, recipient design is not simply a resource which speakers use to design talk, while it is also a resource listeners can use in interpreting talk, as listeners are motivated to hear a turn that is

designed for them, and participants track the trajectory of the talk to hear a turn if a turn is designed for them.

Liddicoat (2007) points out that 'conversation analysis', as the name of an approach to studying talk in interaction, is in some ways a misnomer for the approach, as the focus of CA is actually much larger than conversation as it is usually understood. While much work in CA examines informal talk in everyday social settings, there is a growing body of work which has applied the same approach to talk in institutional contexts (Drew and Heritage 1992, Drew and Sorjonen 1997, Heritage 1998, 2004). Conversation analysts do not see an inherent distinction between the formal and the informal, the everyday and the institutional; rather they see talk in interaction as a social process which is deployed to realize and understand the social situations in which talk is used. As Schegloff (1992b, p. 1296) argues, 'talk-in-interaction is a primordial site of sociality on the one hand and, on the other hand, one of the (largely presupposed) preconditions for, and achievements of, organized life'. CA therefore legitimately investigates all areas of socially motivated talk.

3.1.3 Talk: meaningful social action and its context

The underlying assumption of CA is to develop an account of language as social action. CA studies the organization and orderliness of social interaction. In order to do this, it begins with an assumption that the conduct, including talk, of everyday life is produced as sensible and meaningful.

> The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand that of others.
>
> (Heritage 1984b, p. 1)

According to Liddicoat (2007), a fundamental assumption of such a programme of research is that in engaging in talk, participants are engaging in socially organized interaction. Human talk is a form of action, and is understood as action by participants in the interaction. This talk is presented and understood as meaningful because participants share the same procedures for designing and interpreting talk. CA seeks to understand these shared procedures which participants in an interaction use to produce and recognize meaningful action.

Moreover, action is meaningful only in context and context is seen as playing two primary roles in interaction (Liddicoat 2007). Heritage (1984b) refers to this as the context-shaped and the context-renewing significance of a speaker's contribution. Talk is context-shaped in that talk responds to the context in which it is created. What participants say is shaped by and for the context in which it occurs and each next bit of talk is understood in the light of what has preceded it. This contextualization is an important procedure for understanding conversational contributions. At the same time talk is context-renewing because talk shapes the context as each next bit of talk constrains and affects what follows and influences how further talk will be heard and understood. Each turn at talk is the response to some previous talk and, by its utterance, provides a context in which the next turn at talk will be heard. Context is, therefore, dynamic and is renewed at each point in the talk. Conversationalists design their talk to demonstrate the sense they have made of the preceding talk and display, through the construction of their talk, their understanding of the talk-so-far. Turns at talk are, therefore, publicly available displays of understanding which allow for 'shared understandings' to be created and ratified (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992).

Furthermore, Liddicoat (2007) claims that while context is therefore vitally relevant to interaction, it is necessary to be cautious about what can legitimately be invoked as relevant context. Schegloff (1992a) has indicated that context can be considered in two different ways: external to the interaction itself and this includes context in the

form of social categories, social relationships and institutional and cultural settings; internal to the interaction and is created by participants through their talk. Not all potentially knowable aspects of external context can be taken as being equally potentially relevant at any point in the interaction and, as such, the test of the analyst is to determine, on the basis of the interaction itself, which elements of context are displayed as relevant and consequential to the participants themselves. This means that context needs to be seen more as something that is invoked in interaction, rather than something which impacts on interaction.

3.1.4 Naturally recorded data

As CA considers language as a social action, the data to use should be actual talk occurring in actual contexts (Heritage 1995). CA is analysis of real-world, situated, contextualized talk. The use of actual instances of talk allows for the possibility of an examination of what speakers actually do when speaking, rather than producing an account of what speakers think they do (e.g. as the result of introspection about the language use). CA uses a specimen approach in which each data segment used for developing an account of conversational behaviour is not a statement about reality but rather a part of the reality being studied (ten Have 1999). As an empirical discipline, CA allows order to emerge from the data without an intervening layer of theoretical constructs and allows for the determination of the organizing principles that are used and oriented to by the speakers themselves.

Liddicoat (2007) notes because talk is seen as organized and orderly and because this order is understood as constructed in a particular context for a particular conversation, conversation analyst work with recordings of spontaneously occurring talk. Recordings allow the talk to be subjected to multiple examinations and these allow details which may have been ignored or set aside to be taken up in later analyses. Similarly, Pomerantz and Fehr (1997, p. 70) state that 'Conversation analysts strongly prefer to work from recordings of conduct' and argue that the advantages of

recording are that it allows for the possibility of playing and replaying the interaction both for transcribing and developing an analysis, permits rechecking of the analysis against full detailed material and makes it possible to return to the data with new interests.'

Video and tape recordings are much richer sources of conversational data than other ways of capturing interaction (Heritage 1984b, 1995). For example, note-taking and recall all necessarily involve some editing of the data, as not all of the minute details which are available to participants can be represented or recalled. Any attempt to construct a written version of a conversation will therefore obscure much of what made the conversation meaningful and orderly for the participants themselves. In fact, even the production of a written transcription based on recorded data involves some loss of detail. However it is by far the best we could possibly do to keep the data close to the real-life.

3.1.5 Single case, collection and inductive approach

Single-case analysis involves looking at a conversation, or a segment of a conversation, in order to track in detail the various devices and strategies used by participants to accomplish a particular action (Schegloff 1987a, 1988b). The analysis of a single case is in effect the starting point for any analysis, as single-case examples allow the analyst to examine how conversational practices operate in particular instances and allow for a description of these practices to begin. It allows the analyst to examine how an instance of conversation is orderly for its participants (Schegloff 1968). A single case of talk is a single case of achieved orderly interaction, which can be examined as such and which can reveal much about the procedures used to create this order. This means that the single case is derived from and manifests the competency that members have to produce orderly talk.

That this particular social action occurred is evidence that the machinery for its production is culturally available, involves members' competencies, and is therefore possibly (and probably) reproducible. (Psathas 1995, p. 50)

Any single case of orderly interaction is therefore an indication of the nature of members' competencies involved in creating order. As such, a single case is not like a sample drawn from a pre-existing collection of such cases and representative of those cases, but rather an entire, self-contained instance of produced order.

Furthermore, as the conversation analytic approach is concerned with identifying patterns of action, identifying instances of action through unmotivated looking and then moving to establishing collections of similar actions is an effective way of examining regularly occurring patterns (Liddicoat 2007). A collection can only proceed from a single-case analysis, as such an analysis is required to determine what a particular action is an instance of (Psathas 1995). A collection is, therefore, a possible next step in analysis rather than an alternative analytic approach. Once a collection has been assembled it can be used to test the robustness of a particular description of action and to refine the analysis in the light of repeated instances of an action in different instances of interaction. The analysis of a collection allows the regularly occurring procedures for accomplishing a particular type of action to become clear and allows for differing trajectories for the accomplishment of the action to be seen.

In CA quantification is usually expressed by adjectival means (*commonly, overwhelmingly, regularly, typically, etc.*) rather than numerically, as totals, frequency counts or percentages (Schegloff, 1993). While it may seem useful to be able to provide a numerical quantity, the quantification of results is highly problematic in CA because of the nature of the instances being counted (Heritage, 1995). The collections used by conversation analysts are instances of highly contextualized talk and the collection allows for the possibility of examining in a

systematic way patterns as they occur across differing contexts and with differing participants. This means that while there may be patterns which span contexts and participants, each context is unique: a collection is a collection of single instances rather than multiple examples of the same thing (Schegloff 1993). As Liddicoat (2007) states, the study of collections is therefore the study of multiple single-case examples, in which each next case demonstrates the systematic commonalities which exist across participants and contexts.

In this present study however, quantification will be expressed using a combination of numerical and adjectival means because they serve different purposes and meet different needs. Description, such as totals, frequency counts and percentages, can be useful when used with a note of caution. While the adjectival means may often be less problematic in terms of accurately representing the context dependence of language phenomena, numbers are intuitive, easy to understand, effective and efficient to illustrate certain research findings and to certain group of readers.

The analytical approach discussed here is an inductive one (ten Have 1991, Heritage 1988) which seeks to build an understanding of regularities in the way talk is organized from the study of actual instances of interaction. The analyst, however, does not stop at a description of regularities, but rather is required to show that regularities are methodically produced and oriented to by participants (Heritage, 1988). Regularities in conversation are then viewed as normative in that they affect the behaviour of participants in the interaction and participants display an orientation to regular procedures as the taken-for-granted orderliness of the social world.

Of particular interest in the study of collections is the study of 'deviant' cases. In a conversation analytic perspective, deviant cases are not viewed as exceptions, but rather as indications of orderliness which have not yet been accounted for by the description (Schegloff 1968). Description of a regular pattern should be able to account for behaviours which do not conform to the normal course of action and

these accounts should demonstrate how the deviant case is in some way orienting to the normal course of action. If an instance of interaction is a departure from an expected process then it needs to be shown how the participants in the interaction orient to the departure (Heritage 1988). Deviant cases which do not appear to fit an analytic description are taken as evidence that the account is not yet maximally generalizable rather than being in some sense a deviant or defective instance.

3.1.6 Some methodological issues

As ten Have (1990) indicates, CA tends to use a restricted data base, i.e. recordings of naturally occurring interactions. This is often seen as a severe limitation of the validity of its findings. From a CA point of view, however, it is rather a strong point for analytic results, if they are built up solely from recorded data. Critiques on this point take a variety of forms. Reference has been made to 'missing data' concerning participants, as the usual macro-sociological variables (socioeconomic status, age and gender), institutional position, and personal background. Often critics tend to complain that the institutional context of the interaction is neglected analytically in CA (Cicourel 1981). And others wonder why sources like interviews with participants, their comments on recordings, or interpretations of taped material by panels of 'judges' are not used.

To respond to the above questions, ten Have (1990) argues that to understand CA's position on this, we should go back to the early work of Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. In that early phase those scholars were working on material from institutional settings, such as calls to an emergency psychiatric facility or to the police in cases of disaster. These studies showed that participants in such institutional circumstances were using interactional devices that were quite commonplace. Such devices, then, might also, or perhaps even better, be studied in less dramatically pre-defined circumstances, such as unremarkable conversations between equals.

The choice of term 'conversation' has been presented as rather arbitrary (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, pp. 289-290), but, with the wisdom of hindsight, it may be judged to have been a lucky one. ten Have (1990) further explicates that ordinary conversation seems to be of the utmost importance for social life, both to 'old' and 'new' members of the group. It is the bedrock for inter-subjective understanding, and also a kind of 'technological reservoir' for whatever kind of more 'formal' or 'restricted' social life. Seen in this light, it has been a wise decision to concentrate, at least for a certain amount of time, on the most ordinary conversations as materials for analysis. Its commonplaceness has been an asset rather than a deficiency, since there is no obvious, pre-given functional significance to prejudge what is happening in the data.

According to ten Have (1990), in later developments of CA, however, it is seen that many members of later generations have turned again to the analysis of interactions in institutional settings. Pre-trial conferences, court hearings, news interviews, medical encounters, classroom interactions and political rallies have been among the objects for these analyses. What these researchers have done is to use the repertoire of conversational devices, described by the first generation of CA mostly on the basis of ordinary conversation, to explore how this repertoire is restrictively used by members to constitute episodes of 'institutional' life, recognizable as such to both members of CA camp and analysts in general. As Heritage has formulated it, when he summarized his discussion of these kinds of analyses:

> It is within these local sequences of talk, and only there, that these institutions are ultimately and accountably talked into being. (..) the details of little, local sequences which at first seemed narrow, insignificant and contextually uninteresting, turn out to be the crucial resources by which larger institutionalized activity frameworks are evoked. Such institutional contexts are created as visible states of affairs on a turn-by-turn basis. It is ultimately through such means that 'institutions' exist as accountable organizations of social actions.
>
> Heritage (1984b p. 290)

ten Have (1990) states that explanations of what happens in any kind of interaction, institutional or not, that make reference to 'fixed' givens such as institutional identities and functions, institutionalized resources or relationships, or whatever, are not acceptable to a CA analysis, until the local procedural relevance is demonstrated. And even then, what may be said concerning such moments is only that those properties or relationships are 'talked into being' then and there. He contends that, any preconceptions of properties, relationships and occasions, which are used as taken-for-granted realities in other schools of thought are to be 'bracketed' in CA. Other sources could be analyzed in terms of their own productive processes, but that the information which they provide should not prejudge the detailed analysis of the interactional data themselves.

3.1.7 CA and the present research

As discussed above, CA promotes the concept that language communication is a contextulised social action, and any adequate linguistic research should be based on real-life and naturally recorded data and focuses on sequential analysis. It emphasizes recipient design, interactive and inductive approaches.

The most relevant parts of CA's framework to the present study are the analysis of the actual talks and sequence of interactions. Firstly, this study uses spontaneous spoken data rather than isolated or experimental sentences. CA's requirement for the method of data collection is that it should be naturally occurring, created in control-free settings and non-experimental interactions, obtained from any available source, formal or informal, institutional or personal. The taped recording provides detailed examination of particular events within the interactions. These can be repeatedly replayed and transcribed, i.e. the availability of recordings allows repeated re-viewings or re-listening. This makes it possible to have close and precise observations of on-going conversations, in which the ratification of the numerous

instances collected is conducted, creating valuable studies of the varieties and variations within these recorded instances.

Through observation of the audio or video taping of conversations, researchers can obtain a complete understanding of linguistic patterns of a given speech act and dynamic situations produced. Moreover, the recording of on-going interactions provides researchers with potential data for further linguistic research. Commitment to this method helps fill the gap of the unnoticed aspects of the interaction which have been previously ignored. The recording of ongoing interactions provides potential, valuable and sought-after data for further linguistic research, particularly business negotiation data is difficult to obtain. The use of recordings will contribute to the investigation of the under-explored interactive aspects of language study methodology (Psathas 1995).

Secondly, the present study also emphasizes CA's 'sequential analyses' of interaction. Chapter 8 is specifically dedicated to the analysis of utterance sequences and the organization of such sequences in interaction. One central concept within the analytic framework of CA is a speaking turn. It is an uninterrupted (although possibly partially overlapping) utterance by a single speaker (Wouk 2001). With examination of the structural organization of turns, one can understand contextual variation of how speakers manage sequences as well as the internal design of turns. Another central concept of CA is adjacency pair that is required to understand sequencing of conversations (Sacks *et al*. 1974). An adjacency pair is uttered by separate speakers in that the first pair initiates an exchange to produce certain expectations which constrain the possibilities for a second to respond to a prior action. Examples of adjacency pairs are greeting-greeting, question-answer, and request-acceptance, etc.

Conversation analysts examine turn-by-turn sequences to depict sequential organization characteristics in conversation of ongoing interaction, in terms of pre-

sequences, sequences, and post-sequences (Levinson 1983), which is also adopted in the present study in the form of pre-vague, vague, post-vague at the level of a single turn. Schegloff (1990a and 1990b) points out that the essential aspect involved in examining sequential organization is on the reflection of the richness of the negotiated and elaborated efforts between the two interlocutors. Thus, the relevance of CA to this study is that the applicability of analysing sequential organization makes it possible to discover how interaction unfolds across vague sequences in Chinese business negotiations by different participants.

3.2 Methodology

As stated in Section 1.2, this study aims to find out how VL is employed strategically in naturally-occurring Chinese business negotiations. There are four steps to be taken to address the question: analyzing VL at lexical and syntactic level, in terms of its pragmatic functions and sequential moves. The data analysis is based on naturally occurring data. Recent years speech acts research employs more of an ethnographic methodology using the recording of spontaneous spoken conversation. For example, Pan (2000) utilised such a method, achieving a detailed examination of discourse structure and discourse features of Chinese. The presence of opening/closing of an interaction, length of the interaction, the negotiation process, and the discursive markers including prosodic features make it possible to identify what determines vague behaviour in Chinese.

3.2.1 Data collection

The data collection was conducted in China from January 2008 to March 2008 with medium to large sized companies. To undertake this research, the business negotiations were naturally recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recording

involved five business negotiations in total, each of which lasted at least half an hour. There are in total about four and a half hours of recording, which should supply sufficient data for a convincing and reliable analysis. A negotiation setting was chosen for the data collection. The five companies that participated were a petrol-chemical company, an equipment-supplying company, an insurance company, a travel agency and an overseas study agency.

Participants: The participants were from the above five companies and their clients, with a nearly equal number of participants (one to two/two to three each) participating in the recording. Three male participants from the petrol-chemical company, one female participant from the equipment-supplying company, one female participant from the insurance company and her female client, two female participants of the travel agency and their male and female clients, and a female participant from the overseas study agency and her female client took part in the recording. The detailed information about the data collection is provided in the following chart:

Table 3.1: Detailed information of all participants in five negotiations

Negotiations and its nature	Number of participants	Relationship of participants	Gender	Age	Social distance
1 **Equipment supply**	4	**A, C, D** (Clients) vs. **B** (Supplier)	**A**: M, **B**: F, **C**: M, **D**: M	**A**: 56, **B**: 37, **C**: 45, **D**: 36	= Acquaintances
2 **Sale of insurance**	2	**A** (Client) vs. **B** (Agent)	**A**: F, **B**: F	**A**: 54, **B**: 54	_ Friends
3 **International travel**	2	**A** (Client) vs. **B** (Agent)	**A**: M, **B**: F	**A**: 60, **B**: 32	+ Strangers
4 **Domestic travel**	2	**A** (Client) vs. **B** (Agent)	**A**: F, **B**: F	**A**: 32, **B**: 24	+ Strangers
5 **Overseas education**	2	**A** (Client) vs. **B** (Agent)	**A**: F, **B**: F	**A**: 21, **B**: 55	+ Strangers

The present research is not experimentally designed. The comparisons of the three factors (gender, age and social distance) as shown in Table 3.1 may not be matched neatly in the data analysis because of the nature of the naturally recorded data. It was challenging to collect spontaneous spoken data of business negotiations, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of commercial information. The findings would be useful to know which VL strategies are effective and which are not, and that may enhance one's success in business negotiations.

The criteria for selecting samples are two-fold: 1) Companies are medium to large sized, with at least 20 employees. This is because companies of such size tend to have a more systematic management structure; in turn the data collected would have more credibility. Also, companies of a medium to large size provide more choices for data recordings. 2) Recording business negotiations is from diverse industries to have a balanced representation.

Procedure: A pilot study was conducted in a real estate company in Shanghai. Four hours' recording of natural negotiations was tested out. It went smoothly, but there was one technical problem. The recording sound volume was not turned to an appropriate level, so the sound quality was poor. After the pilot study, the technical drawback in recording was modified. In the main recordings, the recording volume was adjusted to the maximum level, and the sound quality was good.

As required by the regulations of research ethics, the consent was obtained for the recording of business negotiations from company managers first. Then for all the recordings, the participants were given information sheets and consent forms before the recordings began.

The tape recording was conducted using digital voice recorders. After the participants agreed to participate in the recording, the researcher placed one or two

digital voice recorders on the desks in the meeting rooms. In the recordings there were places where noise and the weak voice of some participants created some difficulties in transcription. This problem was solved by a special voice-sensor and speed control software. The confidentiality of the recording and data handling are guaranteed at all times.

3.2.2 Data analysis

Four levels of analysis were undertaken, including parts of speech and combinational analysis at the lexical level, syntactic analysis, pragmatic analysis and sequential strategy analysis involving turn taking organization and execution.

Parts of speech and combinational analysis at the lexical level (Addressing Objective 1 in Section 1.2 above): Software WordSmith (by Oxford University) was used to acquire information on VEs used, including the number of tokens, word lists ordered by frequency, and all references located to any given expression within the data (e.g. *kěnéng jiù hěn gāoxìng* 可能就很高兴, 'might be very happy'). It will show, for example, the most (and least) common VEs for each part of speech and how they are collocated in the data. Parts of speech of VEs examined include adjective (*duō*, 多, 'many'), adverb (*tōngcháng,* 通常, 'usually'), auxiliary word (*ne*, 呢, 'well'), conjunction (*yào/yàoshi,* 要/要是, 'in case'), noun (*niándǐ,* 年底, 'year end'), numeral (*èr sān shí,* 二、三十, 'twenty or thirty'), pronoun (*nà/nàgè,* 那/那个, 'well/then'), and verb including modal/auxiliary verb (*kěnéng,* 可能, 'may/might/probably/possibly'). Combinational analysis is carried out on three basic lexical categories: pre-vaguefiers (*gèng*, 更, 'much more'), VEs (*shénme/de,* 什么/的, 'whatisit/whatever/stuff like that'), and post-vaguefiers (*zuǒyòu*, 左右, 'or so').

This lexical level analysis addresses Objective 1 in Section 1.2, by uncovering lexical patterns used as communicative strategies, and more importantly indicates

which VEs are effective and successful and which are not, through participants' interactive use of lexical items.

Syntactic analysis (Addressing Objective 1): Vagueness at the syntactic level is analysed through the following six syntactic forms: conditionals, passives, concessive conjunctions, indirect constructions, reduplications and interrogatives. The concordancing software (by Oxford University) provides information on issues like how these syntactic forms are distributed, and the data were analysed for evidence of the systematic use of the above forms and their features. Similarly to the discussion at the lexical level, the analysis at syntactic level endeavours to address Objective 1, by investigating syntactic patterns used in the negotiations and their effectiveness.

Pragmatic analysis (Addressing Objective 2): Pragmatic functions of VL fall into categories including self-protection, withholding, politeness, informality, etc. Closely related to pragmatic functions, it is also important to explore how the cultural values and social relationship influence the way VL is performed. For instance, Chinese have a long tradition of 'refusal dance' (e.g. A offers B a seat, A should insist at least two or three times and B should not accept the first time). The analysis here aims to find out whether or not this type of cultural tradition underpins VL behaviours in Chinese business negotiations.

The analysis at this level addresses Objective 2. It shows socio-cultural determinants of the use of certain vague patterns. In other words, the discussion uncovers the relationship between the socio-cultural factors and corresponding VL strategies used. In addition, the study also indicates the reasons and motivations for the Chinese participants to use VL as a communicative strategy through observing its pragmatic functions achieved in business negotiations.

Sequential strategy analysis (Addressing Objective 3): The data analysis explores negotiators' sequential strategies of interaction. Firth (1996) explicates the strategies of 'let it pass' and 'make it normal' in the data of 'lingua franca' English, referring to when participants are unsure of what others mean, they do not ask for immediate clarification, but rather let it pass and expect that the meaning would become clear as the conversation unfolds. Among others, this analysis evaluates how certain VL interactive strategies, similar to 'let it pass' and 'make it normal', are deployed in Chinese business interactions.

The analysis at this level addresses Objective 3. That is to say, it shows how the negotiators interacted in the realization of vagueness by examining ways in which they employed sequential strategies in interaction. The study also shows which sequential strategies worked well, which is what Objective 4 seeks to explore. The Objective 4 ('Speculating the implications of the findings on the study of Chinese business communication and communication in general') will be explored throughout this thesis and particularly in Chapter 9.

The above analyses are supplementary to each other. The interrelatedness of culture, socio-interpersonal relationships and linguistic characteristics will work together to illustrate the multi-layers of how VL is utilised in the data. It is expected that all four will unlock the myth of indirectness in Chinese language use.

3.2.3 Coding system

After the data were collected, VL was classified and coded. In order to achieve validity and uniformity in classifying VL, non clear-cut cases were discussed thoroughly between the researcher and his supervisor, before reaching a final decision. To ensure confidentiality for participants in this study, names were coded to protect their privacy. The following coding system was developed to suit linguistic

characteristics of the Chinese data in this study, adapted from the works of Channell (1994) and Zhang (1998, 2001, 2004a, 2004b and 2005).

Lexical categories

Parts of speech: noun, verb (including auxiliary verb), adjective, adverb, pronoun, numerals, auxiliary word and conjunction.

Pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers:

Table 3.2: Three lexical categories of VL

Categories	Descriptions and examples
Pre-vaguefiers	As the name shows, they are vague items used before core items to make the non-vague meaning vague or the vague meaning more vague. **N1S2:9**：您　就 放心。 这　报　的都 是 <u>真实</u>　的 价格， 　　　　Nín jiù fàngxīn. Zhè bào de dōu shì <u>zhēnshí</u> de jiàgé, 都 是 按 <u>规定</u>　报　的。 dōu shì àn <u>guīdìng</u> bào de. 'You can be assured of it. The price offered is exactly the <u>real</u> price, and offered as <u>stipulated</u>.' **N1S1:10**：我 知道 你这 是 按 <u>规定</u>　报 的。你 应该 　　　　Wǒ zhīdao nǐ zhè shì àn <u>guīdìng</u> bào de. Nǐ yīnggāi 给 个 价格，你 <u>肯定</u>　应该　有　个 价。 gěi gè jiàgé, nǐ <u>kěndìng</u> yīnggāi yǒu gè jià. 'I know it is offered as <u>stipulated</u>. You should offer the price, and <u>surely</u> you should have a price.' The VEs *zhēnshí* (真实 'real'), *guīdìng* (规定 'stipulated') and *kěndìng* (肯定 'surely') preceding the core items *jiàgé* (价格 'price') and *yīnggāi yǒu* (应该有 'should have') make the non-vague meanings of *jiàgé* (价格, 'price') and *yīnggāi yǒu* (应该有, 'should have') vague.
VEs	Core vague items that can be used individually or be modified by pre-vaguefiers and/or post-vaguefiers. **N2S2:34**：你 <u>看 一看</u>，你 先 <u>看 一看</u>。(overlap) 　　　　Nǐ <u>kàn yī kàn</u>, nǐ xiān <u>kàn yī kàn</u>. (overlap) '<u>Have a look</u>, and you <u>have a look</u> first.' **N2S1:35**：(overlap) 但是 　<u>这</u>、<u>这</u>、<u>这个</u> (overlap) 　　　　(overlap) Dànshì <u>zhè</u>, <u>zhè</u>, <u>zhègè</u> (overlap) 'But <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>'

	The VEs *kàn yī kàn* (看一看 'have a look') and *zhe/zhege* (这/这个 'well') are used individually. The VE *kàn ȳ kàn* (看一看 'have a look') softens the speaker's tone, making the speaker sound polite and informal, while the speaker was trying to persuade the client to consider the offer within a short duration. The VEs *zhe/zhege* (这/这个 'well') help to fill in lexical gaps, allowing the speaker some thinking time and creating an informal negotiating atmosphere.
Post-vaguefiers	As the name indicates, they are vague items used after core items to make the non-vague meaning vague or the vague meaning more vague. **N2S2:44**：你 先 看 一下。(overlap) 　　　　　Nǐ xiān kàn yīxià.　(overlap) 　　　　　'Have a quick look at it first.' **N2S1:45**：(overlap) 可以 考虑 一下，对 不 对？(overlap) 　　　　　(overlap) Kěyǐ kǎolǜ yīxià, duì bù duì?　(overlap) 　　　　　'I can think it over for a while, cannot I?' The VE *yīxià* (一下, 'a little in scale, scope or capability') following the core items *kàn* (看, 'look') and *kǎolǜ* (考虑, 'think over) makes the non-vague meanings of *kàn* (看, 'look') and *kǎolǜ* (考虑, 'think over) vague as with *yīxià* (一下, 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *kàn* (看, 'look') and *kǎolǜ* (考虑, 'think over) have become quite vague indicating a quick action within a short duration and an indefinite answer respectively.

Notes: N1S2:9: N1 means Negotiation 1; S2 means Speaker 2 who appeared in a particular data segment as the second speaker; 9 means Turn 9. This format is applicable throughout this thesis**.**

Syntactic forms:

1) **Conditionals:** VL through using a clause containing or implying a condition, e.g. *rúguǒ---* (如果 --- 'If ---')

E.g.: *Jiù shì shuō rúguǒ wǒmen dīyú nàgè zuìdījià, kěnéng ǰu chjú le .* (就是说如果我们低于那个最低价，可能就出局了。That is to say, if our price is lower than that lowest price, we might be out.)

2) **Passives:** VL through using a verb form or voice in which the grammatical subject receives the verb's action, e.g. *bèi ---* (被--- 'by---')

E.g.: *Bèi táotài le, jiù shì zhè gè yuānmy* (被淘汰了，就是这个原因。It was eliminated; this is just the reason why.)

3) Concessive conjunctions: VL through using a clause introducing a concessive clause used to concede a given point in an argument, e.g. *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 --- 'Although ---')

E.g.: *Suīrán qiāndìng yī nián, dànshì hái yǒu gè shénme shìchē duō cháng duōcháng shíjiān.*   (虽然签订一年，但是还有个什么试车多长多长时间。<u>Although</u>   we signed it for one year, there was still, whatisit, a kind of long trial period.)

4) Indirect constructions: VL through using a clause referring to a point, aim, purpose, or result indirectly, rather than by the most direct course or by obvious means, e.g. *yàoshi ---* (要是 --- 'in case ---')

E.g.: *Yàoshi kōngyùn, shì wǔshí lái tiān.* (要是空运，是五十来天。<u>In case</u> air-express is required, it will take over 50 days.)

5) Reduplications: VL through adopting a morphological process by which the root or stem of a word, or part of it, is repeated, e.g. *kànkàn* (看看, 'have a look')

E.g.: *Zhèyàng xíng bù xíng, nǐ kànkàn?* (这样行不行，你看看？ Is this OK? Please have a look.)

6) Interrogatives: VL through using an interrogative word, element, or construction, e.g. *--- ne?* (--- 呢? 'a question marker')
E.g.: *Jiù* (.) *zhè gè chǎnpǐn ne?* (就（.）这个产品呢？ Well, this product?)

Pragmatic functions:

Pragmatic functions of VL in this study fall into the following six categories, as listed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Pragmatic functions of VL

Categories	Descriptions and examples
Self-protection	VL is used as a safeguard against being wrong later. E.g.: **N4S1:105:** 还 有　就是 咱们　这个 行程　　都 很 Hái yǒu　jiù shì zánmen　zhègè xíngchéng dōu hěn 充实，　但是 晚上　　可能　会 有　一些 自由 chōngshí, dànshì wǎnshang kěnéng huì yǒu yīxiē zìyóu 活动　　的 时间。 huódòng de shíjiān. 'Moreover, our itinerary is very <u>tight</u>, but in the evening there <u>might</u> be <u>some</u> free activity time.'
Deliberately withholding information	For strategic reasons, VL is used to hide information. E.g.: **N1S1:59:** 不 光　　是 照顾　好，还 得，还 得，还 得 让利。 Bù guāng shì zhàogù hǎo, hái děi, hái děi, hái děi rànglì, 实惠　点儿，主动　　点儿。(0.2) 你 看　你 这个 Shíhuì diǎnr,　zhǔdòng diǎnr.　(0.2) Nǐ kàn nǐ zhègè 价格， jiàgé, 'Not only look after us well, but also should give us a discount. Should be <u>a little</u> more practical and <u>a little</u> more voluntary. You see your price,'
Politeness	VL is used as means of showing respect and politeness in Chinese culture, and of not threatening face. E.g.: **N2S1:41:** 完 了，所以 我 想　　呢，如果 十 万　呢，(0.2) Wán le,　suǒyǐ wǒ xiǎng ne,　rúguǒ shí wàn ne,　(0.2) 我 得 考虑 一下 了。 wǒ děi kǎolǜ yīxià le. 'Therefore, I think, <u>well</u>, <u>if</u> it's one hundred thousand, I have to think it over <u>for a while</u>.'
Informality	VL is associated with informal conversational settings. E.g.: **N3S1:1:** 嗯，(0.1) 这个 (0.2)，我 在 你们　青旅　啊， En,　(0.1) zhègè (0.2),　wǒ zài nǐmen qīnglǚ a, 这个 出去 外国　旅游 了 多少　次。啊，从 zhègè chūqù wàiguó lǚyóu le duōshao cì.　A, cóng 安排、服务 各方面　　都 非常　满意。 ānpái, fúwù gè fāngmiàn dōu fēicháng mǎnyì. '<u>Well</u>, <u>well</u>, I, with your Youth Travel, <u>well</u>, travel abroad many times. <u>Well</u>, from arrangements to services, it was very satisfactory in every way.'

Filling in lexical gaps	VL is used to convey meaning in situations where speakers do not have any other expressions to use, and is a ploy speakers use when they cannot find the words they need. E.g.: **N4S1:123:** 我们　　到 那边 肯定　　就 事先　　导游　　根据 你 　　　　　Wǒmen dào nàbiān kěndìng jiù shìxiān dǎoyóu gēnjù nǐ 　　　　　<u>这个</u>　就 是 <u>那个</u>。 　　　　　<u>zhègè</u> jiù shì <u>nàgè</u>. 　　　　　'We will, and the tour guide there will surely do it in advance 　　　　　according to, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>.'
Giving the right amount of information	The amount of information given is tailored for the perceived purposes of the interaction and VEs can be used where less precision is required. E.g.: **N5S1:67:** 他们　都　是，在 这　方面　　　是 <u>很</u>　有　经验　的， 　　　　　Tāmen dōu shì, zài zhè fāngmiàn shì <u>hěn</u> yǒu jīngyàn de, 　　　　　学校　　就　是 这样　　　给 安排　的。 　　　　　xuéxiào jiù shì zhèyàng gěi ānpái de. 　　　　　'They are <u>very</u> experienced in this aspect, and it's arranged 　　　　　like this by the university.'

Chapter 4 Analysis of parts of speech at the lexical level

This chapter discusses the most (and least) common VEs used in the data and how they are collocated in Chinese business negotiations from the perspectives of parts of speech, in relation to three factors: age, gender and social distance. Age is represented by A+ (older) and A- (younger). For the convenience of analysis in this study, 'older' is defined as 45 years old and above, and 'younger' as below 45 years old. Gender consists of F (female) and M (male). Social distance has three variables, D-: 'friends'; D=: 'acquaintances'; D+: 'strangers'. This discussion attempts to uncover lexical patterns and their corresponding communicative strategies.

4.1 Negotiation 1 (D=)

N1 is a case where both negotiating parties know each other as acquaintances; three males are on one side (A: 56, C: 45 and D: 39 years old respectively) and one female (B: 37 years old) is on the other side. It is a business negotiation of a contract between a petrol-chemical company (A, C and D) and an equipment supplier (B).

4.1.1 Parts of speech of the VEs

In this study parts of speech of the VEs are defined loosely to include vague words and phrases. Phrases, such as *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest'), are included because they play a similar role as that of vague words when used in VL.

VEs are classified following the system of the original Chinese classifications of parts of speech, not of pragmatic functions depending on the context, thus unnecessary confusion can be avoided and the classification can be simplified and

streamlined as well. For example, although the VEs *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then') in this data pragmatically function as a discourse marker or a gap filler, they are still classified as a pronoun. Similarly, *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little') and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') function as diminutives, but they are classified as numerals.

It should also be noted that the English parts of speech may not be suitable for Chinese words because Chinese is, typologically, a very different language. Therefore, there is not necessarily an exact one-for-one transfer of parts of speech classification between the two languages. For instance, *xiànzài* (现在 'now') tends to be classified as a noun in Chinese, but it could be an adverb in English; and *yībān* (一般 'general') as an adjective in Chinese, while sometimes an adverb in English.

There are some VEs that on surface appear to be non-vague, but are vague in actual language use, for example, *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest') and *zuìhǎo* (最好 'the best'). They may not be vague in an absolute superlative sense, but can be vague in sentences such as 'This is probably the <u>lowest</u> point in his life' and 'She is one of my <u>best</u> friends'.

Table 4.1: Number of tokens for each part of speech in N1

Parts of speech	Pronoun	Adjective	Adverb	Con- junction	Noun	Auxiliary word	Verb*/ Auxiliary verb	Numeral
No. of tokens	234	172	122	68	67	54	53	45

* Verbs here include auxiliary verbs

The results shown in Table 4.1 indicate that the most frequent use of part of speech was vague pronouns represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then'). The second most commonly used part of speech was vague adjectives represented by *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest') and *duō* (多 'many'). The least

used were vague numerals represented by *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little') and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability').

Among all the VEs, the most common one was *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then', 96 tokens) and the least common ones (only 1 token) were *chōngqíliàng* (充其量 'at most'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *shìdàng* (适当 'appropriately'), *pǔbiàn* (普遍 'at large'), *kuàiyào* (快要 'shortly'), *jìnlì* (尽力 'do one's best'), *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly'), *zúgòu* (足够 'enough'), *bùshǎo* (不少 'many'), *wěndìng* (稳定 'stable'), *shíyòng* (实用 'practical'), *yōuliáng* (优良 'fine'), *mǎnyì* (满意 'satisfied'), *yōuhuì* (优惠 'favourable'), *shíhuì* (实惠 'substantial'), *zhǔdòng* (主动 'active'), *tōngcháng* (通常 'usual'), *xiāngduì* (相对 'relative'), *duǎn* (短 'short'), *nàiyòng* (耐用 'durable'), *hélǐ* (合理 'reasonable'), *yǒushìchǎng* (有市场 'popular'), *chángyòngde* (常用的 'commonly used'), *duōdà* (多大 'that big'), *hégé* (合格 'certified'), *shūfu* (舒服 'comfortable'), *miǎnmianqiāngqiāng* (勉勉强强 'reluctant'), *còuhū* (凑乎 'so so'), *zhòngyào* (重要 'important'), *gèbié* (个别 'very few'), *máng* (忙 'busy'), *jǐn* (紧 'urgent'), *línghuó* (灵活 'flexible'), *bǎoshǒu* (保守 'conservative'), *xīnxīngde* (新兴的 'burgeoning'), *cāngcù* (仓促 'brash'), *yībān* (一般 'general'), *sháwányìr* (啥玩意儿 'whatisit'), *zhǐdǎojià* (指导价 'guided price'), *chǔnshìer* (蠢事儿 'stupid things'), *chángqīxìng* (长期性 'long term'), *bùfen* (部分 'part'), *yīdàn* (一旦 'once'), *nǔlì* (努力 'try hard'), *zōnghé* (综合 'integrate'), *gūjì* (估计 'estimate'), *gǎnjué* (感觉 'feel'), *rènwéi* (认为 'think'), *jǐchéng* (几成 'a few percent'), *sāndàosì* (三到四 '3 or 4'), *wǔshí lái* (五十来 '50 odd'), *shí kuài dào èrshí kuài* (十块到二十块 '10 yuan or 20 yuan'), and *bù shàng sān nián* (不上三年 'less than 3 years').

Table 4.2: The most common and the least common VEs for each part of speech in N1

Parts of speech	Most common	Least common (only 1 token)
Pronoun	*nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then', 96 tokens) **Eg.** *Wǒmen shì shuō, xiàng shì nàgè, jiù shì shuō, biǎodá wǒmen de nánchù.* (我们是说，象是那个，就是说，表达我们的难处。We are trying to say, like, well, just say, to express our difficulty. N1S2:233)	*jǐchéng* (几成 'a few percent')
Auxiliary word	*ne* (呢 'well', 40 tokens) **Eg.** *Hǎiyùn, yào hǎiyùn ne, jiù shì shuō zhōuqī zuì cháng shì qī tiān.* (海运，要海运 呢，就是说周期最长是七天。Ocean transportation, in case we go for ocean transportation, well, the longest period will be seven days. N1S1:26)	
Conjunction	*yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case', 33 tokens) **Eg.** *Yàoshi wǒmen bào de bā qiān duō, zài jiàng, jiàng dào zuìshǎo. (0.2) Wǒ bù zhīdao zěnme zuò gèng ǎh.* (要是我们报的八千多，再降、降到最少(0.2)我不知道怎么做更好。In case we offered over 8,000, then we reduced the price to the lowest. I don't know which way would be better. N1S2:195)	*yīdàn* (一旦 'once')
Noun	*xiànzài* (现在 'now', 33 tokens) **Eg.** *Xiànzài kōngyùn shì shíbā wàn, duìbù duì?* (现在空运是十八万，对不对？Now the airfare is 180,000, right? N1S1:12)	*sháwányìr* (啥玩意儿 'whatisit'), *zhǐdǎojià* (指导价 'guided price'), *chǔnshìer* (蠢事儿 'stupid things'), *chángqīxìng* (长期性 'long term'), *bùfen* (部分 'part')

Verb (including auxiliary verb)	*kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably /possibly', 25 tokens) **Eg.** <u>*Kěnéng*</u> *hái yàohuàn diào.* (可能还要换掉。It <u>might</u> still be replaced. N1S3:216)	*gūjì* (估计 'estimate'), *gǎnjué* (感觉 'feel'), *rènwéi* (认为 'think'), *nǔlì* ('try hard'), *zōnghé* (综合 'integrate'),
Numeral	*diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little', 23 tokens) **Eg.** *Nà jiù ná* <u>*diǎnr*</u> *guǎnggào fèi ba.* (那就拿<u>点儿</u>广告费吧。Well then, pay <u>a little</u> for advertising. N1S1:221)	*sāndàosì* (三到四 '3 or 4'), *wǔshí lái* (五十来 '50 odd'), *shí kuài dào èrshí kuài* (十块到二十块 '10 yuan or 20 yuan'), and *bù shàng sān nián* (不上三年 'less than 3 years')
Adjective	*zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest', 16 tokens) **Eg.** *Wǒmen xiànzài gěi de shì* <u>*zuìdī*</u> *jiàgé.* (我们现在给的是<u>最低</u>价格。The price we are offering now is the <u>lowest</u>. N1S2:157)	*zúgòu* (足够 'enough'), *bùshǎo* (不少 'many'), *wěndìng* (稳定 'stable'), *shíyòng* (实用 'practical'), *yōuliáng* (优良 'fine'), *mǎnyì* (满意 'satisfied'), *yōuhuì* (优惠 'favourable'), *shíhuì* (实惠 'substantial'), *zhǔdòng* (主动 'active'), *tōngcháng* (通常 'usual'), *xiāngduì* (相对 'relative'), *duǎn* (短 'short'), *nàiyòng* (耐用 'durable'), *hélǐ* (合理 'reasonable'), *yǒushìchǎng* (有市场 'commercioganic'), *chángyòngde* (常用的 'commonly used'), *duōdà* (多大 'that big'), *hégé* (合格 'certified'), *shūfu* (舒服 'comfortable'), *miǎnmianqiāngqiāng* (勉勉强强 'reluctant'), *còuhū* (凑乎 'so so'), *zhòngyào* (重要 'important'), *gèbié* (个别 'very few'), *máng* (忙 'busy'), *jǐn* (紧 'urgent'), *línghuó* (灵活 'flexible'), *bǎoshǒu* (保守 'conservative'), *xīnxīngde* (新兴的 'burgeoning'), *cāngcù* (仓促 'brash'), *yībān* (一般 'general')
Adverb	*tōngcháng* (通常 'usually', 16 tokens) **Eg.** <u>*Tōngcháng*</u> *dōu shì bǎifēnzhī shí .* (<u>通常</u>都是百分之十。Everything is <u>usually</u> 10 percent. N1S1:64)	*chōngqíliàng* (充其量 'at most'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *shìdàng* (适当 'appropriately'), *pǔbiàn* (普遍 'at large'), *kuàiyào* (快要 'be about to'), *jìnlì* (尽力 'do one's best'), *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly'),

As Table 4.2 reveals, the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), auxiliary word *ne* (呢 'well'), conjunction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now'), auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), numeral *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little'), adjective *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest), and adverb *tōngcháng* (通常 'usually') were the most commonly used VEs for each part of speech respectively.

The vague auxiliary word *ne* (呢 'well') was used to ease tension among negotiating parties and create a more friendly and relaxing negotiating atmosphere, and also to make negotiators' thoughts and negotiations run more smoothly and naturally. *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') was the most frequently employed vague conjunction, which created vagueness at the syntactic level and will be discussed fully in Chapter 6. The vague noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') was normally placed at the beginning of a sentence or right before a verb to indicate a variety of length of time more effectively, which did not cause any misunderstandings, but helped the negotiation go more smoothly. The vague auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') was sometimes collocated with *yǒu* (有 'have'), placed at the beginning of a sentence or right before a verb to allow the negotiators some leeway for potential changes or future corrections. The vague numeral *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little') was often collocated with a verb in the form of verb + *dianr/yidianr* to soften the negotiator's tone and make an eased atmosphere for negotiation.

The vague adjective *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest) was collocated with *jià* (价 'price') or *jiàgé* (价格 'price'), to facilitate negotiating the price, implying the bottom price the negotiators can afford without telling the exact price for the purpose of protecting their benefits. The vague adverb *tōngcháng* (通常 'usually') was often utilized at the beginning of a sentence or right before a verb to guard the negotiator's own best interest and negotiating stand.

4.1.2 Lexical analysis of all 4 participants

Table 4.3: Lexical analysis of the participants in N1

Participants	A (Leading)	B (Leading)	C	D
Gender	M	F	M	M
Age	56+	37-	45+	39-
Distance	=	=	=	=
No. of tokens (Total)	367	267	145	36
Adjective	63 (17.17%)	78 (29.21%)	25 (17.24%)	6 (16.67%)
Adverb	40 (10.9%)	48 (17.98%)	29 (20%)	5 (13.89%)
Auxiliary word	15 (4.09%)	10 (3.75%)	27 (18.62%)	2 (5.56%)
Conjunction	35 (9.54%)	22 (8.24%)	6 (4.14%)	5 (13.89%)
Noun	30 (8.17%)	10 (3.75%)	21 (14.48%)	6 (16.67%)
Numeral	17 (4.63%)	25 (9.36%)	3 (2.07%)	0 (0%)
Pronoun	147 (40.06%)	50 (18.73%)	27 (18.62%)	10 (27.78%)
Verb	20 (5.45%)	24 (8.99%)	7 (4.83%)	2 (5.56%)

As shown in Table 4.3, the two leading negotiators spoke more frequently than the other two, especially participant A, who played a dominant role in this case. Participant A mostly used vague pronouns (40.06%) represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), and used vague auxiliary words least (4.09%), represented by *ne* (呢 'well'); participant B most commonly used vague adjectives (29.21%) represented by *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest'), and least utilized vague nouns and vague auxiliary words (both 3.75%) represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *ne* (呢 'well') respectively; participant C most frequently employed vague adverbs (20%) represented by *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), and least commonly used vague numerals (2.07%) represented by *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'); vague pronouns (27.78%) represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and vague numerals (0%) not used at all were most and least commonly utilized respectively by participant D.

4.1.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 1

1. It has been demonstrated that vague pronouns were favoured as a communicative strategy to allow the negotiators some time for thinking or reflecting upon uncertain

questions or new ideas and suggestions, to generate a new topic, withhold some sensitive information, or to soften the speaker's tone.

2. Vague numerals were least commonly used in order not to cause any inconvenience, impoliteness or overt informality in the business negotiation.

3. Vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') normally placed between sentences was the most preferred VE. It played an important role in carrying on the negotiation, eliciting further discussion, softening the tone of the negotiators, switching to a new topic, and buying more time for thinking, etc.

4. The oldest and the youngest male participants mostly employed vague pronouns, while the middle-aged male and the younger female participants respectively utilized vague adverbs and adjectives most. The male participants least used vague auxiliary word and vague numerals, while the female participant least used vague nouns. The older participants used fewer vague adjectives than the younger ones. It reveals that age and gender factors did have an influence on the choice of parts of speech in N1, whereas distance factor is not relevant in this case.

4.2 Negotiation 2 (D-)

N2 is a case where both negotiating parties know each other well as friends; both of them are female and are the same age (54 years old). It is a business negotiation of an insurance agreement between the client (A) and the insurance agent (B).

4.2.1 Parts of speech of the VEs

Table 4.4: Number of tokens for each part of speech in N2

Parts of speech	Pro-noun	Adjec-tive	Auxiliary word	Adverb	Con-junction	Numeral	Verb/ Auxiliary verb	Noun
No. of tokens	335	173	121	78	75	64	63	62

Table 4.4 shows that the same as N1, vague pronouns represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then') were the most frequently used part of speech, and vague adjectives represented by *duō* (多 '*many*') and *hǎo* (好 'good') were found to be the second most commonly used. Differently to N1, the least used were vague nouns represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *guānjiàn* (关键 'key').

Similarly, out of all the VEs, the most common one was *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'，121 tokens) and most differently to N1, the least common ones (only 1 token) were *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *chàbùduō* (差不多 'almost'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), *yǒushíhòu* (有时候 'sometimes'), *huòduōhuòshǎo* (或多或少 'more or less'), *yěxǔ* (也许 'maybe'), *tǐng* (挺 'very'), *yībān* (一般 'general'), *zuìshǎo* (最少 'at least'), *jiǎndān* (简单 'simple'), *yǒuxiào* (有效 'effective'), *bǎoshǒu* (保守 'conservative'), *jìnyībùde* (进一步的 'further'), *gāoyú* (高于 'higher than'), *duǎnqī* (短期 'short term'), *línghuó* (灵活 'flexible'), *duǎn* (短 'short'), *yuèxiǎo* (越小 'smaller'), *cōngming* (聪明 'clever'), *bùdéliǎo* (不得了 'great'), *gèzhǒnggèyàngde* (各种各样的 'various'), *gāoxìng* (高兴 'happy'), *shìhé* (适合 'suitable'), *róngyì* (容易 'easy'), *zhǔyàode* (主要的 'primary'), *yuèdà* (越大 'bigger'), *zǎo* (早 'early'), *máfan* (麻烦 'troublesome'), *zhōngděng* (中等 'middling'), *yībānrén* (一般人 'every man'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *yìwài* (意外 'thunderbolt'), *shíjiānduàn* (时间段 'period of time'), *bàntiān* (半天 'quite a while'), *zhīqián* (之前 'ago'), *xiāngyìngde* (相应的 'corresponding'), *suànsuàn* (算算 'think a while'), *xiǎngxiǎng* (想想 'consider'), *zhǎngyīzhǎng* (涨一涨 'increase a bit'), *sān sì kuǎn* (三、四 款 '3 or 4 kinds'), *shíyīwànduō* (十一万多 'over 110,000'),

shísānwànduō (十三万多 'over 130,000'), *sìshísìwànduō* (四十四万多 'over 440,000'), *èrshíduō* (二十多 '20 odd'), *sìwànduō* (四万多 'over 40,000'), *sānshíduō* (三十多 '30 odd'), *bā jiǔ nián* (八、九 年 '8 or 9 years'), *wǔqiānduō* (五千多 'over 5,000'), *qībǎiduō* (七百多 'over 700'), *qīshíduō* (七十多 '70 odd'), *mǒuyīgè* (某一个 'a certai one'), *bùdàoliù* (不到六 'less than 6')

Table 4.5: The most common and the least common VEs for each part of speech in N2

Parts of speech	Most common	Least common (only 1 token)
Pronoun	*nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'，96 tokens) **Eg.** <u>*Nàgè*</u> *shénme, jiù shì, zhègè bǎodān de huà---* (<u>那个</u>什么，就是，这个保单的话--- <u>Well</u>, whatisit, that's to say, well, if the policy --- N2S1:573)	
Auxiliary word	*a* (啊 'well', 48 tokens) **Eg.** *Hélǐbìshuì wǒ xiǎng nǐ kěnéng yě liǎojiě le,* <u>*a*</u>, *guībì zhègè lìxī shuì de zhègè, zhègè fēngxiǎn.* (合理避税我想你可能也了解了，<u>啊</u>，规避这个利息税的这个、这个风险。Reasonable tax avoidance, which I think you have probably understood, <u>well</u>, is to avoid, well, well, the risk of the interest tax. N2S2:20)	
Noun	*xiànzài* (现在 'now', 31 tokens) **Eg.** *Nàme zhè gè yě jiù shì shuō wǒmen* <u>*xiànzài*</u> *lǐng de zhègè niánjīn a ---.* (那么这个也就是说我们<u>现在</u>领的这个年金啊--- Well then, that's to say, the annuity we claim <u>now</u>---- N2S2:12)	*yībānrén* (一般人 'everyman'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *yìwài* (意外 'thunderbolt'), *shíjiānduàn* (时间段 'period of time'), *bàntiān* (半天 'quite a while'), *zhīqián* (之前 'ago')
Conjunction	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 23 tokens) **Eg.** *Wǒ* <u>*rúguǒ*</u> *tóu yīwàn, nà wǒ zhè guānài niánjīn---* (我<u>如果</u>投一万，那我	

	这关爱年金--- <u>If</u> I invest 10,000, then my 'Care' annuity--- N2S1:361)	
Adjective	*duō* (多 'many', 22 tokens) **Eg.** *Zhèyàng duìwǒmen de yèwù (0.2) yào yǒu hěn <u>duō</u> de yīxiē, dài lái hěn <u>duō</u> de máfan.* (这样对我们的业务，(0.2) 要有很<u>多</u>的一些、带来很多的麻烦。Thus, there will be <u>many</u>, it will make <u>a lot of</u> trouble for our business. N2S2:58）	*yībān* (一般 'general'), *zuìshǎo* (最少 'at least'), *jiǎndān* (简单 'simple'), *yǒuxiào* (有效 'effective'), *bǎoshǒu* (保守 'conservative'), *jìnyībùde* (进一步的 'further'), *gāoyú* (高于 'higher than'), *duǎnqī* (短期 'short term'), *línghuó* (灵活 'flexible'), *duǎn* (短 'short'), *yuèxiǎo* (越小 'smaller'), *cōngming* (聪明 'clever'), *bùdéliǎo* (不得了 'great'), *gèzhǒnggèyàngde* (各种各样的 'various'), *gāoxìng* (高兴 'happy'), *shìhé* (适合 'suitable'), *róngyì* (容易 'easy'), *zhǔyàode* (主要的 'primary'), *yuèdà* (越大 'bigger'), *zǎo* (早 'early'), *máfan* (麻烦 'troublesome'), *zhōngděng* (中等 'middling'),
Verb (including auxiliary verb)	*kěnéng* ('may/might/probably/possibly', 20 tokens) **Eg.** *Zhèyàng nǐ dàoshǒu le yǐhòu <u>kěnéng</u> jiù hěn gāoxìng.* (这样你到手了以后<u>可能</u>就很高兴。Thus, after you get it, you <u>might</u> be very happy. N2S2:470)	*suànsuàn* (算算 'reckon a while'), *xiǎngxiǎng* (想想 'consider'), *zhǎngyīzhǎng* (涨一涨 'increase a bit'), *xiāngyìng* (相应 'corresponding')
Numeral	*yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability', 16 tokens) **Eg.** *Guībì <u>yīxià</u> fēngxiǎn.* (规避<u>一下</u>风险。Reduce the risk <u>a little bit</u>. N2S2:721)	*sān sì kuǎn* (三、四款 '3 or 4 kinds'), *shíyīwànduō* (十一万多 'over 110,000'), *shísānwànduō* (十三万多 'over 130,000'), *sìshísìwànduō* (四十四万多 'over 440,000'), *èrshíduō* (二十多 '20 odd'), *sìwànduō* (四万多 'over 40,000'), *sānshíduō* (三十多 '30 odd'), *bā jiǔ nián* (八、九 年 '8 or 9 years'), *wǔqiānduō* (五千多 'over 5,000'), *qībǎiduō* (七百多 'over 700'), *qīshíduō* (七十多 '70 odd'), *mǒuyīgè*

		(某一个 'a certain one'), *bùdàoliù* (不到六 'less than 6')
Adverb	*gāngcái* (刚才 'just now', 15 tokens) **Eg.** *Qíshí ne, wǒ gāngcái shuō le.* (其实呢，我刚才说了。Actually, I said it just now. N2S2:72)	*dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *chàbùduō* (差不多 'almost'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), *yǒushíhòu* (有时候 'sometimes'), *huòduōhuòshǎo* (或多或少 'more or less'), *yěxǔ* (也许 'maybe'), *tǐng* (挺 'very')

As shown in Table 4.5, the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), auxiliary word *a* (啊 'well'), noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now'), conjunction *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), adjective *duō* (多 'many'), auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), numeral *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), and adverb *gāngcái* (刚才 'just now') were the most commonly used VEs respectively for each part of speech.

The vague auxiliary word *a* (啊 'well'), vague noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and vague auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') were employed in the same manner as in N1 for similar reasons. The vague adjective *duō* (多 'many') was often collocated with another hedge word *hěn* (很 'very') becoming more vague or with a numeral in the form of numeral + *duō* (多 'many') turning into a vague quantifier. They were used by the negotiators to convince his/her negotiating counterpart into agreement by impressing and attracting the opponent.

Similar to *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), the vague conjunction *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') was commonly used and created vagueness through syntactic forms. The same as the vague numeral *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little'), the vague numeral *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') was also often collocated with a verb in the form of verb + *yixia* for the same pragmatic purposes.

The vague adverb *gāngcái* (刚才 'just now') was usually utilized between sentences to place an emphasis on the short period and help remind the negotiating opponent of the negotiator's own point and negotiating stand iterated before.

4.2.2 Lexical analysis of the participants

Table 4.6: Lexical analysis of the participants in N2

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	54+	54+
Distance	-	-
No. of tokens (Total)	438	533
Adjective	69 (15.75%)	104 (19.51%)
Adverb	34 (7.76%)	44 (8.26%)
Auxiliary word	60 (13.7%)	61 (11.45%)
Conjunction	54 (12.33%)	21 (3.94%)
Noun	33 (7.53%)	29 (5.44%)
Numeral	16 (3.65%)	48 (9.01%)
Pronoun	157 (35.85%)	178 (33.4%)
Verb	15 (3.43%)	48 (9.01%)

As revealed in Table 4.6, participant A most frequently employed vague pronouns (35.85%) represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), and used vague verbs least (3.43%) represented by *xiǎng* (想 'think'). Vague pronouns (33.4%) represented by *zhègè* (这个 'well then') and vague conjunctions (3.94%) represented by *yīdàn* (一旦 'once') were most and least commonly utilized respectively by participant B.

4.2.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 2

1. Similar to N1, vague pronouns were preferred, for the same reasons.

2. Vague nouns were least commonly used in order not to cause unnecessary misunderstandings, breakdowns or over informality in the business negotiation.

3. As in N1, the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') was the favourite VE, for the same strategic purpose.

4. Both of the two older female participants mostly employed vague pronouns, and participant A kept utilizing the vague noun *guānjiàn* (关键 'key') for stressing her points of view. However, one used vague verbs the least whilst the other least utilized vague conjunctions. This indicates that negotiators of the same age and gender can still use VL differently. One possible factor could be the different power position and communicative goals because one is the client and the other is the salesperson.

4.3 Negotiation 3 (D+)

N3 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; one is male (A: 60 years old) and the other one is female (B: 32 years old). It is a business negotiation of an international travel agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

4.3.1 Parts of speech of the VEs

Table 4.7: Number of tokens for each part of speech in N3

Parts of speech	Pro-noun	Adjec-tive	Adverb	Auxilia-ry word	Numeral	Con-junction	Verb/ Auxiliary verb	Noun
No. of tokens	201	152	128	118	74	52	24	21

Table 4.7 reveals that, similar to N1 and 2, vague pronouns represented by *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then') and *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') were the most frequently used part of speech and the second most commonly used were vague adjectives represented by *yībān* (一般 'general') and *hǎo* (好 'good'). As in N2, the least used were vague nouns represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *dāngshí* (当时 'then').

Among all the VEs, the most commonly used was *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'，74 tokens) and the least commonly employed (only 1 token) were

suíchù (随处 'everywhere'), *xiāngduì* (相对 'relatively'), *kuàiyào* (快要 'shortly'), *xiāngyìngde* (相应地 'corresponding'), *yěxǔ* (也许 'maybe'), *suíshí* (随时 'anytime'), *hǎoxiàng* (好像 'seemingly'), *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), *shēndù* (深度/地 'in-depth'), *yuǎn* (远 'far'), *héshì* (合适 'appropriate'), *shūfu* (舒服 'comfortable'), *xīnxiān* (新鲜 'fresh'), *dàgàide* (大概的 'general'), *chà* (差 'bad'), *lìngwài* (另外 'extra'), *jìn* (近 'near'), *zhòng* (重 'heavy'), *yǒumíngde* (有名的 'famous'), *xiǎoxíngde* (小型的 'pint-sized'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *mǎnyì* (满意 'satisfied'), *hélǐ* (合理 'reasonable'), *yǐwài* (以外 'beyond'), *bùfen* (部分 'part'), *guānjiàn* (关键 'key'), *dàbùfen* (大部分 'most part'), *mùqián* (目前 'present'), *yǐhòu* (以后 'later'), *xúnsi* (寻思 'reckon'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *xiǎng* (想 'think'), *xiāngyìng* (相应 'corresponding'), *biéde* (别的 'other'), *yīcān dào lǎng cān* (一餐到两餐 '1 or 2 meals'), *èrshí yǐxià* (二十以下 'less than 20'), *sānshíwǔ yǐshàng* (三十五以上 'over 35'), *wǔqiān dào yīwàn* (五千到一万 '5,000 or 10,000'), *èr sān shí* (二、三十 '20 or 30'), *yīdàduī* (一大堆 'a large pile').

Table 4.8: The most common and the least common VEs for each part of speech in N3

Parts of speech	Most common	Least common (only 1 token)
Pronoun	*zhè/zhègè* (这/个 'well/then'，3/74 tokens) **Eg.** *Tā huì yǒu ānpái dāngdì de zhègè cān.* (它会有安排当地的这个餐。It will, <u>well</u>, provide the meal with the local flavor. N3S2:86)	*biéde* (别的 'other')
Auxiliary word	*en* (嗯 'well' 49 tokens) **Eg.** *Dànshì chī fàn de bāozhǔn shì yīyàng de. En, zhù de bāozhǔn néng gāo yīxiē.* (但是吃饭的标准是一样的。嗯，住的标准能高一些。However, the meal standard is the same. <u>Well</u>, housing standard is a little higher. N3S2:78)	
Numeral	*yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some', 42 tokens) **Eg.** *Tā yīnài ǒu yīxiē jǐngdiǎn* ---	*yīcān dào lǎngcān* (一餐到两餐 '1 or 2 meals'), *èrshí yǐxià* (二十以下

	(它因为有一些景点--- because there are some scenic spots--- N3S2:130)	'less than 20'), *sānshíwǔ yǐshàng* (三十五以上 'over 35'), *wǔqiān dào yīwàn* (五千到一万 '5,000 or 10,000'), *èr sān shí* (二、三十 '20 or 30'), *yīdàduī* (一大堆 'a pile')
Adverb	*bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively', 24 tokens) **Eg.** *Rìchéng ānpái de bǐjiào hǎo, yǒu sān tiān zài chuán shàng?* (日程安排得比较好，有三天在船上? The schedule is quite good. Do I stay on the ship for three days? N3S1:11)	*suíchù* (随处 'everywhere'), *xiāngduì* (相对 'relatively'), *kuàiyào* (快要 'shortly'), *xiāngyìngde* (相应地 'corresponding'), *yěxǔ* (也许 'maybe'), *suíshí* (随时 'anytime'), *hǎoxiàng* (好像 'seemingly'), *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), *shēndù/di* (深度地 'in an in-depth manner')
Conjunction	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 24 tokens) **Eg.** *Nǐ rúguǒ zài jìngwài tí xiàn dehuà, nàgè shǒuxù fèi huì hěn gāo.* (你如果在境外提现的话，那个手续费会很高。If you withdraw cash abroad, the transaction fee will be very high. N3S2:214)	
Adjective	*yībān* (一般 'general', 20 tokens) **Eg.** *Suǒyǐ tā de rénshù yībān tā dōu kòngzhì zài èrshí rén yǐxià.* (所以它的人数一般它都控制在二十人以下。Therefore, the number of the people is generally limited to less than 20. N3S2:100)	*yuǎn* (远 'far'), *héshì* (合适 'appropriate'), *shūfu* (舒服 'comfortable'), *xīnxiān* (新鲜 'fresh'), *dàgàide* (大概的 'general'), *chà* (差 'bad'), *lìngwài* (另外 'extra'), *jìn* (近 'near'), *zhòng* (重 'heavy'), *yǒumíngde* (有名的 'famous'), *xiǎoxíngde* (小型的 'pint-sized'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *mǎnyì* (满意 'satisfied'), *hélǐ* (合理 'reasonable')
Verb (including auxiliary verb)	*kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/ possibly', 8 tokens) **Eg.** *Zhōngcān ǒu kěnéng jiù shìzài xíngchéng dāngzhōng lái chī le.* (中餐有可能就是在行程当中来吃了。The Chinese meal *may* be served during the journey. N3S2:74)	*xúnsi* (寻思 'reckon'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *xiǎng* (想 'think'), *xiāngyìng* (相应 'corresponding')

Noun	*xiànzài* (现在 'now', 6)	*yǐwài* (以外 'beyond'), *bùfen* (部分 'part'), *guānjiàn* (关键 'key'), *dàbùfen* (大部分 'most part'), *mùqián* (目前 'present'), *yǐhòu* (以后 'later')
	Eg. *Xiànzài pài shàng yòngtú le.* (现在派上用途了。Now it can be used. N3S2:248)	

As shown in Table 4.8, vague pronoun *zhège* (这个 'well then'), auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), numeral *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some'), adverb *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), conjunction *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), adjective *yībān* (一般 'general'), auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') and noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') were the most commonly used VE respectively for each part of speech.

The vague auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), vague auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') and vague noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') were used in the same way as in N1 and N2 for similar reasons. The vague numeral *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some'), normally placed before nouns and sometimes after verbs, was employed to express the amount the negotiators were not sure about, make non-vague meanings vague and vague meanings more vague to soften the tone. As in N2, *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') was the most used vague conjunction.

The vague adverb *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), used to hedge, was normally placed right before the word or expression it modified to make a non-vague meaning vague or a vague meaning more vague. It is used to prevent the negotiators from losing face due to a possible wrong judgement and allow some room for correcting any potential mistakes later on, indicate more objective evaluation, or simply to be polite.

The vague adjective *yībān* (一般 'general') was often collocated with words such as *shì* (是, 'to be'), *dōu* (都 'all'), or *láishuō* (来说 'speaking') placed at the very

beginning of a sentence or right before verbs to imply possible exceptions and in this way help the negotiators save some room for further negotiation or correction of a mistake due to lack of knowledge.

4.3.2 Lexical analysis of the participants

Table 4.9: Lexical analysis of the participants in N3

Participants	A	B
Gender	M	F
Age	60+	32-
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Total)	293	477
Adjective	55 (18.77%)	97 (20.34%)
Adverb	49 (16.72%)	79 (16.56%)
Auxiliary word	57 (19.45%)	61(12.79%)
Conjunction	15 (5.12%)	37 (7.76%)
Noun	4 (1.37%)	17 (3.56%)
Numeral	16 (5.46%)	58 (12.16%)
Pronoun	92 (31.4%)	109 (22.85%)
Verb	5 (1.71%)	19 (3.98%)

As indicated in Table 4.9, both participant A and participant B utilized vague pronouns (31.4% and 22.85% respectively) represented by *zhège* (这个 'well then') most frequently, and employed vague nouns the least (1.37% and 3.56% respectively) represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now').

4.3.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 3

1. Vague pronouns were favoured, the same as in N1 and N2. Vague nouns were least commonly employed, the same as in N2, for the same reason.

2. In the same manner as the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), the vague pronoun *zhège* (这个 'well then') was also normally placed between sentences, and was the favourite VE for the same strategic purpose.

3. Both the older male and the younger female participants most frequently utilized vague pronouns and least commonly employed vague nouns. This case indicates that gender and age did not have much impact on the choice of parts of speech.

4.4 Negotiation 4 (D+)

N4 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; both are female (A: 32 and B: 24 years old respectively). It is a business negotiation of a domestic travel agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

4.4.1 Parts of speech of the VEs

Table 4.10: Number of tokens for each part of speech in N4

Parts of speech	Pro-noun	Adverb	Numeral	Adjec-tive	Con-junction	Auxiliary word	Verb/ Auxilia-ry verb	Noun
No. of tokens	93	81	68	55	51	50	24	13

Table 4.10 shows that for N4, as in N1, N2 and N3, vague pronouns represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *shénme/shénmede* (什么/什么的 'whatisit'/ 'stuff like that') were the most frequently used part of speech. In contrast to the other cases, the second most commonly-used part of speech was vague adverbs represented by *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively') and *hěn* (很, 'very'). Likewise, as in N2 and N3, the least used part of speech was vague nouns represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *zhīlèi* (之类 'things like that'). The number of tokens for each part of speech in this case is smaller due to the shorter recording time of the negotiation.

Out of all the VEs, as in N1 and N2, the most common one was *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then', 37 tokens). In contrast, the least common ones (only 1 token) were *wànyī* (万一 'by any chance'), *jīngcháng* (经常 'often'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *yīhuìr*

(一会儿 'a minute'), *jīhū* (几乎 'almost'), *suíbiàn* (随便 'anyway'), *suíshí* (随时 'anytime'), *dàlüède* (大略地 'roughly'), *dàgài* (大概 'generally'), *chàbùduō* (差不多 'almost'), *hǎohao* (好好 'carefully'), *yuǎn* (远 'far'), *jìn* (近 'near'), *guì* (贵 'expensive'), *zǎo* (早 'early'), *shǎo* (少 'few/little'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *duǎn* (短 'short'), *yìwài* (意外 'thunderbolt'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *yībùfen* (一部分 'a part'), *dāngshí* (当时 'then'), *wànyī* (万一 'suddenness'), *jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that'), *duōshao* (多少 'amount/number'), *yǒude* (有的 'some/certain'), *sì wǔ diǎnzhōng* (四、五点钟' '4 or 5 o'clock'), *sānshíduō* (三十多 'over 30'), *duōduōshǎoshǎo* (多多少少 'more or less').

Table 4.11: The most common and the least common VEs for each part of speech in N4

Parts of speech	Most common	Least common (only 1 token)
Pronoun	*nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then', 37 tokens) **Eg.** *Nàgè jiù kěyǐ shāo yīxiē lǚyóu jìniànpǐn.* (那个就可以捎一些旅游纪念品。Well then, you can buy some souvenirs. N4S1:75)	*duōshao* (多少 'amount/number'), *yǒude* (有的 'some/certain')
Numeral	*yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability', 27 tokens) **Eg.** *Wǒ hái xiǎng zài wèn yīxià.* (我还想再问一下。I still want to ask a quick question. N4S2:78)	*sì wǔ diǎnzhōng* (四、五点钟' '4 or 5 o'clock'), *sānshíduō* (三十多 'over 30'), *duōduōshǎoshǎo* (多多少少 'more or less')
Auxiliary word	*en* (嗯 'well' 22 tokens) **Eg.** *Dào nàbiān nǐ dōu dài zhe duǎnxiù yīfu, xiàtiān de fúzhuāng . En, zuìhǎo hái dài bǎ yǔsǎn.* (到那边你都带着短袖衣服，夏天的服装。嗯，最好还带把雨伞。Going there, you take short-sleeved clothes, summer clothes. Well, you'd better take an umbrella as well. N4S1:19)	
Conjunction	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 21 tokens) **Eg.** Rúguǒ wǒ jiù bù xiǎng tāo dān fáng	*jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that')

	chā---(如果我就不想掏单房差--- <u>If</u> I truly don't want to pay the balance for the single room--- N4S2:126)	
Adverb	*bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively', 21 tokens) **Eg.** *Yīnwèi wǒ <u>bǐjiào</u> zàihu zhègè.* (因为我<u>比较</u>在乎这个。Because I am quite concerned about this. N4S2:12)	*wànyī* (万一 'by any chance'), *jīngcháng* (经常 'ofren'), *dàyuē* (大约 'about'), *yīhuìr* (一会儿 'a minute'), *jīhū* (几乎 'almost'), *suíbiàn* (随便 'anyway'), *suíshí* (随时 'anytime'), *dàlüède* (大略地 'roughly'), *dàgài* (大概 'generally'), *chàbùduō* (差不多 'almost'), *hǎohao* (好好 'carefully'),
Adjective	*duō* (多 'many', 13 tokens) **Eg.** *Wǒ yīnwèi yǐqián kàn guò hǎo <u>duō</u> bàozhǐ ma--* -(我因为以前看过好<u>多</u>报纸嘛--- Since I have read <u>many</u> newspapers in the past--- N4S2:50)	*yuǎn* (远 'far'), *jìn* (近 'near'), *guì* (贵 'expensive'), *zǎo* (早 'early'), *shǎo* (少 'few/little'), *kuài* (快 'fast'), *duǎn* (短 'short')
Verb (including auxiliary verb)	*kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly', 9 tokens) **Eg.** *Yǒude shíhou dǎoyóu <u>kěnéng</u> tíqián a huì gēn nǐ shāngliàng yīxià.* (有的时候导游<u>可能</u>提前啊会跟你商量一下。Sometimes, the tour guide <u>may</u> discuss it a little bit with you in advance. N4S1:45)	*máfan* (麻烦 'trouble')
Noun	*xiànzài* (现在 'now', 6 tokens) **Eg.** *Nàbiān de <u>xiànzài</u> de wēndù shì dıˉo gāo a?* (那边的<u>现在</u>的温度是多高啊？How high is the temperature there <u>now</u>? N4S2:16)	*yìwài* (意外 'thunderbolt'), *máfan* (麻烦 'trouble'), *yībùfen* (一部分 'part'), *dāngshí* (当时 'then'), *wànyī* (万一 'suddenness')

As indicated in Table 4.11, the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), numeral *yīxià* (一下'a little in scale, scope or capability'), auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), adverb *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), conjunction *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), adjective *duō* (多 'many'), auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), and noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') were the most commonly employed VE for each part of speech respectively.

The vague numeral *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') and vague adjective *duō* (多 'many') were employed in the same way as in N2 for the same reasons. The vague auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), vague noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and vague auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') were used in the same manner as in N1, N2 and N3 for similar reasons. The vague adverb *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively') was utilized in the same manner as in N3. As in N2 and N3, the vague conjunction *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') was the most utilized.

4.4.2 Lexical analysis of the participants

Table 4.12: Lexical analysis of the participants in N4

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	32-	24-
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Total)	173	262
Adjective	25 (14.45%)	30 (11.45%)
Adverb	30 (17.34%)	51 (19.47%)
Auxiliary word	10 (5.78%)	40 (15.27%)
Conjunction	23 (13.3%)	28 (10.69%)
Noun	4 (2.31%)	9 (3.44%)
Numeral	33 (19.08%)	35 (13.36%)
Pronoun	36 (20.81%)	57 (21.76%)
Verb	12 (6.94%)	12 (4.58%)

As shown in Table 4.12, both participant A and participant B most commonly employed vague pronouns (20.81% and 21.76% respectively) represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), and used vague nouns the least (2.31% and 3.44% respectively) represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now').

4.4.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 4

1. For the same reason as in N1, N2 and N3, vague pronouns were the most favoured, and vague nouns were least commonly employed as in N2 and N3.

2. As in N1 and N2, the vague pronoun *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') was the most commonly used VE for the same strategic purpose.

3. Both of the two younger female participants most frequently utilized vague pronouns and least commonly employed vague nouns. They are both younger and are the same gender, so the factors of age and gender do not appear to be relevant in this case. However, it cannot be assumed that the same variables would produce the same outcomes; a counter example is N2, where the two participants are also the same gender and even the same age, yet the results show that they used VL in different ways. Two possible influential factors for this difference could be that the two in N2 are much older than the two in this case. The other factor is the nature of the two negotiations; N2 concerns an insurance agreement, whilst this case concerns a domestic travel agreement.

4.5 Negotiation 5 (D+)

N5 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; both are female (A: 21 and B: 55 years old respectively). It is a business negotiation of an overseas study agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

4.5.1 Parts of speech of the VEs

Table 4.13: Number of tokens for each part of speech in N5

Parts of speech	Pro-noun	Auxiliary word	Adjec-tive	Con-junction	Adverb	Numeral	Verb/ Auxilia-ry verb	Noun
No. of tokens	306	132	118	101	70	54	32	28

As seen in Table 4.13, similar to N1, 2, 3 and 4, vague pronouns represented by *zhègè* (这个 'well then') and *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') were the most commonly-used part of speech and the least used were vague nouns represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *yuèmò* (月末 'end of month') as in N2, N3 and N4. In contrast, the second most commonly used part of speech was vague auxiliary words represented by *en* (嗯 'well').

Among all the VEs, similar to N3, the most common in this case was *zhègè* (这个 'well then', 129 tokens) and the least common (only 1 token) were *jībĕnshang* (基本上 'basically'), *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly'), *zŏngdi* (总地 'overally'), *shāowēi* (稍微 'little'), *piányi* (便宜 'cheap'), *yángéde* (严格的 'strict'), *fùzá* (复杂 'complex'), *qiáng* (强 'strong'), *yīdiǎnr* (一点儿 'a little'), *hăoduō* (好多 'a good many'), *bùshăo* (不少 'quite a lot'), *guì* (贵 'expensive'), *zuìduō* (最多 'at most'), *bùdà* (不大 'tiny'), *dà* (大 'big'), *yŏumíngde* (有名的 'well-known'), *jiăndān* (简单 'simple'), *niánmò* (年末 'end of year'), *chúfēi* (除非 'unless'), *jiărú* (假如 'provided that), *gănjué* (感觉 'feel'), *liù qī nián* (六、七 年 '6 or 7 years'), *sìshí duō* (四十多 'over 40'), *chāoguò sān gè yuè* (超过三个月 'more than 3 months'), *bùdào sān gè yuè* (不到三个月 'less than 3 months'), *chāoguò bànnián* (超过半年 'more than half a year'), *bùdào liăng gè yuè* (不到两个月 'less than 2 months'), *sìqiān duō* (四千多 'over 4,000'), *liùqiān duō* (六千多 'over 6,000') and *a* (啊 'well').

Table 4.14: The most common and the least common VEs for each part of speech in N5

Parts of speech	Most common	Least common (only 1 token)
Pronoun	*zhègè* (这个 'well then', 129 tokens) **Eg.** *Wŏ yào gēn nĭ shuō qīngchu , <u>zhègè</u>, nĭ yă sī wŭ diănr wŭ---* (我要跟你说清楚, <u>这个</u>，你雅思五点儿五--- I must make it clear to you,	

	<u>well</u>, actually your IELTS score is 5.5 --- N5S1:173)	
Auxiliary word	*en* (嗯 'well' 80 tokens) **Eg.** *Méiyǒu juédìng. <u>En,</u> nà wǒ jiù jiǎndān gěi nǐ jièshào yīxià ba.* (没有决定。嗯，那我就简单给你介绍一下吧。Haven't decided yet. Well then, I'll just tell you a bit about them. N5S1:9)	*a* (啊 'well')
Conjunction	*yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case', 47 tokens) **Eg.** R*úguǒ Yīngyǔ <u>yàoshi</u> fēn er bù gòu de huà*--- (如果英语<u>要是</u>分儿不够的话--- <u>In case</u> the English score is not high enough --- N5S1:149)	*chúfēi* (除非 'unless'), *jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that)
Adjective	*yībān* (一般 'general', 22 tokens) **Eg.** <u>*Yībān*</u> *de dōu shì liù diǎn wǔ.* （<u>一般</u>地都是六点五。It's generally six point five. N5S1:39)	*piányi* (便宜 'cheap'), *yángéde* (严格的 'strict'), *fùzá* (复杂 'complex'), *qiáng* (强 'strong'), *yīdiǎnr* (一点儿 'a little'), *hǎoduō* (好多 'a good many'), *bùshǎo* (不少 'quite a lot'), *guì* (贵 'expensive'), *zuìduō* (最多 'at most'), *yībānde* (一般的 'average'), *bùdà* (不大 'tiny'), *dà* (大 'big'), *yǒumíngde* (有名的 'well-known'), *jiǎndān* (简单 'simple')
Adverb	*hěn* (很 'very', 19 tokens) **Eg.** *Suǒyǐ xiězuò <u>hěn</u> zhòngyào.* (所以写作<u>很</u>重要。Therefore, writing is <u>very</u> important. N5S1:49)	*jīběnshang* (基本上 'basically'), *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly'), *zǒngdi* (总地 'overally'), *shāowēi* (稍微 'little')
Numeral	*yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability', 17 tokens) **Eg.** *Nǐ zài qiánghuà <u>yīxià</u>.* (你再强化<u>一下</u>。Work <u>a little bit more</u> on it. N5S1:195)	*liù qī nián* (六、七 年 '6 or 7 years'), *sìshí duō* (四十多 'over 40'), *chāoguò sān gè yuè* (超过三个月 'more than 3 months'), *bùdào sān g̀ yuè* (不到三个月 'less than 3 months'), *chāoguò bànnián* (超过半年 'more than half a year'), *bùdào sān gè yuè* (不到两个月 'less than 2 months'), *sìqiān duō* (四千多 'over 4,000'), *liùqiān duō*

		(六千多 'over 6,000')
Noun	*xiànzài* (现在 'now', 16 tokens) **Eg.** *Nǐ <u>xiànzài</u> wǔ diǎn wǔ.* (你<u>现在</u>五点五。<u>Now</u> you've got five point five. N5S1:65)	*niánmò* (年末 'end of year'),
Verb (including auxiliary verb)	*kěnéng* (可能'may/might/probably/possibly', 11 tokens) **Eg.** *<u>Kěnéng</u> shì chāoguò bànnián le.* (<u>可能</u>是超过半年了。It might be longer than half a year. N5S1:171)	*gǎnjué* (感觉 'feel')

As shown in Table 4.14, the vague pronoun *zhègè* (这个 'well then'), auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), conjunction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), adjective *yībān* (一般 'general'), adverb *hěn* (很 'very'), numeral *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') were the most commonly used VEs respectively for each part of speech.

The vague auxiliary word *en* (嗯 'well'), vague noun *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and vague auxiliary verb *kěnéng* (可能'may/might/probably/possibly') were all used in the same manner as in N1, N2, N3 and N4 for the same reasons. As in N1, *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') was the most commonly used vague conjunction. The vague adjective *yībān* (一般 'general') was employed in the same way as in N3. Being a hedge itself, the vague adverb *hěn* (很 'very') was normally placed right before an item it modified to make a vague meaning more vague in order to assist the negotiators in highlighting their own point of view and skillfully influence their opponents or impress them. The vague numeral *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') was also utilized in the same way as in N2 and N4.

4.5.2 Lexical analysis of the participants

Table 4.15: Lexical analysis of the participants in N5

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	21-	55+
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Total)	128	713
Adjective	29 (22.66%)	89 (12.48%)
Adverb	23 (17.97%)	47 (6.59%)
Auxiliary word	24 (18.75%)	108 (15.15%)
Conjunction	7 (5.47%)	94 (13.18%)
Noun	5 (3.91%)	23 (3.23%)
Numeral	6 (4.69%)	48 (6.73%)
Pronoun	28 (21.88%)	278 (38.99%)
Verb	6 (4.69%)	26 (3.65%)

As indicated in Table 4.15, vague adjectives (22.66%) represented by *yībān* (一般 'general') and vague nouns (3.91%) represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now') were most and least commonly used respectively by participant A; participant B most commonly utilized vague pronouns (38.99%) represented by *zhège* (这个 'well then'), and employed vague nouns the least (3.23%) represented by *xiànzài* (现在 'now').

Noticeably, the agent employed quite a large number of VEs, 713 in total. One reason is the recording time for this negotiation was long. The other possible reason is the nature of the negotiation, where the agent's job was to advise and persuade the young girl to go overseas, which was probably not an easy task. The young girl, given her age of 21, had many questions for which the agent needed to resort to VL to answer. There was much at stake if the agent could not achieve her goals. One of the things to lose would be her considerable commission.

4.5.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 5

1. Vague pronouns were the most preferred part of speech in this case, for the same reasons as N1, N2, N3 and N4, and vague nouns were least frequently employed again, as in N2, N3 and N4.

2. As in N3, the vague pronoun *zhège* (这个 'well then') was the most commonly utilized VE, for the same strategic purpose.

3. Both female participants least commonly employed vague nouns. Differently, the older female participant mostly used vague pronouns, while the younger female participant mostly utilized vague adjectives. It indicates that the age factor did have an influence on the choice of parts of speech, as negotiators were of the same gender but of a significantly different age.

4.6 Summarising remarks

4.6.1 General discussion

What has been attempted here is to explore the lexical patterns of VL in Chinese business negotiations from the perspective of parts of speech. This lexical level analysis reveals some trends shown in Figure 4.1 below:
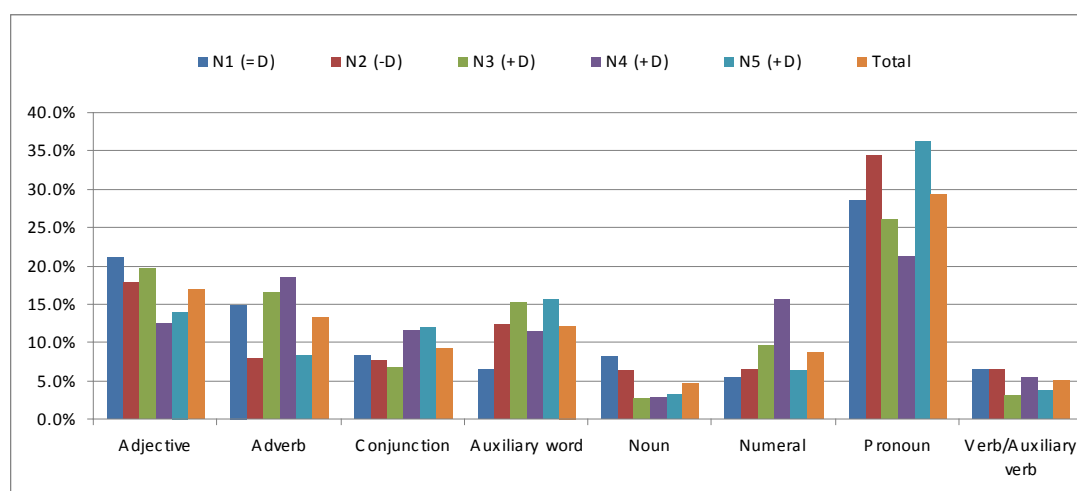
Figure 4.1: Distribution of parts of speech in five negotiations

In Figure 4.1 vague pronouns were the most favoured and pervasive part of speech represented by *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'); and the second most commonly used were vague adjectives represented by *zuìdī* (最低 'the lowest), *duō* (多 'many') and *yībān* (一般 'general'). This shows that in Chinese business negotiations, using vague pronouns is the most preferred and useful way of hedging. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that vague pronouns perform the function of politeness in mitigating the potential threat to face. Another function of vague pronouns is to create an atmosphere of informality; thereby, they reinforce solidarity between interlocutors and even project intimacy.

In contrast to vague pronouns, the findings show that vague nouns were the least preferred part of speech; *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), *xiànzài* (现在 'now') and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') were the most popular vague verb, noun and numeral respectively. This contradicts Koester's (2007) finding in the study of vagueness in North American and UK offices, where vague nouns were the most frequent type of vague item. Koester (2007) claims that the most frequent reason for using a vague noun is because it is not necessary to be more precise, as the participants can easily identify the items or concepts referred to owing to the background knowledge they share from working together. Vague nouns perform a number of different transactional functions, which are particularly useful when talking about facts and information.

Cheng (2007) finds that the major determinant of the forms of VL (word combinations containing 'very', 'more', 'some', 'much', 'many', 'quite', 'most', 'lot', 'few', 'bit', 'something', 'things', 'kind of' and 'about') and the frequencies with which they occur is related more to the genre than to whether the speaker is Hong Kong Chinese or a native-speaker of English. Hence, the genre difference may largely contribute to the discrepancy between the present research and Koester's work.

4.6.2 Social factor comparison

Three social factors are discussed in this section: gender, age and social distance. In the following tables, (A, C and D) represent clients and (B) represents an agent of some kind.

Table 4.16 Gender factor comparison

Negotiation	Most commonly used parts of speech	Least commonly used parts of speech
N1	Males: (A) Pronoun - 40.06% (C: Young) Adverb - 20% (D) Pronoun - 27.78%	Males: (A) Auxiliary word - 4.09% (C) Numeral - 2.07% (D) Numeral - 0%
	Young Female: (B) Adjective - 29.21%	Young Female: (B) Noun - 3.75%
N2	Female: (A) Pronoun - 35.85%	Female: (A) Verb - 3.43%
	Female: (B) Pronoun - 33.4%	Female: (B) Conjunction - 3.94%
N3	Male: (A) Pronoun - 31.4%	Male: (A) Noun - 1.37%
	Female: (B) Pronoun - 22.85%	Female: (B) Noun - 3.56%
N4	Female: (A) Pronoun - 20.81%	Female: (A) Noun - 2.31%
	Female: (B) Pronoun - 21.76%	Female: (B) Noun - 3.44%
N5	Younger Female: (A) Adjective - 22.66%	Younger Female: (A) Noun - 3.91%
	Female: (B) Pronoun - 38.99%	Female: (B) Noun - 3.23%

As indicated in Table 4.16, the most commonly used parts of speech were almost all pronouns, except for the adjective preferred by the younger females and adverb by the younger male. A possible explanation of this could be that they were more inexperienced and intentionally showed their politeness and respect. However, there is a greater discrepancy in the least commonly used parts of speech. The numerals were least favoured by half of the males, while nouns were disliked by almost all females. This reveals that in Chinese business negotiations, the gender factor indeed has an influence on the choice of parts of speech of VEs, particularly on the least commonly used parts of speech of VEs.

Table 4.17 Age factor comparison

【A+: older (45 years old and above), A-: younger (below 45 years old)】

Negotiation	Most commonly used parts of speech	Least commonly used parts of speech
N1	(A) A+ : Pronoun - 40.06% (B) A- : Adjective - 29.21% (C) A+ : Adverb - 20% (D) A- : Pronoun - 27.78%	(A) A+ : Auxiliary word - 4.09% (B) A- : Noun - 3.75% (C) A+ : Numeral - 2.07% (D) A- : Numeral - 0%
N2	(A) A+ : Pronoun - 35.85%	(A) A+ : Verb - 3.43%
	(B) A+ : Pronoun - 33.4%	(B) A+ : Conjunction - 3.94%
N3	(A) A+ : Pronoun - 31.4%	(A) A+ : Noun - 1.37%
	(B) A- : Pronoun - 22.85%	(B) A- : Noun - 3.56%
N4	(A) A- : Pronoun - 20.81%	(A) A- : Noun - 2.31%
	(B) A- : Pronoun - 21.76%	(B) A- : Noun - 3.44%
N5	(A) A- : Adjective - 22.66%	(A) A- : Noun - 3.91%
	(B) A+ : Pronoun - 38.99%	(B) A+ : Noun - 3.23%

As shown in Table 4.17, pronouns were the most commonly used parts of speech by almost all the older and the younger participants, except for adjectives favoured by the two younger negotiators and adverbs by an older one. In contrast, there is a greater difference in the least commonly used parts of speech. Nouns were least preferred by nearly all the younger group, while numerals were least favoured by one of the older and one of the younger negotiators, auxiliary words by an older individual, and verbs and conjunctions by another older one. This indicates that in Chinese business negotiations, consistent with the factor of gender, the factor of age also has an impact on the choice of parts of speech of VEs, especially on the least commonly used parts of speech of VEs. A possible reason that the younger negotiators used fewer pronouns is that they are young, and too impatient to use many vague pronouns (as discourse markers) in Chinese business negotiations.

Table 4.18 Distance factor comparison

【D=: acquaintances, D- : friends, D+: strangers】

Negotiation	Most commonly used parts of speech	Least commonly used parts of speech
N1 D=	(A) Pronoun - 40.06% (B) Adjective - 29.21% (C) Adverb - 20% (D) Pronoun - 27.78%	(A) Auxiliary word - 4.09% (B) Noun - 3.75% (C) Numeral - 2.07% (D) Numeral - 0%
N2 D-	(A) Pronoun - 35.85%	(A) Verb - 3.43%
	(B) Pronoun - 33.4%	(B) Conjunction - 3.94%
N3 D+	(A) Pronoun - 31.4%	(A) Noun - 1.37%
	(B) Pronoun - 22.85%	(B) Noun - 3.56%
N4 D+	(A) Pronoun - 20.81%	(A) Noun - 2.31%
	(B) Pronoun - 21.76%	(B) Noun - 3.44%
N5 D+	(A) Adjective - 22.66%	(A) Noun - 3.91%
	(B) Pronoun - 38.99%	(B) Noun - 3.23%

As revealed in Table 4.18, pronouns were the most commonly used VEs by most of negotiators, whether or not they knew each other. However, there is an outstanding discrepancy in the least commonly used parts of speech. Nouns were the least preferred by all the negotiators who did not know each other, while the parts of speech disliked by the negotiators who knew each other were more diversified, including auxiliary words, nouns, numerals, verbs and conjunctions. This clearly shows that in Chinese business negotiations, the distance factor has an influence on the choice of parts of speech of VEs, in particular on the least commonly used parts of speech of VEs. It could also be interpreted that in Chinese business negotiations, negotiators who do not know each other tend to be more cautious in order to guarantee a smooth and successful negotiation.

Comparing the findings in Tables 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18, a distinctive pattern has emerged in relation to the use of VL corresponding to the impact of the three factors (gender, age and social distance) – there is relatively less variance among the different groups in the preference of the most commonly used parts of speech

compared to the preference of the least commonly used. This trend implies that interlocutors would probably agree more on what VL to use than what not to use.

Following the parts of speech analysis, further combinational analysis at the lexical level will be conducted in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 Combinational analysis at the lexical level

This chapter discusses three categories of the combinational vague words at the lexical level and examines how they work. They are VEs, pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers, all of which could be either a word or a phrase. VEs, e.g. *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then';), *en* (嗯 'well'), *a* (啊 'well'), etc. can be used individually or be modified by pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers. A pre-vaguefier, as its name indicates, is a VE which precedes a core item, e.g. *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), *gèng* (更 'much more'), *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), and the like. A post-vaguefier is a VE which follows a core item, e.g. *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little'), *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *ne* (呢 'well'), *yǐshàng* (以上 'over'), *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'a bit more'), *zuǒyòu* (左右 'or so'), etc. Both are vague items strategically used before or after the core item to make the non-vague meaning vague and the vague meaning more vague.

5.1 Pre-vaguefiers

Examples of pre-vaguefiers used in the five negotiations:

(5.1): from N1S3:216 to N1S1:219, 3 peakers over 4 turns.

N1S3:216：另外 ， 这 是 一 种 长期性 的 东西， 有 可能

Lìngwài, zhè shì yī zhǒng chángqīxìng de dōngxi, yǒu kěnéng

三 到 四 年 <u>可能</u> 还 要 **换掉**。

sān dào sì nián <u>kěnéng</u> hái yào huàndiào.

'In addition, this is a long-term thing, and they <u>might</u> be replaced in three or four years again.'

N1S1:217： 另外， 另外 你这 还有 个 <u>什么</u> **东西**，你还、还
Lìngwài, lìngwài nǐ zhè hái yǒu gè <u>shénme</u> dōngxi, nǐ hái, hái

有 个。就 海水 淡化 在、在 咱们 国家 来讲 现在 也
yǒu gè. Jiù hǎishuǐ dànhuà zài, zài zánmen guójiā lái jiǎng xiànzài yě

是 处于 一 个 <u>新兴</u> 的这 种、这 种 **技术**。在 中
shì chǔyú yī gè <u>xīnxīng</u> de zhè zhǒng, zhè zhǒng jìshù. Zài zhōng

石油，中 石化 现在 也 都 在 用。 反正 这 个
shíyóu, zhōng shíhuà xiànzài yě dōu zài yòng. Fǎnzhèng zhè gè

技术， 美国 这个 技术 就 是 你、你 大连 用 不 用， 你
jìshù, Měiguó zhègè jìshù jiù shì nǐ, nǐ dàlián yòng bù yòng, nǐ

大连 不用， 人家 地方 <u>可能</u> **用**， 就 是 这 个 概念。
Dàlián bù yòng, rénjiā dìfāng <u>kěnéng</u> yòng, jiù shì zhè gè gàiniàn.

但是 就说 咱们 这个 企业，如果 你 在 中石化 打听、
Dànshì jiù shuō zánmen zhègè qǐyè, rúguǒ nǐ zài zhōngshíhuà dǎting,

打听 就 知道 了。这个， 大连 这个、这个、这个，在
dǎting jiù zhīdao le. Zhègè, Dàlián zhègè, zhègè, zhègè, zài

中 石化、中 石油，你们 俩 都 清楚 了。
zhōng shíhuà, zhōng shíyóu, nǐmen liǎ dōu qīngchu le.

'In addition, well, you still have, <u>whatisit</u>, you still have. In terms of seawater desalination in our country, it's also a <u>new</u> technology. Both Sino Petrol and Sino Petrol Chemical are using it now. Anyway, this technology of America, even if it is not used in Dalian, it <u>might</u> be used in some other places. This is the fact. However, in terms of our enterprise, if you do a survey on Sino Petrol Chemical, you will know it. Well, Dalian, well, in Sino Petrol Chemical and Sino Petrol, both of you are clear about it.'

N1S2:218： 嗯，是 <u>最</u> **好** 的。(0.2)
En, shì <u>zuì</u> hǎo de. (0.2)

'Yes, it's <u>the best</u>.'

N1S1:219: 不 能 说 是 最 **好** 的，<u>最 **起码**</u> 就 是 说 我们 用

Bù néng shuō shì <u>zuì</u> hǎo de, <u>zuì</u> qǐmǎ jiù shì shuō wǒmen yòng

的 东西， 可能 其它 兄弟 、 兄弟 单位 它 <u>可能</u> 不 **需要**

de dōngxi, kěnéng qítā xiōngdì, xiōngdì dānwèi tā <u>kěnéng</u> bù xūyào

费 再 费 这个 (.) <u>很</u> **大** 的，这个、这个、这个 脑力 去 研究

fèi zài fèi zhègè (.) <u>hěn</u> dà de, zhègè, zhègè, zhègè nǎolì qù yánjiū

它，这个 东西 性能 怎么样， 它 就 用 了。行， 我们

tā, zhègè dōngxi xìngnéng zěnmeyàng, tā jiù yòng le. Xíng, wǒmen

就 用 这个 。 它 这个 有 这个 底。实际上 我 这个，这个

jiù yòng zhègè. Tā zhègè yǒu zhègè dǐ. Shíjìshang wǒ zhègè, zhègè

实际上 我 跟 你 说 =

shíjìshang wǒ gēn nǐ shuō =

'We can't say it's <u>the best</u>, but <u>at least</u> for the thing we use, other brother units, <u>probably</u> don't need to waste again, well, <u>very</u> huge brain power to study its performance, and then they just use it. Ok, we just use this as they are confident about the quality. Actually, I, well, in fact, to be honest='

In Extract (5.1), five pre-vaguefier combinations were used:

1. the prevaguefier *kěnéng* (可能 'possibly') + the non-vague verbs *huàndiào* (换掉 'replace'), *yòng* (用 'use',) and xūyào (需要 'need');

2. *shénme* (什么 'whatisit') + the vague noun *dōngxi* (东西 'thing');

3. *xīnxīng* (新兴 'new') + the non-vague noun *jìshù* (技术 'technology');

4. *zuì* (最 'making a superlative degree') + the vague adjectives *hǎo* (好 'good') and *qǐmǎ* (起码 'minimum');

5. *hěn* (很 'very') + the vague adjective *dà* (大 'big').

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Combinations 1 and 3 transform the core items from non-vague to vague; combinations 2, 4 and 5 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague.

(5.2) from N2S1:1 to N2S1:11, 2 speakers over 11 turns.

N2S1:1：王　经理，那个 上次　听　你们　公司　讲　的 那个
　　　　　Wáng jīnglǐ,　nàgè　shàngcì tīng nǐmen gōngsī jiǎng de nàgè

　　　　　财富 论坛，当中　　　就 是 介绍　这个 <u>比较</u> 好 的 保险
　　　　　cáifù lùntán,　dāngzhōng jiù shì jièshào zhègè <u>bǐjiào</u> hǎo de　bǎoxiǎn

　　　　　品种，　哈，我 呢，非常　　想　听听，哈，就 是 你、你 的
　　　　　pǐnzhǒng, hā,　wǒ ne,　fēicháng xiǎng tīngtīng, hā,　jiù shì nǐ,　nǐ de

　　　　　意见 啦。完　了，<u>主要</u>　就 是 你 那个，分红　品种　　就
　　　　　yìjian la.　Wán le,　<u>zhǔyào</u> jiù shì nǐ nàgè,　fēnhóng pǐnzhǒng jiù

　　　　　<u>主要</u>　是 美满　　人生。　它 的 那个 特点，就 是 对于 我 来 讲，
　　　　　<u>zhǔyào</u> shì měimǎn rénshēng. Tā de nàgè tèdiǎn, jiù shì duìyú wǒ lái jiǎng,

　　　　　啊，我 的 要求，想　买 你 那个，你们 的 产品　呢，<u>主要</u>　就
　　　　　a,　wǒ de yāoqiú, xiǎng mǎi nǐ nàgè,　nǐmen de chǎnpǐn ne, <u>zhǔyào</u> jiù

　　　　　是 两　个，我 的，一 个 是 要 有 保障，　第 二 个 呢
　　　　　shì liǎng gè,　wǒ de,　yī gè shì yào yǒu bǎozhàng, dì èr gè ne

　　　　　'Manager Wang, last time I attended the Fortune Forum by your company, in which the <u>rather</u> better varieties of insurances were introduced. Well, I'd like to listen to your advice very much. Well, it's <u>mainly</u> profit-sharing kind, i.e. <u>mainly</u> 'Perfect Life'. Its main feature, to me, well, I want to buy the products, which are <u>mainly</u> of two features. One is that it must be of protective function, the other one is'

N2S2:2：嗯。
　　　　　En.

　　　　　'Right.'

N2S1:3：是 要　就 是 在 中国　　的 保险　公司　里面　是 <u>比较</u>

Shì yào jiù shì zài Zhōngguó de bǎoxiǎn gōngsī lǐmiàn shì <u>bǐjiào</u>

创新　　　的 一 个 产品。

chuàngxīn de　yī gè　chǎnpǐn.

'That it's a <u>quite</u> innovative product in the insurance companies of China.'

N2S2:4：嗯。

En.

'Right.'

N2S1:5：对 吧 ? 要　<u>比较</u>　**具有** 它 的 (.) 保 、具有 保障　　功能。

Duì ba ? Yào <u>bǐjiào</u> jùyǒu tā de (.)bǎo,　jùyǒu bǎozhàng gōngnéng.

'Is it right? It must have a <u>relatively</u> protective function.'

N2S2:6：收益　<u>比较</u>　**稳** 。

Shōuyì <u>bǐjiào</u> wěn.

'Earnings are <u>quite</u> stable.'

N2S1:7：哎 --- ，收益 、收益　也 <u>比较</u>　**稳定** 。　而且 呢 ，(0.2) 你

ài ---,　　shōuyì, shōuyì yě　<u>bǐjiào</u> wěndìng. érqiě ne,　(0.2) nǐ

这个　是 怎么　说 ? 就 是 应该　　是 <u>比较</u> **适合** 我 的 产品。

zhègè shì zěnme shuō? Jiù shì yīnggāi shì <u>bǐjiào</u> shìhé wǒ de chǎnpǐn.

'Yes, earnings are also <u>quite</u> stable. Moreover, well, you, well, how do I put

it? It should just be a product that suits me <u>quite</u> well.'

N2S2:8：嗯。

　　　　En.

　　　　'Right.'

N2S1:9：因为　　像　　我、我们 (.)　　到 了 这个 年龄，　　就要，再
　　　　Yīnwèi　xiàng wǒ,　wǒmen (.) dào le zhègè niánlíng, jiùyào, zài
　　　　有　几年　　就 要　退休 了，哈。
　　　　yǒu jǐ　nián jiù yào tuìxiū le,　hā.

　　　　'Because like me, us, we've reached this age, and we will retire in <u>several</u>
　　　　years.'

N2S2:10：嗯。

　　　　En.

　　　　'Right.'

N2S1:11：所以 主要　　还 是 想　　买 (.)　比较 有利于 养老　的 品种。
　　　　Suǒyǐ <u>zhǔyào</u> hái shì xiǎng mǎi (.) <u>bǐjiào</u> yǒulìyú yǎnglǎo de pǐnzhǒng.

　　　　'So <u>mainly</u> still want to buy a variety that is <u>quite</u> helpful to provide for
　　　　the aged.'

In Extract (5.2), there were four pre-vaguefier combinations employed:

1. the prevaguefier *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite') + the vague adjectives *hǎo* (好 'good'),
   chuàngxīn (创新 'innovative'), *wěn/wěndìng* (稳/稳定 'stable'), and *yǒulìyú* (有
   利于 'helpful');

2. *bǐjiào* (比较 'relatively') + the non-vague verbs *jùyǒu* (具有 'have') and *shìhé* (适合 'suit');

3. *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly') + the non-vague verbs *shì* (是 'be') and *xiǎng* (想 'want');

4. *jǐ* (几 'several') + the non-vague noun *nián* (年 'year').

Combination 1 makes the core items that are vague themselves more vague; while combinations 2, 3 and 4 convert the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.3): from N3S2:96 to N3S1:99, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N3S2:96：这个 团队 啊，人 啊，目前为止 收 的 是 <u>不 到</u> 二十 个 人。

　　　Zhègè tuánduì a, rén a, mùqiánwéizhǐ shōu de shì <u>bùdào</u> èrshí gè rén.

　　　'This group, the number of this group we are recruiting, up to now, is <u>less than</u> twenty people.'

N3S1:97：它、它，<u>一般</u> 都 收 多少 人？

　　　Tā, tā, <u>yībān</u> dōu shōu duōshao rén?

　　　'<u>Generally</u>, how many people does it recruit?'

N3S2:98：<u>一般</u> 是 不 会 <u>超过</u> 二十 个 人。

　　　<u>Yībān</u> shì bù huì <u>chāoguò</u> èrshí gè rén.

　　　'<u>Generally</u>, it won't be <u>more than</u> twenty people.'

N3S1:99：对 呀，别 <u>二、三 十</u> 人，<u>一大堆</u> 人。

　　　Duì ya, bié <u>èr sān shí</u> rén, <u>yīdàduī</u> rén.

　　　'Right, don't make it <u>twenty or thirty</u> people, <u>a large number of</u> people.'

In Extract (5.3), three pre-vaguefier combinations were utilized:

1. the pre-vaguefiers *bùdào* (不到 'less than') and *chāoguò* (超过 'more than') + the non-vague numeral *èrshí* (二十 'twenty');

2. *yībān* (一般 'generally') + the non-vague verbs *shōu* (收 'recruit') and *shì* (是 'be');

3. the pre-vaguefiers *èr sān shí* (二、三十 'twenty or thirty') and *yīdàduī* (一大堆 'a large number of') + the non-vague noun *rén* (人 'people').

All these three combinations transform the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.4): from N3S1:125 to N3S2:132, 2 speakers over 8 turns.

N3S1:125：比如说，比如说 要 购物 的 话，我 看 这 里 头，

    Bǐrúshuō, bǐrúshuō yào gòuwù de huà, wǒ kàn zhè lǐ tóu,

(.) 我 看 安排 购物 了。

(.) wǒ kàn ānpái gòuwù le.

'For example, if I'd like to do some shopping, I see in here, I see shopping has been arranged.'

N3S2:126：有 几 个 购物。

Yǒu jǐ gè gòuwù.

'There are <u>several</u> times for shopping.'

N3S1:127：三十一 号，(overlap) 购物 了。

Sānshíyī hào, (overlap) gòuwù le.

'On the thirty first, shopping is arranged.'

N3S2:128：(overlap) 对 对，但 不 是 很 多。

(overlap) Duì duì, dàn bù shì <u>hěn</u> duō.

'Yes, correct, but there aren't <u>too</u> many.'

N3S1:129：唉。

ài.

'Right'

N3S2:130：它 因为 有 一些 景点， 像 埃及 吧，它 有 一些 地区
　　　　Tā yīnwèi yǒu yīxiē jǐngdiǎn, xiàng āijí ba, tā yǒu yīxiē dìqū

　　　　就 是 你 想 安排 购物 它 也 没、没有 什么 地方 可以
　　　　jiù shì nǐ xiǎng ānpái gòuwù tā yě méi, méiyǒu shénme dìfāng kěyǐ

　　　　买 的。(overlap)
　　　　mǎi de. (overlap)

　　　　'Because there are <u>some</u> scenic spots like Egypt, there are <u>some</u> areas
　　　　where you cannot find <u>any</u> place for shopping even if you want to
　　　　arrange shopping.'

N3S1:131：(overlap) <u>主要</u> 是 自然 景观。(overlap)
　　　　(overlap) <u>Zhǔyào</u> shì zìrán jǐngguān. (overlap)

　　　　'It is <u>mainly</u> natural scenery.'

N3S2:132：(overlap) 对 对。它 <u>主要</u> 是 以 自然 景观 为 主 的。
　　　　(overlap) Duì duì. Tā <u>zhǔyào</u> shì yǐ zìrán jǐngguān wéi zhǔ de.

　　　　'Right, that's right. It's <u>mainly</u> natural scenery-oriented.'

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In Extract (5.4), four pre-vaguefier combinations were used:

  1. the pre-vaguefier *jǐ* (几 'several') + non-vague measure word *gè* (个 'time');

  2. *hěn* (很 'very') + the vague adjective *duō* (多 'many');

  3. *yīxiē* (一些 'some') and *shénme* (什么 'whatever') + the vague nouns *jǐngdiǎn* (景点 'scenic spot'), *dìqū* (地区 'area') and *dìfāng* (地方 'place');

  4. *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly') + the non-vague verb *shì* (是 'be').

Combinations 1 and 4 convert the core items from non-vague to vague; combinations 2 and 3 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague.

(5.5): from N4S1:171 to N4S1:175, 2 speakers over 5 turns.

N4S1:171：嗯 ， 这个 ， 你 看看 咱们 这个 行程， 哈。 从 第一

En, zhègè, nǐ kànkàn zánmen zhègè xíngchéng, hā. Cóng dìyī

天 开始 就 基本上 非常 地 充实， 一直 一般 都 是 到

tiān kāishǐ jiù jīběnshang fēicháng de chōngshí, yīzhí yībān dōu shì dào

晚上 四 五 点钟 才 能 结束， 走 完 这些 行程，

wǎnshang sì wǔ diǎnzhōng cái néng jiéshù, zǒu wán zhèxiē xíngchéng,

因为 咱们 行程 要 走 的 不是 很， 不是 那种

yīnwèi zánmen xíngchéng yào zǒu de bù shì hěn, bù shì nèizhǒng

什么 走马观花 呀， 就 是 大略 地 看看 。

shénme zǒumǎguānhuā ya, jiù shì dàlüè de kànkàn.

'Well, have a look at our, well, itinerary, ah. From the first day, it's basically very full, and it generally lasts till four or five o'clock in the evening to finish these itineraries, because our itinerary is not that kind of, well, whirlwind visit, which is to just have a rough look.'

N4S2:172：(overlap) 哦 ， 比较 详细 呗 。

(overlap) O, bǐjiào xiángxì bei.

'Oh, have a quite close look.'

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N4S1:173：(overlap) 有　很　多　那个、那个 闲余　的 时间。 咱们

(overlap) Yǒu hěn duō nàgè,　nàgè xiányú de shíjiān. Zánmen

基本上　　是 没有，非常　　充实。　然后　这 一路上　你 所

jīběnshang shì méiyǒu, fēicháng chōngshí. Ránhòu zhè yīlùshàng nǐ suǒ

体验 的 一些 民俗 啊。你 从　　到 海南　之后，你 就 能　体验

tǐyàn de yīxiē mínsú a.　Nǐ cóng dào hǎinán zhīhòu, nǐ jiù néng tǐyàn

到 那 种　海南 的 那 种　　风情。　一路上　都 会 有　这

dào nèi zhǒng hǎinán de nèi zhǒng fēngqíng. Yīlùshàng dū huì yǒu zhè

种　　感觉。

zhǒng gǎnjué.

'There is so much, well, spare time. We basically don't have this, and
ours is very full. Then, you will experience some folk-customs all the
way. Right after you arrive in Hainan, you can experience, well, Hainan's,
well, local conditions and customs. You will have this kind of feelings all
the way.'

N4S2:174：嗯，那 我 想　我 会 玩儿 得 很 好　的。(Laughs very short)

En,　nà wǒ xiǎng wǒ huì wánr de hěn hǎo de.　(Laughs very short)

(0.3) 我 看　了 这个 游客　须知 啊，那个 我 想　问　一下。就 是

(0.3) wǒ kàn le zhègè yóukè xūzhī a,　nàgè wǒ xiǎng wèn yīxià. Jiù shì

说　这 有 一 条，酒店　内 打 电话　这个。(0.1)

shuō zhè yǒu yī tiáo, jiǔdiàn nèi dǎ diànhuà zhègè.　(0.1)

'Well then, I think I will enjoy myself very well. I've read, well, the
notice to tourists, and I'd like to ask. There is one regulation about
making a phone call in the hotel.'

N4S1:175：啊，酒店　那个 对，对。 跟 你 说　 一下，哈，到 那边

A, jiǔdiàn nà gè duì, duì. Gēn nǐ shuō yīxià, hā, dào nàbiān

酒店 它 <u>一些</u> <u>很</u> **多　东西**，它 都 是 就 是 需要　付费 的。

jiǔdiàn tā <u>yīxiē</u> <u>hěn</u> duō dōngxi, tā dōu shì jiù shì xūyào fùfèi de.

'Ah, the hotel, well, right. Just tell you, ah, that there are <u>some</u> or <u>so</u> many things in the hotel there that need to be paid for.'

In Extract (5.5), there were seven pre-vaguefier combinations employed:

1. the pre-vaguefiers *jīběnshang* (基本上 'basically') and *fēicháng* (非常 'very') + the vague adjective *chōngshí* (充实 'rich');

2. *yībān* (一般 'generally') + the non-vague verb *shì* (是 'be');

3. *dàlüè* (大略 'rough') + the vague verb *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look');

4. *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite') + the vague adjective *xiángxì* (详细 'particular');

5. *hěn* (很 'so/very') + the vague adjectives *duō* (多 'many') and *hǎo* (好 'good');

6. *jīběnshang* (基本上 'basically') + the non-vague verb *méiyǒu* (没有 'do not have');

7. *yīxiē* (一些 'some') + the vague nouns *mínsú* (民俗 'folk-custom') and *dōngxi* (东西 'things').

Combinations 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague; combinations 2 and 6 transform the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.6): from N5S1:35 to N5S1:39, 2 speakers over 5 turns.

N5S1:35：CPA，应该，　是 CPA，对 不 对？应该　　是 那个，嗯，对，

CPA, yīnggāi, shì CPA, duì bù duì? Yīnggāi shì nàgè, en, duì,

是 那个、那种　　 考试。它 那个　连 那个 考试　费 都 含 在

shì nàgè, nèizhǒng kǎoshì. Tā nàgè lián nàgè kǎoshì fèi dōu hán zài

里面 了。那个 学费　应该　 说　是 还 可以，但是　麦考里　入学

lǐmiàn le. Nàgè xuéfèi yīnggāi shuō shì hái kěyǐ, dànshì màikǎolǐ rùxué

条件　也是有 门槛儿　了，也是挺　高 的。你 知不知道
tiáojiàn yě shì yǒu ménkǎnr le,　 yě shì tǐng gāo de.　Nǐ　zhī bù zhīdao
这个 读研　雅思 应该　几 分儿?
zhège dú yán yǎsī　yīnggāi jǐ fēnr?

'CPA, it should be CPA, shouldn't it? It should be that, well, right, it's that kind of test. Well, the test fee is included in it as well. Well, the tuition fee should be alright, but there is also a threshold for entering Macquarie, which is quite high as well. Do you know what IELTS score, well, the postgraduate programs require?'

N5S2:36：嗯，不 太 清楚。

En,　bù tài qīngchu.

'Well, not too clear.'

N5S1:37：不 太 清楚　啊。研究生　　一般 地 来 说

Bù tài qīngchu a.　Yánjiūshēng yībān de lái shuō

'Not too clear. Generally-speaking, postgraduate programs'

N5S2:38：(overlap) 六 点　五。

(overlap) Liù diǎn wǔ.

'Six point five.'

N5S1:39：(overlap) 都　是，唉，对，都 是 六点　五。不　太 清楚，

(overlap) Dōu shì,　ài, duì, dōu shì liù diǎn wǔ.　Bù tài　qīngchu,

你还是 清楚。(laughs short)　一般 地 都 是 六 点　五。那 有

nǐ hái shì qīngchu. (laughs short) Yībān de dōu shì liù diǎn wǔ. Nà yǒu

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一点　就是 说，　写作　的 分 儿 不 能　　低于六 分 儿。如果

yīdiǎn jiù shì shuō, xiězuò de fēn er bù néng dīyú liù fēnr.　Rúguǒ

写作　 的 分 儿 要 低于六 分 儿 的 话，会　给 你 加 这个

xiězuò de fēnr　yào dīyú liù fēnr de huà, huì gěi nǐ jiā zhègè

英语　课。我们　　前 几天　有 一 个 学生　　去 悉尼 大学，他

yīngyǔ kè. Wǒmen qián jǐ tiān yǒu yī gè xuésheng qù xīní dàxué, tā

还 是 理工　大学 那个，(0.2) 就 是 理工　大学 成人　　学院

hái shì lǐgōng dàxué nàgè, (0.2) jiù shì lǐgōng dàxué chéngrén xuéyuàn

的。(overlap) 他 去

de. (overlap) Tā qù

'All require, yes, right, six point five. Not <u>too</u> clear, you are still clear. It's
<u>generally</u> six point five. Well, there is one point that the writing score can't
be <u>lower</u> than six points. If the writing score is <u>lower</u> than six points, an
English class will be added for you. <u>Several</u> days ago, we received a
student who is going to Sydney University, and he is from the University
of Technology, well, the Adults' College of the University of Technology'

In Extract (5.6), five pre-vaguefier combinations were utilized:

  1. the pre-vaguefier *tǐng* (挺 'quite') + the vague adjective *gāo* (高 'high');

  2. *tài* (太 'too') + the vague adjective *qīngchu* (清楚 'clear');

  3. *yībān* (一般 'generally') + the non-vague verb *shuō* (说 'speak') and *shì* (是 'be');

  4. dīyú (低于 'lower than') + the non-vague numeral liù (六 'six');

  5. *jǐ* (几 'several') + the non-vague noun *tiān* (天 'day').

Combinations 1 and 2 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague;

combinations 3, 4 and 5 convert the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.7): from N5S1:69 to N5S1:75, 2 speakers over 7 turns.

N5S1:69：嗯，另外　一 个，这个，(0.2) 学校　　呢，就 是 (0.1)

　　　　En,　lìngwài yī gè, zhègè, (0.2) xuéxiào ne, jiù shì (0.1)

根据 你 的 成绩 来 这个 接收 学生。 比如说 你 想 上

gēnjù nǐ de chéngjī lái zhègè jiēshōu xuésheng.Bǐrúshuō nǐ xiǎng shàng

八 大 名校。 你 这个，如果 要是 211 工程 大学 的

bā dà míngxiào. Nǐ zhègè, rúguǒ yàoshi 211gōngchéng dàxué de

学生，(0.5) 平均 分 有的 **大学** 可以 七 十 五， 有的 **大学**

xuésheng，(0.5) píngjūn fēn yǒude dàxué kěyǐ qī shí wǔ, yǒude dàxué

要求 八 十 分。如果 不 是 211 工程 的 大学 的 学生， 那

yāoqiú bā shí fēn. Rúguǒ bù shì 211gōngchéng de dàxué de xuésheng, nà

就 是 平均 分 要 八 十 分 以上， 还 有的 **大学** 甚至 要

jiù shì píngjūn fēn yào bā shí fēn yǐshàng, hái yǒude dàxué shènzhì yào

八 十 五 分儿 。

bā shí wǔ fēnr.

'Well, on the other hand, well, the university admits students according to their grades. For example, you want to go to the top eight universities. Well, in case you are a student of Project 211 universities, some universities require an average mark of seventy five percent, and some require eighty percent. If you are not a student of Project 211 universities, well, the average mark must be over eighty percent, and some universities even require eighty five percent.'

N5S2:70：那个，我 当时 在 雅思 班 学习 的 时候，

Nàgè， wǒ dāngshí zài yǎsī bān xuéxí de shíhou,

'Well, at the time when I studied in an IELTS class'

N5S1:71：嗯 。

En.

'Yes'

N5S2:72：那个 老师 是 那个 剑桥 的。

Nàgè lǎoshī shì nàgè jiànqiáo de.

'Well, the teacher is from Cambridge.'

N5S1:73：嗯 。

En.

'Yes'

N5S2:74：从 剑桥 毕业 的，上 的 研究生 。 他 就 说

Cóng jiànqiáo bìyè de, shàng de yánjiūshēng. Tā jiù shuō

他 当时 申请 的 时候。他 就 教 我们 了个 窍门儿。 就

tā dāngshí shēnqǐng de shíhou. Tā jiù jiào wǒmen le gè qiàoménr. Jiù

说 那个，嗯，比如说 你们 成绩，平均 分 就 七十 左右

Shuō nàgè, en, bǐrúshuō nǐmen chéngjī, píngjūn fēn jiù qī shí zuǒyòu

吧，然后 你 又 不 是 什么 211 工程 的。但是 他，但是

ba, ránhòu nǐ yòu bù shì shénme 211 gōngchéng de. Dànshì tā, dànshì

那个 他、他 说，嗯，你 要 在 申请 材料 上 写上 说，

nàgè tā, tā shuō, en, nǐ yào zài shēnqǐng cáiliao shàng xiě shàng shuō,

虽说 这 成绩 不 是 很 高，但是 这、这 由于 我们

suī shuō zhè chéngjī bù shì hěn gāo, dànshì zhè, zhè yóuyú wǒmen

学校 可能 卷子 比较 难 ，(indistinct) 的 成绩。 然后

xuéxiào kěnéng juànzi bǐjiào nán, (indistinct) de chéngjī. Ránhòu

这样 写 的话 好像 就 可以，人家 就 可以 给 你 分数 啊

zhèyàng xiě dehuà hǎoxiàng jiù kěyǐ, rénjiā jiù kěyǐ gěi nǐ fēnshù a

稍微 往 下 降 一 降， 也 可能 录取。这 种

shāowēi wǎng xià jiàng yī jiàng, yě kěnéng lùqǔ. Zhè zhǒng

情况　　可、有、有　这　种　情况　　吗？

qíngkuàng kě,　yǒu,　yǒu zhè zhǒng qíngkuàng ma?

'Graduated from Cambridge University, and studied the postgraduate courses there. He said when he applied. He taught us a tip. Just say, well, your grades, the average mark is just about seventy percent, and you are not a student of Project 211. However, he, well, he said, 'You should write in your application materials that although the grades are not <u>very</u> high, it's because our university's exams possibly were <u>quite</u> difficult. Then if you write like this, it seems that universities can <u>slightly</u> lower the required grades and <u>might</u> admit you. Is this true?''

N5S1:75：这　种　　情况　　啊，就 分 什么样　　的 学校。 <u>有的</u>

Zhè zhǒng qíngkuàng a,　jiù fēn shénmeyàng de xuéxiào.Yǒude

学校　就 是 说，　这　种　解释 根本　就 一点

xuéxiào jiù shì shuō, zhè zhǒng jiěshì gēnběn jiù yīdiǎn

'This kind of situation depends on what kind of university it is. For <u>some</u> universities, this kind of explanation doesn't work at all.'

In Extract (5.7), there were five pre-vaguefier combinations employed:

1. the pre-vagufier *yǒude* (有的 'some') + the non-vague nouns *dàxué* (大学 'university') and *xuéxiào* (学校 'school);

2. *hěn* (很 'very') + the vague adjective *gāo* (高 'high');

3. *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite') + the vague adjective *nán* (难 'difficult');

4. *shāowēi* (稍微 'slightly') + the vague verb *jiàng yī jiàng* (降一降 'lower a bit');

5. *kěnéng* (可能 'might') + the non-vague verb *lùqǔ* (录取 'admit').

Combinations 1 and 5 transform the core items from non-vague to vague; combinations 2, 3 and 4 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague.

Table 5.1: Six mostly used pre-vaguefiers (descending from left to right)

Pre-vaguefiers	*hěn* (很 'very')	*bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relative-ly')	*kěnéng* (可能 'probably')	*yīxiē* (一些 'some')	*yībān* (一般 'generally')	*yǒude* (有的 'some')
No. of Tokens	81 (7.88%)	78 (7.59%)	73 (7.1%)	52 (5.06%)	48 (4.67%)	29 (2.82%)
Parts of Speech	Adverb	Adverb	Auxiliary Verb	Numeral	Adjective	Pronoun
Frequently used combinations	+ adjective 78 (96.3%)	+ adjective 67 (85.9%)	+ verb 57 (78.1%)	+ noun 51 (98.1%)	+ verb 42 (87.5%)	+ noun 23 (79.3%)

As revealed in Table 5.1, *hěn* (很 'very'), *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively'), *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), *yīxiē* (一些 'some'), *yībān* (一般 'generally') and *yǒude* (有的 'some') were the six most frequently used pre-vaguefiers in the data. Two out of six pre-vaguefiers were adverbs, and the remaining four were auxiliary verbs/verbs, numerals, adjectives and pronouns. Among the frequently used combinations, the most frequent combination was a pre-vaguefier + adjective, followed by a pre-vaguefier + verb combination and in third place a pre-vaguefier + noun combination.

As extracts (5.1) to (5.7) illustrate, pre-vaguefiers make the non-vague meaning vague or the vague meaning more vague in the following most frequently used patterns:

1) pre-vaguefier + adjective, e.g. <u>*hěnduō*</u> (很多 '<u>so</u> many/<u>very</u> much') and *bǐjiào wěndìng* (比较 稳定 '<u>quite</u> stable'), in which the pre-vaguefiers *hěn* (很 'so/very') and *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite') make the vague meanings of *duō* (多 'many/much') and *wěndìng* (稳定 'stable') more vague;

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2) pre-vaguefier + verb, e.g. *kěnéng hái yào huàndiào* (可能还要换掉 'might be replaced') and *yībān de lái shuō* (一般 地 来 说 'generally speaking'), in which the pre-vaguefiers *kěnéng* (可能 'might') and *yībān* (一般 'generally') make the non-vague meanings of *huàndiào* (换掉 'be replaced') and *shuō* (说 'speaking') vague;

3) pre-vaguefier + noun, e.g. *yīxiē jǐngdiǎn* (一些 景点 'some scenic spots'), *èr sān shí rén* (二、三十 人 'twenty or thirty people') and *yǒude dàxué* (有的 大学 'some universities'), in which the pre-vagufiers *yīxiē* (一些 'some'), *èr sān shí* (二、三十 'twenty or thirty') and *yǒude* (有的 'some') make the non-vague meanings of *jǐngdiǎn* (景点 'scenic spots'), *rén* (人 'people') and *dàxué* (大学 'universities') vague;

4) pre-vaguefier + numeral, e.g. *chāoguò èrshí* (超过 二十 'more than twenty'), *bùdào èrshí* (不到 二十 'less than twenty') and *jiāngjìn sānshí* (将近 三十 'nearly thirty'), in which the pre-vaguefiers *chāoguò* (超过 'more than'), *bùdào* (不到 'less than') and *jiāngjìn* (将近 'nearly') make the non-vague meanings of *èrshí* (二十 'twenty') and *sānshí* (三十 'thirty') vague.

Pre-vaguefiers are mainly utilized to play a role in the pragmatic functions of
1) self-protection, e.g. *Zuòwéi wǒmen gōngsī, bù yǔnxǔ nà gè yùjì de hěn gāo, bǎoshǒu yīxiē. Zhèyàng nǐ dàoshǒu le yǐhòu kěnéng jiù hěn gāoxìng.* (作为我们公司，不允许那(0.2)预计得很高，保守一些。这样你到手了以后可能就很高兴。Our company does not allow to estimate it very high, but a little 'conservative'. Thus, after you get it, you will probably be very happy. N2S2:470);

2) withholding information, e.g. *Nà xíng. Nà jiù ná diǎnr guǎnggàofèi ba.* (那行。那就拿点儿广告费吧。That's all right. Well then, pay a little for advertising. N1S1:221);

3) politeness, e.g. *Nǐ rúguǒ zài jìngwài tíxiàn de huà, nàgè shǒuxùfèi huì hěn gāo.* (你如果在境外提现的话，那个手续费会很高。If you withdraw cash abroad, well, bank charges would be <u>very</u> high. N3S2:214);

4) giving the right amount of information, e.g. *Ránhòu suíshēndài de zhè zhǒng, jiù shì xiànjīn bù yòng dài <u>tài duō</u>, jiù zúgòu nǐ mǎi <u>yīxiē</u> xiǎo jìniànpǐn hé jiù shì lùshang zìjǐ mǎi <u>diǎnr</u> shuǐ hē shénmede jiù kěyǐ le.* (然后随身带的这种，就是现金不用带<u>太</u>多，就足够你买<u>一些</u>小纪念品和就是路上自己买<u>点儿</u>水喝什么的就可以了。Then, don't need to bring, well, <u>too</u> much cash with you, and just enough for you to buy <u>some</u> small souvenirs and <u>a little</u> water on the way for yourself, and things like that. N3S2:212). For further details of pragamtic functions of VL, see Chapter 7.

When pre-vaguefiers are used with different combinations, they do not usually change their meanings and functions. That is to say, they may be morphologically different, but they are semantically the same. For example, the pre-vaguefier *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly') in the following two cases, *kěnéng sāndàosì nián* (可能三到四年 'probably three or four years') and *kěnéng hái yào huàndiào* (可能还要换掉 'might be replaced'), is morphologically different, since the former is *kěnéng* (可能 'probably') + a noun phrase, and the latter is *kěnéng* (可能 'might') + a verbal phrase. However, these two *kěnéng* (可能 'probably/might') are still semantically similar, as both express a certain possibility.

5.2 Vague expressions

Examples of vague expressions used in the five negotiations:

(5.8): from N1S2:118 to N1S2:120, 2 speakers over 3 turns.
N1S2:118：可以 签　个 惩罚性　　协议。
　　　　　　Kěyǐ qiān gè chéngfáxìng xiéyì.

'We can sign an agreement of punishment.'

N1S1:119： 签　什么　都 不 好说。

Qiān *shénme* dōu bù hǎoshuō.

'It can't be assured <u>no matter what</u> we sign.'

N1S2:120： 你 可以 控告　　我们。

Nǐ　kěyǐ　kònggào wǒmen.

'You can sue us.'

(5.9): from N2S1:401 to N2S1:403, 2 speakers over 3 turns.

N2S1:401： 对 不 对？　也 就 是 说 你 想　得 到 它 的 保障　　和

Duì bù duì? Yě jiù shì shuō nǐ xiǎng dédào tā de bǎozhàng hé

它 的 分红　　嘛。<u>那</u> 肯定，　你 <u>现在</u>　要 比，如果 按照　你，

tā de fēnhóng ma. <u>Nà</u> kěndìng, nǐ <u>xiànzài</u> yào bǐ,　rúguǒ ànzhào nǐ,

按照　你 <u>现在</u>　设 计 的 这 个　方案　 的话 肯定　　要 比 存在

ànzhào nǐ <u>xiànzài</u> shèjì de zhègè fāngàn dehuà kěndìng yào bǐ cúnzài

银行　　<u>合适</u>，　对 不 对？

yínháng <u>héshì</u>,　duì bù duì?

'Right?　That's to say, you want to obtain its coverage and dividend. <u>Well</u>, surely, <u>now,</u> if based on the current plan you've designed <u>now,</u> it's surely <u>more beneficial</u> than depositing it in banks, right?'

N2S2:402： 你 这样　　吧，我 看　一下。这样　　 式儿，给 你 的 女儿

Nǐ zhèyàng ba, wǒ kàn yīxià.　Zhèyàng shìr,　gěi nǐ de nǚér

再 <u>看看</u>　　打 一 个 计划书。需 不 需要，我 看　公司　<u>现在</u>　　没

zài <u>kànkàn</u> dǎ　yī gè jìhuàshū. Xū bù xūyào, wǒ kàn gōngsī <u>xiànzài</u> méi

下班。<u>看看</u>　　人 在 不 在，能　　传　　过来 是 最　<u>好</u>　了，　可以

xiàbān. <u>Kànkàn</u> rén zài bù zài, néng chuán guòlái shì zuì <u>hǎo</u> le,　kěyǐ

跟 你 这个 比较 一下。(overlap) <u>那</u> 肯定　　是 合并，　(overlap)

gēn nǐ zhègè bǐjiào yīxià. (overlap) <u>Nà</u> kěndìng shì hébìng, (overlap)

'So, let me have a look. Thus, <u>have a look</u> again to type out a proposal for your daughter. Whether or not it requires it, I don't think the company has been closed <u>now</u>. To <u>see</u> whether or not someone is still in the company. If it can be faxed here, it would be <u>great</u>, and then we can compare it with yours. <u>Well</u>, that's for sure if we combine'

N2S1:403：(overlap) 看　哪个 更　　合适 呗。

(overlap) Kàn nǎgè　gèng <u>héshì</u> bei.

'See which one is more <u>beneficial</u>.'

(5.10): from N3S1:1 to N3S2:4, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N3S1:1：您 好！<u>嗯</u>，(0.1) <u>这个</u>(0.2)，我 在 你们　青　旅 啊，

Nín hǎo! <u>En</u>,　(0.1) <u>zhègè</u> (0.2), wǒ zài nǐmen qīng lǚ a,

<u>这个</u> 出去 外国　旅游 了多少　　次。<u>啊</u>，从　安排、服务 各

<u>zhègè</u> chūqù wàiguó lǚyóu le duōshao cì.　A,　cóng ānpái, fúwù gè

方面　　都非常　　满意。嗯，今天 利用　假期 啊，想　再次(.)

fāngmiàn dōu fēicháng mǎnyì. En, jīntiān lìyòng jiàqī a, xiǎng zàicì (.)

到　你们　这 来 办理 (.)　到 埃及，埃及 十 日 游，<u>啊</u>，这个

dào nǐmen zhè lái bànlǐ (.) dào āijí,　āijí shí rì yóu,　<u>a</u>,　zhègè

旅游 项目，　<u>嗯</u>。

lǚyóu xiàngmù, <u>En</u>.

'Hello! <u>Well</u>, <u>well</u>, I, <u>well</u>, travel abroad many times with your Youth Travel. <u>Well</u>, from arrangements to services, it was very satisfactory in every way. <u>Well</u>, today using the break time, I want to book with you again the tour to Egypt, a ten-day tour to Egypt, <u>well</u>, this tour programme, <u>well</u>.'

N3S2:2：像　埃及 十 日 游 有　四月、四月 十四 号、二十五

Xiàng āijí shí rì yóu yǒu sìyuè, sìyuè shísì hào, èrshíwǔ

号　的 都 可以。

hào de dōu kěyǐ.

'Like a ten-day tour to Egypt, you can register for the fourteenth of April or twenty fifth of April.'

N3S1:3：<u>啊</u>。

<u>A</u>.

'<u>Well</u>.'

N3S2:4：<u>嗯</u>。

<u>En</u>.

'<u>Well</u>'

(5.11): from N4S2:34 to N4S1:41, 2 speakers over 8 turns.

N4S2:34：嗯 嗯。(0.2) 海南　那边　还 可以 吧，<u>现在</u>？　去 的 话。

En en. (0.2) Hǎinán nàbiān hái kěyǐ ba, <u>xiànzài</u>? Qù de huà.

'Ok. Is Hainan OK if I go there <u>now</u>?'

N4S1:35：现在　这个 季节还挺 好 的，然后，而且 价格 都
Xiànzài zhègè jìjié hái tǐng hǎo de,   ránhòu, érqiě jiàgé dōu

降　下来 了。像　春节　的 时候　价格 很 高，现在
jiàng xiàlái le. Xiàng Chūnjié de shíhou jiàgé hěn gāo, xiànzài

基本上　　已经 就 是 平价　了，嗯。
jīběnshang yǐjīng jiù shì píngjià le,　En.

'Now this season is very good; moreover, the prices have all been reduced. Like during the Spring Festival, the prices were very high, and now it's basically already been a fair price. Well'

N4S2:36：嗯。
En.

'Well'

N4S1:37：而且 去 的 人，不 是 那 时候　就 特别 地 拥挤
érqiě qù de rén, bù shì nà shíhou jiù tèbié de yōngjǐ

'Moreover, as for people going there, it's not especially crowded as it was that time.'

N4S2:38：嗯，那 可以。(0.3)
En, nà kěyǐ. (0.3)

'Well, that's Ok.'

N4S1:39：嗯，仔细 看 一下 合同。(0.2) 还 有 现在　你 不 是 一
En, zǐxì   kàn yīxià hétong. (0.2) Hái yǒu xiànzài nǐ bù shì yī

个 人 么？出现　　单 房　差 的 话 那边 是 单 房　差 费用

gè rén me? Chūxiàn dān fáng chā dehuà nàbiān shì dān fáng chā fèiyòng

是 三 百 块　钱。可以 到　那儿 现付，但是　咱们　　尽量　　呢

shì sān bǎi kuài qián. Kěyǐ dào nàr　xiànfù, dànshì zánmen jǐnliàng ne

就 不 出现　　这个 问题。如果　能　　插进去 就插　进去。

jiù bù chūxiàn zhègè wèntí. Rúguǒ néng chā jìnqù jiù chā jìnqù.

　'Well, have a look at the contract carefully. In addition, <u>now</u> you are alone, aren't you? If a single room price difference happens, the cost there for the single room price difference is three hundred yuan. You can pay there on the spot, but we'll <u>try our best</u> to make it not happen. If we can squeeze you in, we will.'

N4S2:40：<u>嗯</u>，最 好 是 别 给 我 出现　　这样　　的 问题。

　　　　<u>En</u>,　zuì hǎo shì bié gěi wǒ chūxiàn zhèyàng de wèntí.

　'<u>Well</u>, you'd better not let this kind of problem happen to me.'

N4S1:41：嗯，对，我们　　也 <u>尽量</u>。

　　　　<u>En</u>, duì,　wǒmen yě <u>jǐnliàng</u>.

　'<u>Well</u>, right, we will also <u>do our best</u>.'

(5.12): from N5S1:15 to N5S1:21, 2 speakers over 7 turns.

N5S1:15：<u>那</u>，澳大利亚 你 准备　　上　哪个 大学 呢？你 目标　的

　　　　<u>Nà</u>,　Aòdàlìyà　nǐ zhǔnbèi shàng nǎgè dàxué ne? Nǐ mùbiāo de

　　　　大学 是 哪个 呢？你 要是　有 倾向　　　的话，我　就 想

　　　　dàxué shì nǎgè　ne? Nǐ yàoshi yǒu qīngxiàng dehuà, wǒ jiù xiǎng

　　　　<u>听听</u>　你 的 目标　大学。

　　　　<u>tīngtīng</u> nǐ de mùbiāo dàxué.

'<u>Well</u>, which university have you planned to go to in Australia? Which is your targeted university? In case you have a preference, I want to <u>have a listen</u> to what your targeted university is.'

N5S2:16：我 目标　大学，<u>嗯</u>，当然　　是 就 是 八 大 名校　　　比较

Wǒ mùbiāo dàxué, <u>en</u>,　dāngrán shì jiù shì　bā dà　míngxiào bǐjiào

好，或者　　是<u>那个</u>就 是 说 会计 专业　　比较 <u>有名</u>　　的 是

<u>hǎo</u>, huòzhě shì <u>nàgè</u>　jiù shì shuō kuàijì zhuānyè bǐjiào <u>yǒumíng</u> de　shì

那个 麦 、麦考里　大学。

<u>nàgè</u> mài,　màikǎolǐ dàxué.

'My targeted university, <u>well</u>, of course it is <u>better</u> to be one of the top eight universities, or, <u>well</u>, the university whose accounting major is rather <u>famous</u>, namely, <u>well</u>, Macquarie University.'

N5S1:17：<u>嗯</u>。

<u>En</u>.

'<u>Well</u>'

N5S2:18：<u>嗯</u>，我 对 这些　比较 倾向。

<u>En</u>,　wǒ duì zhèxiē bǐjiào qīngxiàng.

'<u>Well</u>, I'm inclined to agree.'

N5S1:19：<u>那</u>你还 是 对 <u>这个</u>学校　　还 <u>这个</u> 比较 了解。

<u>Nà</u> nǐ　hái shì duì <u>zhègè</u> xuéxiào hái <u>zhègè</u> bǐjiào liǎojiě.

你 知道 八 大 名校　　都 哪 几 个 学校　　吗？

Nǐ zhīdao bā dà　míngxiào dōu nǎ jǐ　gè xuéxiào ma?

'Well then, you are still, well, quite familiar with, well, this university.

Do you know which universities are the top eight universities?'

N5S2:20：嗯，什么　悉尼 大学，墨尔本 大学，新南威尔士。

En, shénme xīní dàxué, mòěrběn dàxué, xīnnánwēiěrshì.

'Well, whatisit, the University of Sydney, the University of Melbourne,

the University of New South Wales.'

N5S1:21：嗯。

En.

'Well'

(5.13): from N5S1:249 to N5S2:252, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N5S1:249：那 你 回 家，

Nà nǐ huí jiā,

'Well then, you go home,'

N5S2:250：我　再 考虑考虑。

Wǒ zài kǎolùkǎolù.

'I will reconsider it.'

N5S1:251：你 再 考虑考虑。 还 有　刚才　跟 你 说　的，如果

Nǐ zài kǎolùkǎolù. Hái yǒu gāngcái gēn nǐ shuō de, rúguǒ

你想　做 的话，嗯, 你呢回 家跟 你父母 商量

nǐ xiǎng zuò dehuà, en,　nǐ ne huí jiā gēn nǐ fùmǔ shāngliàng

一下，确定　个 时间　段，你 就 知道　你 哪个，哪 段儿

yīxià,　quèdìng gè shíjiān duàn, nǐ jiù zhīdao nǐ nǎge,　nǎ duànr

时间　该 做 什么。

shíjiān gāi zuò shénme.

'<u>Reconsider</u> it. Moreover, as I said to you just now, if you want to do it, <u>well</u>, discuss it with your parents when you get back home, make a timeline, and then you will know <u>what</u> you should do in which period of time.'

N5S2:252：嗯。

En.

'All right'

Table 5.2: Six mostly used VEs (descending from left to right)

VEs	*zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then')	*nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then')	*en* (嗯 'well')	*a* (啊 'well')	*shénme* (什么 'whatisit/whatever')	*xiànzài* (现在 'now')
No. of Tokens	390 (18.89%)	385 (18.64%)	178 (8.62%)	109 (5.28%)	95 (4.6%)	92 (4.46%)
Parts of Speech	Pronoun	Pronoun	Auxiliary word	Auxiliary word	Pronoun	Noun

As indicated in Table 5.2, *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well'), *a* (啊 'well'), *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever') and *xiànzài* (现在 'now') were the six mostly used VEs in the data. Three out of six expressions were pronouns, two of them were auxiliary words, and one was a noun.

As shown in extracts (5.8) to (5.13), VEs can be employed in various patterns, such as:

1) being used separately as a free agent like *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well'), *a* (啊 'well') and *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever');

2) as a noun modifying the whole sentence as in <u>*Xiànzài*</u> *zhègè jìjié hái tǐng hǎo de* . (<u>现在</u> 这个 季节 还 挺 好 的。 '<u>Now</u> this season is very good.' N4S1:35);

3) reduplication of verbs like *tīngtīng* (听听 'have a listen'), *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') and *kǎolǜkǎolǜ* (考虑考虑 'reconsider'), etc.

Compared with pre-vaguefiers in Section 5.1 above, VEs in Section 5.2 here serve more pragmatic functions, such as:

1) self-protection, e.g. *Xiàng Chūnjié de shíhou jiàgé lěn gāo , xiànzài <u>jīběnshang</u> yǐjīng jiù shì píngjià le.* (像春节的时候价格很高，现在<u>基本上</u>已经就是平价了。 During the Spring Festival, the prices were very high, and now it's <u>basically</u> already been a fair price. N4S1:35);

2) politeness, e.g. *Nǐ zài <u>kǎolǜkǎolǜ</u>. Hái yǒu gāngcái gēn nǐ shuō de, rúguǒnǐ xiǎng zuò dehuà, <u>en</u>, nǐ ne huí jiā gēn nǐ fùmǔ shāngliàng yīxià, quèdìng gè shíjiān duàn, nǐ jiù zhīdao nǐ nǎ gè, nǎ duànr shíjiān gāi zuò <u>shénme</u>.* (你再<u>考虑考虑</u>。还有刚才跟你说的，如果你想做的话，<u>嗯</u>，你呢回家跟你父母商量一下，确定个时间段，你就知道你哪个，哪段儿时间该做<u>什么</u>。You can <u>reconsider</u> it. Moreover, as I said to you just now, if you want to do it, <u>well</u>, you discuss it with your parents when you get back home, make a timeline, and then you will know <u>what</u> you should do in which period of time. N5S1:251);

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3) informality, e.g. *En,* (0.1) *zhègè,* (0.2) *wǒ zài nǐmen qīng lǚ a, zhègè chūqù wàiguó lǚyóu le duōshao cì.* (嗯，(0.1) 这个，(0.2) 我在你们青旅啊， 这个 出去 外国 旅游了多少次。<u>Well</u>, <u>well</u>, I, with your Youth Travel, <u>well</u>, travel abroad many times. N3S1:1);

4) filling in lexical gaps, e.g. *Huòzhě shì <u>nàgè</u> jiù shì shuō kuàijì zhuānyè bǐjiào yǒumíng de shì <u>nàgè</u> mài, màikǎolǐ dàxué.* (或者是<u>那个</u>就是说会计专业比较有名 的是<u>那个</u>麦、麦考里大学。Or, <u>well</u>, the university whose accounting major is quite famous, namely, <u>well</u>, Macquarie University. N5S2:16);

5) giving the right amount of information, e.g. *Erqiě qù de rén, bù shì nà shíhou jiù tèbié de <u>yōngjǐ</u>.* (而且去的人，不是那时候就特别地<u>拥挤</u>。Moreover, the people going there, it's not especially <u>crowded</u> as it was that time. N4S1:37). For further details of pragamtic functions of VL, see Chapter 7.

Moreover, some VEs are not vague any more when they express exact and concrete meanings. For example, *zhè/ zhègè*(这/这个 'well/then') in *Dànshì zánmen jǐnliàng ne jiùbù chūxiàn <u>zhègè</u> wèntí.* (但是咱们尽量呢不出现 <u>这个</u>问题。But we will try our best not to make <u>this</u> problem happen. N4S1:39), *nà/nàgè*(那/那个 'well/then') in *Yuánlái mǎi de <u>nàgè</u> mó,* (原来买的<u>那个</u>膜, <u>that</u> membrane we bought before, N1S3:44), *en* (嗯 'well') in *<u>En</u>, shuō de hěn jiǎndān .* (嗯，说得很简单。<u>Yes</u>, said very simply. N1S2:212), *a* (啊 'well') in *Jiéguǒ jiāoliú jīngyàn yǐhòu <u>a</u>,* (结果交流经验以后<u>啊</u>, After exchanging the experience, as a result, N1S3:44), and *jǐgè* (几个 several/a few) in *Nǐ zhīdao bā dà míngxiào dōu nǎ <u>jǐgè</u> xuéxiào ma?* (你知道八大名校都哪<u>几个</u>学校吗？Do you know <u>which</u> universities are the top eight universities? N5S1:19) are not vague any more when they mean precisely *this/this one, that/that one, yes/ok, exclamation tone* and *which* respectively in the above cases. This phenomenon illustrates the dynamics of VL, and one has to be mindful of the change of meaning for a successful communication.

5.3 Post-vaguefiers

Examples of post-vaguefiers used in the five negotiations:

(5.14): from N1S2:189 to N1S1:194, 2 speakers over 6 turns.

N1S2:189：可以 这 方面　　少 点 吗？ 再 **降**　点儿，要不然

Kěyǐ zhè fāngmiàn shǎo <u>diǎn</u> ma? Zài jiàng <u>diǎnr</u>,　yàobùrán

的话，这 得 多少。

dehuà,　zhè děi duōshao.

'Can this be <u>a little</u> less? Reduce it <u>a little</u> more; otherwise, it will be so much.

N1S1:190：不过，**通常**　　呢，(0.3) 看看　我们　 这 是 先 下 了

Bùguò, tōngcháng <u>ne</u>, (0.3)　kànkàn wǒmen zhè shì xiān xià le

百分之　 十，你 这 一共　 是 下 了 二十 块　钱。二十 块　钱

bǎifēnzhī shí,　nǐ zhè yīgòng shì xià le　èrshí kuài qián. èrshí kuài qián

是 多少？　　(0.4) 下 了，

shì duōshao? (0.4)　Xià le,

'But, usually, <u>well</u>, have a look, we first reduced ten percent; you reduced twenty yuan in total. What percentage is twenty yuan? Reduced'

N1S2:191：关键　　是

Guānjiàn shì

'The key is'

N1S1:192：不 应该　是 这么　多。(0.2)

Bù yīnggāi shì zhème duō. (0.2)

'It shouldn't be this much.'

N1S2:193：那 你 说　　我 该 咋 做　呢？我 觉得 我 报 八千 多，

Nà nǐ shuō wǒ gāi zǎ zuò ne? Wǒ juéde wǒ bào bāqiān <u>duō</u>,

然后　　降　　得 是 多。你 觉得 那样？

ránhòu jiàng de shì <u>duō</u>. Nǐ juéde nàyàng?

'Well then, you tell me what I should do? I think I quote <u>over</u> eight

thousand, and then can reduce <u>more</u>. Do you think that?'

N1S1:194：你 报 八千　多，那 你 得　值 啊。那 你 这个，　你 这 是

Nǐ bào bā qiān <u>duō</u>,　nà nǐ deǐ zhí a.　Nà nǐ zhègè, nǐ zhè shì

'You quote <u>over</u> eight thousand; well, it should be worth that.'

In Extract (5.14), five post-vaguefier combinations were used:

  1. the vague adjective *shǎo* (少 'less') + the post-vaguefier *diǎn* (点 'a little');

  2. the non-vague verb *jiàng* (降 'reduce') + *diǎnr* (点 'a little');

  3. the vague adverb *tōngcháng* (通常 'usually') + *ne* (呢 'well');

  4. the non-vague numeral *bāqiān* (八千 'eight thousand') + *duō* (多 'over');

  5. the non-vague verb *jiàng* (降 'reduce') + *duō* (多 'more').

Combinations 1 and 3 make the core items that are vague themselves more vague; combinations 2, 4 and 5 convert the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.15): from N2S1:41 to N2S1:45, 2 speakers over 5 turns.

N2S1:41：你 首先　　自己 要 有　这个 财力，对 不 对？你 没有

　　　Nǐ shǒuxiān zìjǐ　yào yǒu zhègè cáilì,　duì bù duì? Nǐ méiyǒu

这个 财力，(laughs short) 也 没有　用　啊，是 不 是　啊？完 了，

zhège cáilì, (laughs short)　yě méiyǒu yòng a,　shì bù shì a? Wán le,

所以 我 **想**　呢，如果 十万　呢，(0.2) 我　得 **考虑** 一下 了。

suǒyǐ wǒ xiǎng <u>ne</u>,　rúguǒ shíwàn ne,　(0.2) wǒ deǐ kǎolǜ <u>yīxià</u> le.

'First you yourself have to have this financial ability, right? If you don't have this financial ability, there will be no use, right? Therefore, I think, <u>well</u>, if it's one hundred thousand, I have to think it over <u>for a while</u>.'

N2S2:42：可以，可以 考虑。

Kěyǐ,　kěyǐ kǎolǜ.

'Sure, you can consider it.'

N2S1:43：是 不　是？

Shì bù shì?

'Is it right?'

N2S2:44：你 先 **看** 一下。(overlap)

Nǐ xiān kàn <u>yīxià</u>. (overlap)

'Have a <u>quick</u> look at it first.'

N2S1:45：(overlap) 可以 **考虑** 一下，　对 不 对？ (overlap)

(overlap) Kěyǐ kǎolǜ <u>yīxià</u>,　duì bù duì? (overlap)

'I can think it over <u>for a while</u>, can't I?'

In Extract (5.15), two post-vaguefier combinations were utilized:

1. the non-vague verb *xiǎng* (想 'think') + the post-vaguefier *ne* (呢 'well');

2. the non-vague verbs *kǎolǜ* (考虑 'think over') and *kàn* (看 'look') + *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability').

Both of these two combinations transform the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.16): from N3S2:104 to N3S2:112, 2 speakers over 9 turns.

N3S2:104：嗯，它 不会 像 欧洲 啊 或者 其它 国家 那样， 就

En, tā bù huì xiàng Oūzhōu a huòzhě qítā guójiā nàyàng, jiù

是 基本上   三十五 个 人 以上   才能   成   团。它 这

shì jīběnshang sānshíwǔ gè rén yǐshàng cáinéng chéng tuán. Tā zhè

种   埃及 的 就 不 存在   这个 问题。

zhǒng āijí   de jiù bù cúnzài zhègè wèntí.

'Well, it's not like going to Europe or other countries, which will not form a group until basically <u>over</u> thirty five people are recruited. There isn't such a problem for going to Egypt.'

N3S1:105：那 它 从来   不会 就 有 这，有点儿 走马观花，

Nà tā cónglái bù huì jiù yǒu zhè, yǒudiǎnr zǒumǎguānhuā,

点   一下， 到 了 马上   就 走。看 地 不 仔细？(overlap)

diǎn yīxià,   dào le mǎshàng jiù zǒu. Kàn de bù zǐxì? (overlap)

'Well, there is never, well, kind of gaining a superficial understanding through cursory observation, i.e. just have a <u>quick</u> look, immediately leave right after getting there. Don't look carefully.'

N3S2:106：(overlap) 嗯，不 会。因为   咱 这个 游轮 呢，就 等于

(overlap) En, bù huì. Yīnwèi zán zhègè yóulún ne, jiù děngyú

说　已经 是 一 个 深度　游。就 比 正常　　　 行程，　　 更

shuō yǐjīng shì yī gè shēndù yóu. Jiù bǐ zhèngcháng xíngchéng, gèng

深度　去 了解　这 个 埃及，所以 它 的 行程　　 就 走 的

shēndù qù liǎojiě zhègè āijí,　　suǒyǐ tā de xíngchéng jiù zǒu de

更　详细　一些，更　仔细 一些。

gèng xiángxì yīxiē, gèng zǐxì　yīxiē.

'Well, no. Because this cruise is already an in-depth tour. It explores Egypt in a more in-depth manner than the normal tour does, so its itinerary is a bit more detailed and a bit more carefully-planned.'

N3S1:111：那么　旅行社　是 能　派 全程　　 的人员　　 跟 我们　　去？

　　　　　Nàme lǚxíngshè shì néng pài quánchéng de rényuán gēn wǒmen qù?

　　　　　'Well, will the travel agency send a tour guide to go with us throughout the entire journey?'

N3S2:112：这个　团，我 看　一下 啊。我 看　它 派 不 派　全 陪。

　　　　　Zhègè tuán, wǒ kàn yīxià a. Wǒ kàn tā pài bù pài quán péi.

　　　　　如果　派 全 陪 的话，是 北京　　 那边　派 全　陪。

　　　　　Rúguǒ pài quán péi dehuà, shì Běijīng nàbiān pài quán péi.

　　　　　'This group, let me have a quick look. I'll see whether or not a tour guide will be sent. If a tour guide is sent, it will be sent from Beijing.'

In Extract (5.16), there were three post-vaguefier combinations employed:

1. the non-vague numeral *sānshíwǔ* (三十五 'thirty five') + the post-vaguefier *yǐshàng* (以上 'over');

2. the non-vague verbs *diǎn* (点 'look') and *kàn* (看 'have a look') + *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability');

3. the vague adjectives *xiángxì* (详细 'detailed') and *zǐxì* (仔细 'careful') + *yīxiē* (一些 'a bit').

Combinations 1 and 2 convert the core items from non-vague to vague; combination 3 makes the core items that are vague themselves more vague.

(5.17): from N4S2:210 to N4S2:214, 2 speakers over 5 turns.

N4S2:210：投诉，就 是 说 我 整个 旅行 回来 以后，就 六

Tóusù, jiù shì shuō wǒ zhěnggè lǚxíng huílái yǐhòu, jiù liù

天 嘛，回来 以后 我 就 觉得 不 好， 然后 我 就 过来

tiān ma, huílái yǐhòu wǒ jiù juéde bù hǎo, ránhòu wǒ jiù guòlái

找 你 呢？

zhǎo nǐ ne?

'Appealing, that's to say, <u>after</u> I come back from the entire journey, which is just six days, if I don't feel it's good <u>after</u> I come back, I come to see you right away?'

N4S1:211：啊， 对。

A, duì.

'Well, right.'

N4S2:212：那 得 需要 多 长 时间 啊？

Nà deǐ xūyào duō cháng shíjiān a?

'Well then, how long will that take?'

N4S1:213：两个月 左右 吧。

Liǎnggèyuè zuǒyòu ba.

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'Two months <u>or so</u>.'

N4S2:214：**两个月**　　<u>左右</u>？ 那 您 这 是 全额 给 我 退款　呢，

Liǎnggèyuè <u>zuǒyòu</u>? Nà nín zhè shì quáné gěi wǒ tuìkuǎn ne,

还 是 一部分 呢？

hái shì yībùfen ne?

'Two months <u>or so</u>? Well, will you refund me all or part of it?'

In Extract (5.17), two post-vaguefier combinations were used:

  1.the non-vague verb *huílái* (回来 'come back') + the post-vaguefier *yǐhòu* (以后 'after');

  2. the non-vague noun *liǎng gè yuè* (两个月 'two months') + *zuǒyòu* (左右 'or so').

Both combinations transform the core items from non-vague to vague.

(5.18): from N5S1:5 to N5S2:10, 2 speakers over 6 turns.

N5S1:5：你 准备　咨询 哪个 国家 啊？

    Nǐ　zhǔnbèi zīxún nǎgè guójiā a?

    'Which country are you planning to consult on?'

N5S2:6：嗯，我 想　　**咨询**　<u>一下</u> 澳大利亚。

    En，wǒ xiǎng zīxún <u>yīxià</u> Àodàlìyà.

    'Well, I want to consult <u>a bit</u> on Australia.'

N5S1:7：(overlap) 想　　**咨询**　<u>一下</u> 澳大利亚。

    (overlap) Xiǎng zīxún <u>yīxià</u> Àodàlìyà.

    'You want to consult <u>a bit</u> on Australia.'

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N5S2:8：(overlap) 然后　对 这　方面　　能　　更　**倾向**　　一些。

（overlap) Ránhòu duì zhè fāngmiàn néng gèng qīngxiàng yīxiē.

别　的 国家　我 听说　　什么　　英国　　啊，美国　　啊 也 挺 好

Bié de guójiā wǒ tīngshuō shénme Yīngguó a,　　Měiguó a yě tǐng hǎo

的，也 想　　顺便　　问一问，　　最终　　　没有　　决定

de,　yě xiǎng shùnbiàn wènyīwèn, zuìzhōng méiyǒu juédìng

'Well, this appeals to me a bit more. Other countries I have heard, well, England, the U.S. are also very good, so I also want to ask about them, and I haven't finally decided yet.'

N5S1:9：没有　　决定。　嗯，那 我 就 简单　　给 你 **介绍**　　一下 吧。

Méiyǒu juédìng. En,　nà wǒ jiù jiǎndān gěi nǐ jièshào yīxià ba.

'Haven't decided yet. Well then, I'll briefly describe them to you a bit.'

N5S2:10：嗯。

En.

'Alright'

In Extract (5.18), two post-vague combinations were utilized:

1. the non-vague verbs *zīxún* (咨询 'consult') and *jièshào* (介绍 'introduce') + *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability');

2. the non-vague verb *qīngxiàng* (倾向 'incline') + *yīxiē* (一些 'a bit').

Both combinations convert the core items from non-vague to vague.

Table 5.3: Six mostly used post-vaguefiers (descending from left to right)

Post-vaguefiers	*ne* (呢 'well')	*yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability')	*diǎnr* (点儿 'a little')	*duō* (多 'over/odd')	*yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'a bit')	*jǐ* (几 'over/odd')
No. of Tokens	166 (41.29%)	83 (20.65%)	45 (11.19%)	32 (7.96%)	23 (5.72%)	12 (3%)
Parts of Speech	Auxiliary word	Numeral	Numeral	Ajective	Numeral	Pronoun
Frequently used combinations	1. Noun + 呢 (well) 85 (51.21%) 2. Verb + 呢 (well) 24 (14.46%)	Verb + *yixia* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') 83 (100%)	1. Adj + 点儿 (a little) 36 (80%) 2. Verb + 点儿 (a little) 9 (20%)	Numeral + 多 (over/odd) 31 (100%)	Adj + 一些/些 (a bit) 23 (100%)	Numeral +几 (over/odd) 12 (100%)

As shown in Table 5.3, *ne* (呢 'well'), *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little'), *duō* (多 'over/odd'), *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'a bit') and *jǐ* (几 'over/odd') were the six mostly used post-vaguefiers in the data. Three out of the six post-vaguefiers were a numeral, followed by an auxiliary word, adjective and pronoun respectively. Among the frequently used combinations, the most frequent combination was a verb + post-vaguefier, followed by a noun + post-vaguefier combination, an adjective + post-vaguefier and a numeral + post-vaguefier in order of frequency.

As extracts (5.14) to (5.18) demonstrate, it seems that compared with pre-vaguefiers, post-vaguefiers tend to be used to make non-vague meanings vague, rather than to

make vague meanings more vague. They work in the most frequently used patterns as follows:

1) verb + post-vaguefier, e.g. *kǎolǜ yīxià* (考虑 一下 'think over <u>for a while</u>'), *zài jiàng diǎnr* (再降点儿, 'reduce <u>a little</u> again') and *jiù tíyì ne chèdǐ bǎ tā dōu huàn diào* (就提议呢彻底把它都换掉 'it was suggested, <u>well</u>, that all the membrane be replaced completely'), in which the post-vaguefiers *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *diǎnr* 点儿 'a little') and *ne* (呢 'well') make the non-vague meanings of *kǎolǜ* (考虑 'think over'), *jiàng* (降 'reduce') and *tíyì* (提议 'suggest') vague;

2) noun + post-vaguefier, e.g. *zán zhègè yóulún ne* (咱这个游轮 呢 'our cruiser, <u>well</u>'), the post-vaguefier *ne* (呢 'well') making the non-vague meaning of *yóulún* (游轮 'cruiser') vague;

3) adjective + post-vaguefier, e.g. *shāowēi gāo yīdiǎn* (稍微高<u>一点</u> '<u>a little</u> higher') and *gèng xiángxì yīxiē* (更详细 <u>一些</u> '<u>a bit</u> more detailed'), in which the post-vaguefiers *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little') and *yīxiē* (一些 'a bit') make the vague meanings of *gāo* (高 'high') and *xiángxì* (详细 'detailed') more vague;

4) numeral + post-vaguefier, e.g. *bāqiān duō* (八千 <u>多</u> '<u>over</u> eight thousand'), *èrshí jǐ* (二十 <u>几</u> 'twenty <u>odd</u>'), *sānshíwǔ gè rén yǐshàng* (三十五个人 <u>以上</u> '<u>over</u> thirty five people') and *liǎng gè yuè zuǒyòu* (两个月 <u>左右</u> 'two months <u>or so</u>'), in which the post-vaguefiers *duō* (多 'over/odd'), *jǐ* (几 'over/odd'), *yǐshàng* (以上 'over') and *zuǒyòu* (左右 'or so') make the non-vague meanings of *bāqiān* (八千 'eight thousand'), *èrshí* (二十 'twenty'), *sānshíwǔ gè rén* (三十五个人 'thirty five people') and *liǎng gè yuè* (两个月 'two months') vague.

Post-vaguefiers are often employed to perform the pragmatic functions of:

1) self-protection, e.g. *Nǐ cún jìnqù yī bǎiwàn, dào shíhóu yě shì yī bǎi sān shí jǐ wàn.* (你存进去一百万，到时候也是一百三十<u>几</u>万。You deposit one million, and by then it will be <u>over</u> one million three hundred thousand. N2S2:568);

2) withholding information, e.g. *Anzhào, ànzhào shìchǎng zhèngcháng de jià ne shì bā qiān duō yī gēn.* (按照、按照市场正常的价呢是八千<u>多</u>一根。According to the normal market price, it's <u>over</u> eight thousand each. N1S2:161);

3) politeness, e.g. *Nǐ zìjǐ lái zhēnzhuó yīxià.* (你自己来斟酌<u>一下</u> <u>Please</u> consider it <u>a bit</u> by yourself. N2S2:570);

4) informality, e.g. *Hǎiyùn shì duōshao qián, děi xūyào chá yīxià.* (海运是多少钱，得需要查<u>一下</u>。A <u>quick</u> check must be given on how much ocean transportation costs. N1S2:15)

5) giving the right amount of information, e.g. *Zhègè ménkǎn jiù bǎ nǐ xiàndìng zhù le, suǒyǐ zài zhègè niánlíngduàn zuì hǎo xuǎnzé shíjiān cháng yīxiē de, cháng yīxiē de.* (这个门槛就把你限定住了，所以在这个年龄段最好选择时间长<u>一些</u>的，长<u>一些</u>的 This threshold will restrict you, so at this age, you'd better choose a <u>longer-term</u> one, a <u>longer-term</u> one. N2S2:126). For further details of pragamtic functions of VL, see Chapter 7.

Similar to VEs in Section 5.2 above, some post-vaguefiers are no longer vague when they have a different meaning and function, as occurs when used in different contexts. For example, the post-vaguefiers *ne* (呢 'well') and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') are no longer vague when the former is used as *a question marker* to make a question in *Nà nǐ shuō wǒ gāi zǎ zuò ne?* (那你说我该咋做呢？Well then, you say what I should do? N1S2:193) or when the latter means *'once for all'* in *Nǐ bù shì ràng wǒ yīxià jiàng ma?* (你不是让我<u>一下</u>降吗？Didn't you ask

me to reduce it <u>once for all</u>? N1S2:283). The vague to non-vague change enriches and diversifies the use of post-vaguefiers as a communicative strategy.

5.4 Summarising remarks

The findings of the use of pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers can be summarised in Figure 5.1 below:
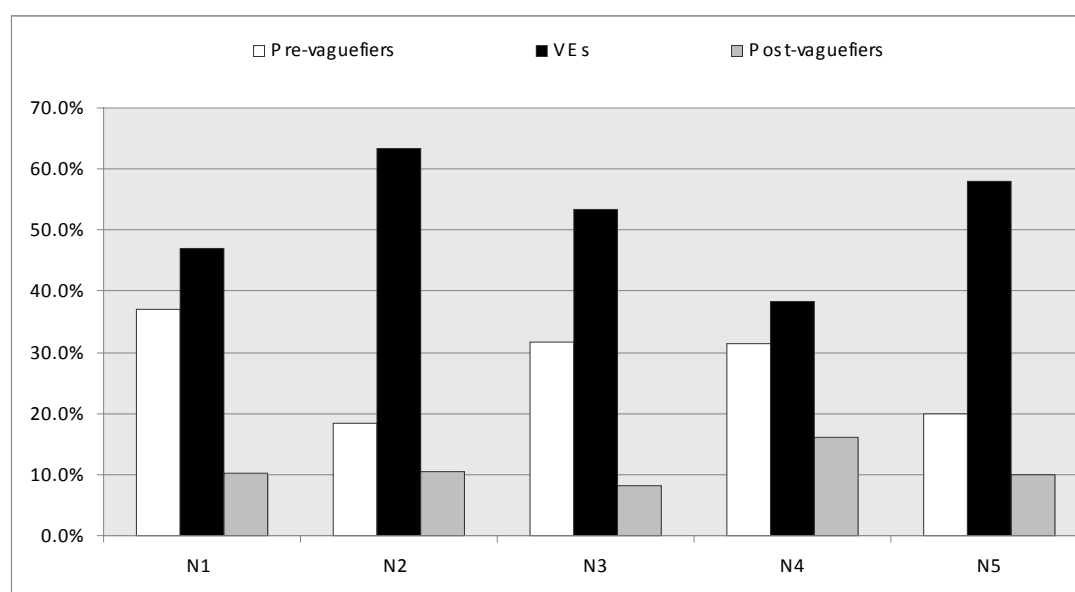
Figure 5.1: Percentage of pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers

As displayed in Figure 5.1, among all five negotiations, VEs were most commonly employed, followed by pre-vaguefiers, with post-vaguefiers employed the least. VEs represented by *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàge* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well') and *a* (啊 'well') were pervasive in Chinese business negotiations. This indicates that VEs play a central role in Chinese business negotiations more than pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers as they are the bases for pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers. The pre-vaguefiers were used more than the post-vaguefiers, so the implication is that the participants preferred left-branching rather than right-branching in the use of VL.

Table 5.4: Three most commonly used pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers

Categories	Pre-vaguefiers			VEs			Post-vaguefiers		
Most used expres-sions	*hěn* (很 'very')	*bǐjiào* (比较 'quite /rath-er/re-lative-ly'')	*kěnéng* (可能 'proba-bly')	*zhè/ zhège* (这/这个 'well/ then')	*nà/ nàge* (那/那个 'well/ then')	*en* (嗯 'well')	*ne* (呢 'well')	*yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capabili-ty')	*diǎnr* (点儿 'a little')
No. of Tokens	81 (7.9%)	78 (7.6%)	73 (7.1%)	390 (18.9 %)	385 (18.6 %)	178 (8.6%)	160 (39.8%)	83 (20.7%)	45 (11.2%)
Parts of Speech	Ad-verb	Ad-verb	Auxilia-ry verb	Pro-noun	Pro-noun	Auxi-liary word	Auxilia-ry word	Nume-ral	Nume-ral

As shown in Table 5.4, the most commonly used pre-vaguefier, VE and post-vaguefier in the data was *hěn* (很 'very'), *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then') and *ne* (呢, 'well') respectively, whose parts of speech are an adverb, pronoun and auxiliary word respectively. This can be interpreted that in Chinese business negotiations, as a strategy, adverbs, pronouns and auxiliary words were the most prevalent and preferred parts of speech used for pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers respectively, which also reflects one of the typical features of the Chinese language – being more indirect as claimed by Kaplan (1996), Scollon and Scollon (1991) and Kirkpatrick (1991).

Pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers make the non-vague meaning vague and the vague meaning more vague. Most pre-vaguefiers were adverbs, while most of post-vaguefiers were auxiliary words. The most common combination for pre-vaguefiers was a pre-vaguefier + an adjective, e.g. *hěn duō* (很 多 'so many/very much'), *bǐjiào wěndìng* (比较 稳定 'quite stable'), etc. and the most common combination for post-vaguefiers was a verb + a post-vaguefier, e.g. *kǎolǜ yīxià* (考虑 一下 'think over for

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a while'), *zài jiàng diǎnr* (再降点儿, 'reduce a little again'). Through the employment of these pre-vague and post-vague combinations, the vagueness of the core items can be effectively increased and enhanced, which is utilized as a communicative strategy to help negotiators more efficiently achieve their goals.

VEs were most frequently employed separately as a free agent (most of them were pronouns), like *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàge* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well'), *a* (啊 'well') and *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever'), and were used in order to serve a wide rang of communicative purposes. VEs and post-vaguefiers had more pragmatic functions than pre-vaguefiers.

Expressions can be used as either pre-vaguefiers, VEs or post-vaguefiers in different contexts, where they may generate different meanings and functions accordingly. For example, *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little') can be used as a pre-vaguefier or a post-vaguefier. In *Nǐ bù kěnéng yīdiǎn kōngjiān dōu méiyǒu.* (你不可能一点空间都没有。It's not possible that you don't have even a little space. N1S1:168), it is a pre-vaguefier, an adjective and an attributive. In *Bù néng zài duǎn yīdiǎnr ma?* (不能再短一点儿吗？Can't it be a little shorter any more? N1S2:100), it is a post-vaguefier, a numeral and complement. *Duō* (多 'many/over/a lot') can also be used as a pre-vaguefier, a VE or a post-vaguefier. In *hézuò zhème duō nián* (合作这么多年 have cooperated for so many years), *wǒ bào bāqiān duō* (我报八千多 I quote over eight thousand) and *ránhòu jiàng de shì duō* (然后降得是多 then can reduce a lot.), it is an adjective in all three cases, but being used as an attributive in the first case, and a complement in the second and third case. Another example is *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some/a bit'). It can be a pre-vaguefier as in *kěnéng yě yǒu xiē wèntí* (可能也有些问题 probably have got some problems) or a post-vaguefier as in *bǎoshǒu yīxiē* (保守一些 a bit conservative), whose parts of speech are both numeral, but being employed as an attributive in the former one and a complement in the latter one.

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Moreover, *jǐ* (几 'several/over/odd') can be used as a pre-vaguefier as in *Qián jǐ nián bù shì ?* (前几年不是? It is not this much in the first <u>several</u> years, isn't it?), whose part of speech is a pronoun being utilised as an attributive, or as a post-vaguefier as in *Dì jiǔ nián nà kěnéng jiù shì yī bǎi èrshí jǐ wàn* (第九年那可能就是一百二十几万。It may be <u>over</u> one million two hundred thousand in the ninth year), whose part of speech is also a pronoun but being used as a complement in this instance. *Shénme* (什么 'whatever/whatisit') can be a pre-vaguefier as in *Nǐ xūyào wǒmen gěi nǐ chū shénme shǒuxù de shíhou jiù gěi nǐ chū shénme shǒuxù.* (你需要我们给你出<u>什么</u>手续的时候就给你出<u>什么</u>手续。We will issue <u>whatever</u> papers you request.) or a VE as in *Nàgè shénme, jiù shì, zhègè bǎodān dehuà,* (那个<u>什么</u>，就是，这个保单的话 Well, <u>whatisit</u>, well, if this policy), whose parts of speech are both pronoun, but being employed as an attributive in the first case and a lexical gap filler in the second case.

There is a dynamic in terms of vague and non-vague items in the data. Zhang (2004a) argues that the same word can be vague or non-vague depending on when and where it is used and by whom it is interpreted. The same principle applies here. Some VEs and post-vaguefires may no longer be vague when they generate specific meanings and serve different functions. This shows the nature of the dynamics of VL in use. This dynamic feature of VL in Chinese implies that the language users have to be more meticulous when using VL in order to communicate more effectively. This dynamic is the impetus behind the use of VL.The change from the vague meaning to the non-vague contributes to the intricacies of the Chinese language.

Chapters 4 and 5 have discussed the issues of parts of speech and combinational patterns of VL at the lexical level. The next chapter will explore the use of VL at the syntactic level.

Chapter 6 Vagueness at syntactic level

This chapter analyses vagueness at the syntactic level, by exploring how six syntactic forms are distributed and employed in Chinese business negotiations, in relation to three factors: age, gender and social distance. Age is represented by A+ (older) and A- (younger). For the convenience of analysis in this study, 'older' is defined as 45 years old and above, and 'younger' as below 45 years old. Gender consists of F (female) and M (male). Social distance has three variables, D-: 'friends'; D=: 'acquaintances'; D+: 'strangers'. The six categories are concessive conjunctions, conditionals, indirect constructions, interrogatives, passives and reduplications.

6.1 Negotiation 1 (D=)

N1 is a case where both negotiating parties know each other as acquaintances; three males are on one side (A: 56, C: 45 and D: 39 years old respectively) and one female (B: 37 years old) is on the other side. It is a business negotiation of a contract between a petrol-chemical company (A, C and D) and an equipment supplier (B).

6.1.1 Frequency of the six types

Table 6.1: Number of tokens for the six types in N1

Types	Conditionals	Indirect constructions	Interrogatives	Reduplications	Passives	Concessive conjunctions
No. of tokens	48	36	24	10	3	2

The results shown in Table 6.1 indicate that the most frequent use was conditionals represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *zhǐyào* (只要 'as long as'). The second most commonly used vague syntactic form was indirect constructions represented by

yào/yàoshi (要/要是 'in case'). The least used vague syntactic form was concessive conjunctions represented by *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although').

Table 6.2: The most common and the least common vague syntactic forms in N1

Types	Most Common	Least Common
Indirect constructions	*yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case', 35 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>*Yàoshi kōngyùn, shì wǔshí lái tiān.*</u> (<u>要是</u> 空运， 是 五 十 来 天。<u>In case</u> air-express is required, it will take over 50 days. N1S1:30)	*yīdàn* (一旦 'once', 1 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>*Yīdàn*</u> *chū le wèntí, zěnme bàn?* (<u>一旦</u>出了问题，怎么办？<u>Once</u> a problem pops up, what should we do? N1S1:117)
Conditionals	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 17 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jiù shì shuō* <u>*rúguǒ*</u> *wǒmen dīyú nà gè zuìdījià, kěnéng jiù chūjú le.* (就是说<u>如果</u>我们低于那个最低价，可能就出局了。That is to say, <u>if</u> our price is lower than that lowest price, we might be out. N1S2:161)	*jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that', 2 token) **Eg.:** <u>*Jiǎrú*</u> *nǐ nà shì shíwàn, zhè bāwàn* (<u>假如</u>你那是十万，这八万--- <u>Provided that</u> yours is 100,000 yuan, this 80,000 yuan--- N1S1:20)
Interrogatives	*ma* (吗 'a question marker', 16 tokens) **Eg.:** *Kěyǐ shǎo yīdiǎnr* <u>*ma?*</u> (可以少一点儿<u>吗</u>？Can you ask for less? N1S2:65)	*ne* (呢 'a question marker', 8 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nǐ zěnme shuō* <u>*ne,*</u> *jiù shì ā zhè gè chǎnpǐn*—(你怎么说<u>呢</u>，就是它这个产品—How can you put it? Namely, it, this product--- N1S3:133)
Passives	*bèi* (被 'by', 3 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>*Bèi*</u> *táotài le, jiù shì zhè gè yuányīn.* (<u>被</u>淘汰了，就是这个原因。It <u>was</u> eliminated; this is just the reason why N1S2:245).	
Reduplications	*kànkàn* (看看 'have a look', 3 tokens) **Eg.:** *Zhèyàng xíng bù xíng, nǐ* <u>*kàn kàn?*</u> (这样行不行，你<u>看看</u>？Is this OK? Please <u>have a look</u>. N1S3:60)	*tīngtīng* (听听 'have a listen', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Wǒ hái shì xiǎng* <u>*tīngtīng*</u> *nǐ,* (我还是想<u>听听</u>你 I still want to <u>have a listen</u> to your opinions, N1S1:209) *shuōshuō* (说说 'say a few words' , 1

	tántán (谈谈 'have a talk', 3 tokens) **Eg.:** *Zài tántán yòu nòng shí kuài* (再谈谈又弄十块 After <u>a talk</u> again, it will be reduced another 10 dollars. N1S1:234)	token) **Eg.:** *Lǎowú nǐ <u>shuōshuō</u>,* (老吴你<u>说说</u> Old Wu , please <u>say a few words</u>, N1S1: 268) *biànbiàn* (变变 'change a bit' 1 token) **Eg.:** *Bǎ yùnshū fāngshì <u>biànbiàn</u>.* (把运输方式<u>变变</u>。 <u>Change</u> the means of transportation <u>a bit</u>. N1S1:295) *cháchá* (查查 'have a check', 1 token) **Eg.:** *<u>Cháchá</u> kě bù kěyǐ?* (<u>查查</u>可不可以? Is it O.K. to <u>have a check</u>? N1S2:288)
Concessive conjunctions	*suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although', 2 tokens) **Eg.:** *<u>Suīrán</u> qiāndìng īy niín, <u>dànshì</u> hái yǒu gè shénme shìchē duō cháng dā cháng shíjūn* . (<u>虽然</u>签订一年，<u>但是</u>还有个什么试车多长多长时间。<u>Though</u> we sign it for one year, there is still, whatisit, a kind of long trial period. N1S1:142)	

As Table 6.2 reveals, the indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), interrogative *ma* (吗 'a question marker'), passive *bèi* (被 'by'), reduplications *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') and *tántán* (谈谈 'have a talk') and concessive conjunction *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type respectively.

The indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') was employed by the negotiators to incorporate any assumed or imagined circumstances and negotiating on a broader ground, thus winning more advantages, and meanwhile softening the negotiators' tone and easing the tense negotiating atmosphere. The conditional *rúguǒ*

(如果 'if') was often utilized with the expression *dehuà* (的话 'tone auxiliary expression') to create a more negotiating and persuading tone that allows the negotiators increasingly favourable room for further negotiations and gives the upper hand in the negotiations. The interrogative *ma* (吗 'a question marker') was normally placed at the end of a sentence as a tone-softener to make a question in a tone of consultation or discussion to alleviate directness or mitigate the imposition of questions on the negotiating opponents, particularly in making or asking for suggestions in the negotiations. This was found to greatly smoothe over stalled negotiations.

The passive *bèi* (被 'by') was used to introduce the agent of an action, or to emphasize that the subject of the sentence is the recipient of an action, which also helped to not disclose the doer of an action. The reduplications *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') and *tántán* (谈谈 'have a talk') were utilized to imply a short duration for that action or the idea of giving something a try tentatively, and creating an easier and more respectful communication environment to allow the negotiators to mitigate the tone of speech, especially in imperative sentences. The concessive conjunction *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although') was employed to help the negotiators defend and highlight their own standpoint when countering the opponent's argument, by making a sufficient concession to give prominence to the adverse consequence in the second clause.

6.1.2 Syntactic analysis

Table 6.3: Syntactic analysis in N1

Participants	A (Leading)	B (Leading)	C	D
Gender	M	F	M	M
Age	56+	37-	45+	39-
Distance	=	=	=	=
No. of tokens (Totoal)	52	46	18	8
Concessive conjunctions	2 (3.85%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Conditionals	16 (30.77%)	20 (43.48%)	6 (33.33%)	6 (75%)
Indirect constructions	23 (44.23%)	10 (21.74%)	2 (11.11%)	1 (12.5%)
Interrogatives	4 (7.69%)	12 (26.09%)	8 (44.44%)	0 (0%)
Passives	0 (0%)	2 (4.35%)	0 (0%)	1 (12.5%)
Reduplications	7 (13.46%)	2 (4.35%)	1 (5.56%)	0 (0%)

As shown in Table 6.3, participant A mostly used indirect constructions (44.23%) represented by *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), and least commonly utilized passives (0%). Conditionals (43.48%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and concessive conjunctions (0%) were most and least commonly utilized respectively by participant B. Participant C most frequently employed interrogatives (44.44%) represented by *ne* (呢 'a question marker'), and least commonly used concessive conjunctions and passives (0%). Conditionals (75%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and concessive conjunctions, interrogatives and reduplications (0%) were most and least commonly utilized respectively by participant D.

6.1.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 1

1. Conditionals were the most favoured vague syntactic forms, used to allow the negotiators more space to strengthen and consolidate their negotiating stand. Conditionals serving as a tone-softening device were very popular with the Chinese negotiators to create a more friendly and cordial atmosphere that helped the negotiators to maximise their influence. Concessive conjunctions were least

commonly used, which indicates the negotiators' concern for their counterparts' negative face.

2. Only the oldest male participant A used concessive conjunctions and mostly used indirect constructions. The older male participant C most frequently employed interrogatives. The younger female participant B mostly utilized conditionals, but did not use concessive conjunctions at all; similarly to the younger female participant B, the youngest male participant D mostly utilized conditionals and used no concessive conjunctions, interrogatives or reduplications. Therefore, as shown in N1, age and gender factors did have an influence on the choice of vague syntactic forms.

6.2 Negotiation 2 (D-)

N2 is a case where both negotiating parties know each other well as friends; both of them are female and are the same age (54 years old). It is a business negotiation of an insurance agreement between the client (A) and the insurance agent (B).

6.2.1 Frequency of the six types

Table 6.4: Number of tokens for the six types in N2

Types	Conditionals	Indirect constructions	Interrogatives	Reduplications	Concessive conjunctions	Passives
No. of tokens	55	27	22	11	0	0

Table 6.4 shows that similar to N1, conditionals represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that') were the most frequent use of vague syntactic forms, and indirect constructions represented by *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') were found to be the second most commonly used; in contrast to N1, the least used were concessive conjunctions and passives (0).

Table 6.5: The most common and the least common vague syntactic forms in N2

Types	Most Common	Least Common
Conditionals	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 23 tokens) **Eg.:** *Rúguǒ shíwàn ne,* (0.2) *wǒ děi kǎolǜ yīxià le.* (如果十万呢，(0.2) 我得考虑一下了。If it's 10,000, I have to think it over for a while. N2S1:41)	*zhǐyào* (只要 'as long as', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Zhǐyào bèibǎoxiǎnrén zài, shuíyě lǐng bù zǒu.* (只要被保险人在，谁也领不走。As long as the insured person is alive, nobody else can claim. N2S2:701)
Indirect constructions	*yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case', 21 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nà wǒ yàoshi xuǎnzé wǔ nián jiù shì bǎifēnzhī wǔ le bei.* (那我要是选择五年就是百分之五了呗。In case I am permitted to choose a five-year one, it will be 5%. N2S1:389)	*yīdàn* (一旦 'once', 6 tokens) **Eg.:** *Yīdàn yǒu gè shénme wèntí le ,cái yǒu zhè bǐ qián.* (一旦有个什么问题了，才有这笔钱。Once there is an accident, this sum of money can be claimed. N2S2:492)
Interrogatives	*ne* (呢 'a question marker', 14 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jiù* (.) *zhè gè chǎnpǐn ne?*（就(.)这个产品呢？Well, this product? N2S1:17)	*ma* (吗 'a question marker', 8 tokens) **Eg.:** *Wǒ juéde wǒ xiànzài jiù gǐ háizi zhème duō qián, hǎo ma?* (我觉得我现在就给孩子这么多钱，好吗？ I don't feel it's quite good to give the child so much money now, is it? N2S2:538)
Reduplications	*kànkàn* (看看 'have a look', 7 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nǐ kànkàn, yàobùshì xiān bǎ dānzi tián le?* (你看看，要不是先把单子填了？Have a look again, and then how about filling out the form? N2S2:570)	*xiǎngxiǎng* (想想 'have a second thought', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Nà* (.) *wǒ xiǎngxiǎng a.* (那(.)我想想啊。Then, I'll have a second thought about it. N2S1:337) *suànsuàn* (算算, 'reckon' 1 token) **Eg.:** *Hái děi zài suànsuàn o.* (还得再算算哦 。 I'll have to recalculate. N2S1:571)
Concessive conjunctions		
Passives		

As shown in Table 6.5, and in the same manner as N1, the conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), and reduplication *kànkàn*

(看看 'have a look') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type respectively. In contrast to N1, *ne* (呢 'a question marker') was the most commonly used interrogative, and concessive conjunctions and passives were not utilized. The conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') and reduplication *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') were employed for the same purposes as in N1. Similar to the interrogative *ma* (吗 'a question marker'), *ne* (呢 'a question marker') was also normally placed at the end of a sentence as a tone-softener to mitigate the imposition of a question on the negotiating opponents.

6.2.2 Syntactic analysis

Table 6.6: Syntactic analysis in N2

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	54+	54+
Distance	-	-
No. of tokens (Totoal)	74	41
Concessive conjunctions	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Conditionals	41 (55.41%)	14 (34.15%)
Indirect constructions	18 (24.32%)	9 (21.95%)
Interrogatives	12 (16.22%)	10 (24.39%)
Passives	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Reduplications	3 (4.05%)	8 (19.51%)

As revealed in Table 6.6, participant A most frequently employed conditionals (55.41%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), and concessive conjunctions and passives (0%) were not used at all. Similarly, conditionals (34.15%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') were the most commonly utilized vague syntactic forms by participant B, and concessive conjunctions and passives (0%) were not used.

6.2.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 2

1. As with N1, conditionals were the most preferred vague syntactic forms, and were used for the same strategic purposes. Differently to N1, concessive conjunctions and passives were both least favoured for the same reasons.

2. Interestingly, it indicates that both female participants A and B mostly employed conditionals and least utilized concessive conjunctions and passives. They behaved in almost the same manner, because they were of the same gender and the same age. However, they were not so uniform at the lexical level, see Section 4.2.3 for detail. The issue of age, distance and gender will be discussed fully in Section 6.6.

6.3 Negotiation 3 (D+)

N3 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; one is male (A: 60 years old) and the other one is female (B: 32 years old). It is a business negotiation of an international travel agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

6.3.1 Frequency of the six types

Table 6.7: Number of tokens for the six types in N3

Types	Conditionals	Interrogatives	Indirect constructions	Reduplications	Concessive conjunctions	Passives
No. of tokens	47	19	12	4	2	0

Table 6.7 reveals that similar to N1 and N2, conditionals represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that') were the most frequent use of vague syntactic forms. Differently to N1 and N2, the least used vague syntactic form was passives

(0), and interrogatives represented by *ma* ('吗' a question marker) were found to be the second most commonly used.

Table 6.8: The most common and the least common vague syntactic forms in N3

Types	Most Common	Least Common
Conditionals	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 24 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>*Rúguǒ*</u> *yǒu zìyóu huódòng shíjiān yě shì,* (<u>如果</u>有自由活动时间也是，<u>If</u> there is some time for one's own personal activity, it's also---N3S2:314)	
Interrogatives	*ma* (吗 'a question marker', 15 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jīntiān néng gěi wǒ <u>ma</u>?* (今天能给我<u>吗</u>？ Can you give it to me today? N3S2:56)	*ne* (呢 'a question marke'r, 4 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jīběn wǒmen shì zhōngcān <u>ne</u>, háishì tā dāngdì de cān?* (基本我们是中餐<u>呢</u>，还是它当地的餐？ Basically, do we have a Chinese meal or a local meal? N3S1:79)
Indirect constructions	*yào/yàoshi* （要/要是 'in case', 10 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jiù shì wǒ <u>yàoshi</u> hē diǎnr chá.* (就是我<u>要是</u>喝点儿茶。 it's just; <u>in case</u> I want to drink some tea. N3S1:415)	*yīdàn* (一旦 'once', 2 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>*Yīdàn*</u> *jiù shì shā wǒ zài zhè gè lǚyóu guòchéng zhōng,* (<u>一旦</u>就是说我在这个旅游过程中， <u>Once</u>, that's to say, when I am in the middle of the journey, --- N3S1:489)
Reduplications	*kànkàn* (看看 'have a look', 4 tokens) **Eg.:** *Wǒ <u>kànkàn</u> hái yǒu shénme, a.* (我<u>看看</u>还有什么，啊，I'll <u>have a look</u> at what else I've got to ask. N3S1:69)	
Concessive conjunctions	*suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although', 1 token) **Eg.:** <u>*Suīrán*</u> *shì zìfèi a, <u>dànshì</u> fēicháng yǒu tèdiǎn.* (<u>虽然</u>是自费啊，<u>但是</u>非常有特点。 Although it's at one's own expenses, it's very special. N3S1:305)	

	suīrán (虽然 'though',1 token)	
	Eg.: *Tā zhègè <u>suīrán</u> shì wǔxīngjí de,* (它这个<u>虽然</u>是五星级的, it's five-star <u>though</u>, N3S1:411)	
Passives		

As indicated in Table 6.8, in a similar fashion to N1, the concessive conjunctions *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although') and *suīrán* (虽然 'though'), and interrogative *ma* (吗 'a question marker') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type respectively; as with N1 and N2, the conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), and reduplication *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type. They were used for the same communicative needs as N1 and N2. In contrast to N1 and N2, passives were not utilized.

6.3.2 Syntactic analysis

Table 6.9: Syntactic analysis in N3

Participants	A	B
Gender	M	F
Age	60+	32-
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Totoal)	34	50
Concessive conjunctions	2 (5.88%)	0 (0%)
Conditionals	7 (20.59%)	40 (80%)
Indirect constructions	7 (20.59%)	5 (10%)
Interrogatives	17 (50%)	2 (4%)
Passives	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Reduplications	1 (2.94%)	3 (6%)

As shown in Table 6.9, participant A most frequently employed interrogatives (50%) represented by *ma* (吗 'a question marker'), and passives were not used at all. Unlike participant A, participant B most commonly utilized conditionals (80%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), and did not use concessive conjunctions and passives (0%).

6.3.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 3

1. As with N1 and N2, conditionals were the most favoured vague syntactic forms, used for the same strategic purposes. Differently to N1 and N2, passives were the least preferred, and for a similar reason.

2. The older male participant A most frequently employed interrogatives and least utilized passives, while the younger female participant B mostly used conditionals and employed concessive conjunctions and passives the least. This seems to suggest an impact of age and gender factors on the choice of vague syntactic forms in N3.

6.4 Negotiation 4 (D+)

N4 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; both are female (A: 32 and B: 24 years old respectively). It is a business negotiation of a domestic travel agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

6.4.1 Frequency of the six types

Table 6.10: Number of tokens for the six types in N4

Types	Conditionals	Interrogatives	Indirect constructions	Reduplications	Concessive conjunctions	Passives
No. of tokens	39	17	13	2	1	0

Table 6.10 shows that as with N1, N2 and N3, conditionals represented by *rúguǒ* (如果, 'if') and *chúfēi* (除非, 'unless') were the most frequently used vague syntactic forms; as with N3, the least used vague syntactic form was passives (0). The second

most commonly used were interrogatives represented by *ma* (吗, 'a question marker').

Table 6.11: The most common and the least common vague syntactic forms in N4

Types	Most Common	Least Common
Conditionals	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if ', 20 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>Rúguǒ</u> *yǒude kèren jiù xiǎng zǎo yīdiǎnr a,* (<u>如果</u>有的客人就想早一点儿啊，<u>If</u> some guests just want to be earlier, N4S1:45)	*jiǎrú* (假如 'provided tha't, 1 token) **Eg.:** <u>Jiǎrú</u> *shuō zhè huíqù jiù shì ɪ̄nwèi liányǔtiān gǎn shàng le huà,* (<u>假如</u>说这回去就是因为连雨天赶上了话， <u>Provided</u> that this time I just happened to meet with a series of rainy days, N4S2:82) *zhǐyào* (只要 'as long as', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Jiù* <u>zhǐyào</u> *nǐ zìjǐ, kěndìng huì chūxiàn jiù shì yī gè*(就<u>只要</u>你自己，肯定会出现就是一个，<u>As long as</u> it's only you yourself, it's bound to appear a -- N4S1:119) *yàobùrán* (要不然 'otherwise', 1 token) **Eg.:** <u>Yàobùrán</u> *là xià jiù máfan le.* (<u>要不然</u>落下就麻烦了。<u>Otherwise,</u> it would be troublesome if left behind. N4S1:107)
Indirect constructions	*yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case', 13 tokens) **Eg.:** <u>Yàoshi</u> *qù bù le ,zánmen yào tuìkuǎn.* (<u>要是</u>去不了，咱们要退款。<u>In case</u> we were not permitted to go, we would get refunded. N4S1:85)	
Interrogatives	*ma* (吗 'a question marker', 10 tokens) **Eg.:** *Hái yǒu shénme chājià yào bǔ de* <u>ma?</u> (还有什么差价要补的<u>吗</u>?	*ne* (呢 'a question marker', 7 tokens) **Eg.:** *Néng bù néng jiùěɪg wǒ hǎohāo ānpái yī gè fángjiān* <u>ne</u>? (能不能就给我好好安排一个房间<u>呢</u>? Is it possible for

	Does any other price difference have to be paid? N4S2:118)	you to well arrange a room for me? N4S2:126)
Reduplications	*kànkàn* (看看 'have a look', 2 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nǐ <u>kànkàn</u> zánmen zhègè xíngchéng.* (你<u>看看</u>咱们这个行程。Please <u>have a look</u> at our itinerary. N4S1:171)	
Concessive conjunctions	*suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although', 1 token) **Eg.:** <u>*Suīrán*</u> *bù shì ǒn dɩō qǔn ,* <u>*dànshì*</u> *yàoshi méiyǒu le* (overlap) *jiù bù fāngbiàn le.* (<u>虽然</u>不是很多钱，<u>但是</u>要是没有了(overlap)就不方便了。<u>Although</u> it's not very much money, it will be inconvenient in case it's gone. N4S1:183)	
Passives		

Table 6.11 illustrates that as with N1 and N3, the concessive conjunction *suīrán --- dànshì---* ('虽然 --- 但是 'although') and interrogative *ma* (吗 'a question marker') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type; as with N1, N2 and N3, the conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') and reduplication *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') were the most preferred syntactic forms for each type, and served as similar negotiating means; as with N3, passives were not employed.

6.4.2 Syntactic analysis

Table 6.12: Syntactic analysis in N4

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	32-	24-
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Totoal)	39	33
Concessive conjunctions	0 (0%)	1 (3.03%)
Conditionals	19 (48.72%)	20 (60.61%)
Indirect constructions	4 (10.26%)	9 (27.27%)
Interrogatives	16 (41.03%)	1 (3.03%)
Passives	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Reduplications	0 (0%)	2 (6.06%)

As shown in Table 6.12, both participant A and participant B most commonly employed conditionals (48.72% and 60.61% respectively) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and used passives (0%) least. Unlike participant B, participant A also least utilized concessive conjunctions and reduplications (0%).

6.4.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 4

1. As with N1, N2 and N3, conditionals were the most preferred vague syntactic forms, used for the same strategic purposes. As with N3, passives were the least preferred vague syntactic forms for the same reasons.

2. Both the younger female participant A and B most frequently employed conditionals and least utilized passives, while participant A also least utilized concessive conjunctions and reduplications. There appeared to be minimal difference between the two participants, who were of the same gender and similar age.

6.5 Negotiation 5 (D+)

N5 is a case where both negotiating parties do not know each other; both are female (A: 21 and B: 55 years old respectively). It is a business negotiation of an overseas study agreement between the client (A) and the agent (B).

6.5.1 Frequency of the six types

Table 6.13: Number of tokens for the six types in N5

Types	Conditionals	Indirect constructions	Interrogatives	Reduplications	Concessive conjunctions	Passives
No. of tokens	55	41	24	4	3	2

As seen in Table 6.13, as with N1, N2, N3 and N4, conditionals represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *zhǐyào* (只要 'as long as') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms, and as with N3 and N4, passives (2) were least used. As in N1 and N2, the second most commonly used vague syntactic form was indirect constructions represented by *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case').

Table 6.14: The most common and the least common vague syntactic forms in N5

Types	Most Common	Least Common
Indirect constructions	*yào/yàoshi* （要 /要是 'in case', 41 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nǐ yàoshi qù xīní dàxué, tā de xuéfèi ne,* (你要是去悉尼大学，它的学费呢，In case you are permitted to go to Sydney University, its tuition fee is, N5S1:131)	
Conditionals	*rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 28 tokens) **Eg.:** *Rúguǒ nǐ yào yòng nǐ yéye de qián,* (如果你要用你爷爷的钱，if you	*jiǎrú* (假如 'provided that', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Jiǎrú shuō ,míngnián qīyuè xiǎng zǒu de huà,* (假如说，明年七月想走的话，provided that I want to go next July, N5S2:194)

	use your grandfather's money, N5S1:121)	*chúfēi* (除非 'unless', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Chúfēi nǐ zìjǐ yuànyì xué.* (除非你自己愿意学, <u>unless</u> you would like to study by yourself. N5S1:195)
Interrogatives	*ne* (呢 'a question marker', 13 tokens) **Eg.:** *Nǐ mùbiāo de dàxué shì nǎ gè <u>ne</u>?* (你目标的大学是哪个呢？ Which is your targeted university? N5S1:15)	*ma* (吗 'a question marker', 11 tokens) **Eg.:** *Lùnwén de chéngjī hěn zhòngyào <u>ma</u>?* (论文的成绩很重要吗？ Is the thesis score very important? N5S2:88)
Concessive conjunctions	*suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although', 3 tokens) **Eg.:** *Suīrán yào qù gōngzhèng, <u>dànshì</u> nǐzuò chéng zhōng yīngwén de bǐjiào hǎo.* (<u>虽然</u>要去公证，<u>但是</u>你做成中英文的比较好。<u>Although</u> you need to notarize them, you'd better make them in both Chinese and English. N5S1:91)	
Passives	*ràng* (让 'by', 2 tokens) **Eg.:** *Jiāduō cháng shíjiān <u>ràng</u> xuéxiào lái píngdìng.* (加多长时间，<u>让</u>学校来评定。The length of time added should <u>be</u> decided by the university. N5S1:57)	
Reduplications	*kǎolùkǎolù* （考虑考虑 'reconsider', 2 tokens) **Eg.:** *Wǒ zài <u>kǎolùkǎolù</u>.* (我再<u>考虑考虑</u>。I'll <u>reconsider</u> it. N5S2:250)	*xiǎngxiǎng* （想想 'have a second thought', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Ránhòu , <u>xiǎngxiǎng</u> a.* (然后，<u>想想</u>啊。Then, I'll <u>have a second thought</u> about it. N5S2:158) *tīngtīng* (听听 'have a listen', 1 token) **Eg.:** *Wǒ jiù xiǎng <u>tīngtīng</u> nǐ de mùbiāo dàxué.* (我就想<u>听听</u>你的目标大学。I just want to <u>have a listen to</u> which is your targeted university. N5S1:15)

As shown in Table 6.14, as with N1, N3 and N4, *suīrán --- dànshì---* (虽然 --- 但是 'although') was the most commonly used concessive conjunction and as with N2, *ne* (呢 'a question marker') was the most commonly used interrogative; as with N1, N2,

N3 and N4, the conditional *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and the indirect construction *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case') were the most commonly used vague syntactic forms for each type respectively. However, in this case the passive *ràng* (让 'by') and reduplication *kǎolǜkǎolǜ* (考虑考虑 'reconsider') were the most frequent use of vague syntactic forms for each type respectively.

6.5.2 Syntactic analysis

Table 6.15: Syntactic analysis in N5

Participants	A	B
Gender	F	F
Age	21-	55+
Distance	+	+
No. of tokens (Totoal)	20	109
Concessive conjunctions	1 (5%)	2 (1.83%)
Conditionals	6 (30%)	49 (44.95%)
Indirect constructions	2 (10%)	39(35.78%)
Interrogatives	8 (40%)	16 (14.68%)
Passives	1 (5%)	1 (0.92%)
Reduplications	2 (10%)	2 (1.83%)

As indicated in Table 6.15, interrogatives (40%) represented by *ne* (呢 'a question marker') were used most by participant A, while participant B most commonly utilized conditionals (44.95%) represented by *rúguǒ* (如果, 'if'); both participant A and B employed passives (5% and 0.92% respectively) the least. In contrast to participant B, participant A also least used concessive conjunctions (5%).

6.5.3 Overall findings of Negotiation 5

1. As with N1, N2, N3 and N4, conditionals were the most preferred for the same strategic purposes. As with N3 and N4, passives were the least favoured, for the same reasons.

2. Though both participant A and B least used passives, the younger female participant A mostly employed interrogatives and the older female participant B mostly utilized conditionals. Therefore, the age factor did have an influence on the choice of vague syntactic forms in N5.

6.6 Summarising remarks

6.6.1 General discussion

What has been discussed here is an exploration of the patterns of vague syntactic forms in Chinese business negotiations. This syntactic level analysis demonstrates typical trends as indicated in Figure 6.1 below:
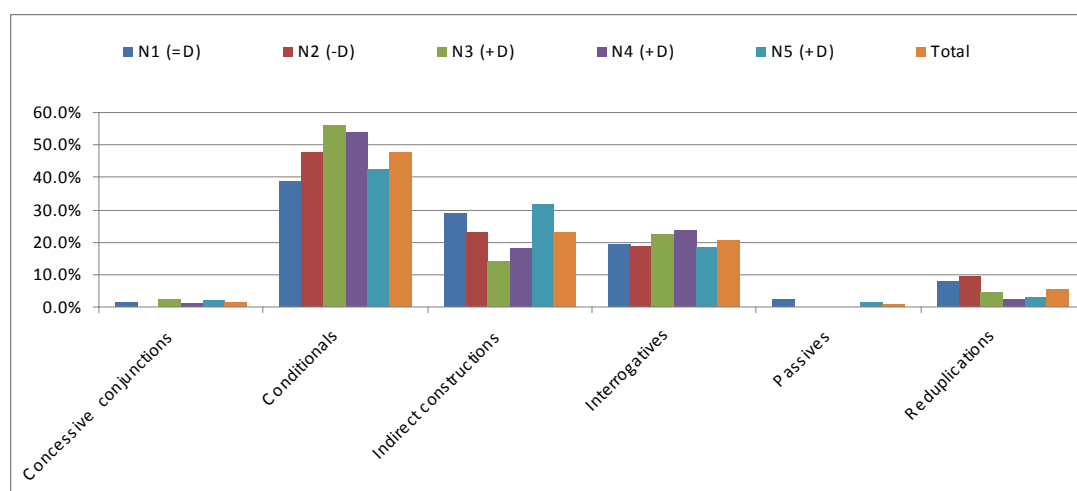
Figure 6.1: Distribution of the six vague syntactic forms

It is observed that conditionals were the most preferred and pervasive vague syntactic form represented by *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), and the second most commonly used vague syntactic forms were indirect constructions and interrogatives represented by *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), *ma* (吗 'a question marker') and *ne* (呢 'a question marker'). On the other hand, passives were the least favoured and concessive conjunctions were the second least favoured. In terms of the individual items, *suīrán*

--- *dànshì*--- (虽然 --- 但是 'although'), *bèi* (被 'by') and *ràng* (让 'by'), and *kànkàn* (看看 'have a look') were the most frequently used concessive conjunction, passive and reduplication, respectively.

6.6.2 Social factor comparison

There are three social factors to be discussed in this section: gender, age and social distance. In the following tables, (A, C and D) represent clients and (B) represents an agent of some kind.

Table 6.16 Gender factor comparison
【F: Female, M: male】

Negotiation	Most commonly used vague syntactic forms	Least commonly used vague syntactic forms
N1	M: (A) Indirect constructions - 44.23% (C) Interrogatives- 44.44% (D) Conditionals - 75%	M: (A) Passives - 0% (C) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0% (D) Concessive conjunctions, interrogatives & reduplications 0%
	F: (B) Conditionals - 29.21%	F: (B) Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N2	F: (A) Conditionals – 55.41%	F: (A) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
	F: (B) Conditionals - 34.15%	F: (B) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N3	M: (A) Interrogatives - 50%	M: (A) Passives - 0%
	F: (B) Conditionals - 80%	F: (B) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N4	F: (A) Conditionals - 48.72%	F: (A) Concessive conjunctions, Passives & reduplications - 0%
	F: (B) Conditionals – 60.61%	F: (B) Passives - 0%
N5	F: (A) Interrogatives - 40%	F: (A) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 5%
	F: (B) Conditionals – 44.95%	F: (B) Passives – 0.92%

As revealed in Table 6.16, half of males preferred interrogatives the most; but almost all the females primarily favoured conditionals except for only one female negotiator

mostly using interrogatives. Although the two groups are similar in terms of the least commonly used vague syntactic forms, as nearly all negotiators least utilized passives, the fact that the two opposite gender groups did behave quite differently in the most preferred category demonstrates that the gender factor does have certain focused influences on the choice of vague syntactic forms, particularly on that of most commonly used vague syntactic forms. A possible reason that almost all females preferred conditionals is that they are more cautious than males and would like to display a more friendly and cooperative attitude. Consistent with this explanation, half of males' using interrogatives may imply that the male group is more assertive in business negotiations.

Table 6.17 Age factor comparison

【A+: older (45 years old and above), A-: younger (below 45 years old) 】

Negotiation	Most commonly used vague syntactic forms	Least commonly used vague syntactic forms
N1	(A) A+: Indirect constructions - 44.23% (B) A-: Conditionals - 29.21% (C) A+: Interrogatives- 44.44% (D) A-: Conditionals - 75%	(A) A+: Passives - 0% (B) A-: Concessive conjunctions - 0% (C) A+: Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0% (D) A-: Concessive conjunctions, nterrogatives & reduplications - 0%
N2	(A) A+: Conditionals - 55.41%	(A) A+: Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
	(B) A+: Conditionals - 34.15%	(B) A+: Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N3	(A) A+: Interrogatives - 50%	(A) A+: Passives - 0%
	(B) A-: Conditionals - 80%	(B) A-: Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N4	(A) A-: Conditionals - 48.72%	(A) A-: Concessive conjunctions, Passives & reduplications - 0%
	(B) A-: Conditionals – 60.61%	(B) A-: Passives - 0%
N5	(A) A-: Interrogatives - 40%	(A) A-: Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 5%
	(B) A+: Conditionals – 44.95%	(B) A+: Passives - 0.92%

As shown in Table 6.17, apparently there is no major difference in the use of most common vague syntactic forms between the younger negotiators and the older negotiators. However, there still exist some discrepancies, with most preferring conditionals, two older ones mostly using interrogatives and one older negotiator employing indirect constructions. A possible explanation for some older negotiators' most utilized interrogatives and indirect constructions is that they are more polite, and confident and skilled in using the two strategies. Similarly, there is no big discrepancy in the least commonly used vague syntactic forms .Nearly all of the negotiators least favoured passives, but again two younger ones were not consistent. The findings in Table 6.17 seem to imply that in Chinese business negotiations, the factor of age has some impact on the choice of vague syntactic forms.

Table 6.18 Distance factor comparison

【D=: acquaintances, D- : friends, D+: strangers】

Negotiation	Most commonly used vague syntactic forms	Least commonly used vague syntactic forms
N1 D=	(A) Indirect constructions - 44.23% (B) Conditionals - 29.21% (C) Interrogatives- 44.44% (D) Conditionals - 75%	(A) Passives - 0% (B) Concessive conjunctions - 0% (C) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0% (D) Concessive conjunctions, interrogatives & reduplications - 0%
N2 D-	(A) Conditionals - 55.41%	(A) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
	(B) Conditionals - 34.15%	(B) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N3 D+	(A) Interrogatives - 50%	(A) Passives - 0%
	(B) Conditionals - 80%	(B) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 0%
N4 D+	(A) Conditionals - 48.72%	(A) Concessive conjunctions, Passives & reduplications - 0%
	(B) Conditionals – 60.61%	(B) Passives - 0%
N5 D+	(A) Interrogatives - 40%	(A) Passives & Concessive conjunctions - 5%
	(B) Conditionals – 44.95%	(B) Passives – 0.92%

As indicated in Table 6.18, conditionals were the most commonly used vague syntactic form favoured by Group 2 of friends (D-) and Group 4 of strangers (D+). The other three groups (1, 3 and 5) preferred both conditionals and interrogatives. There is not an obvious difference in the least commonly used vague syntactic forms. Passives were least preferred by all the negotiators who knew or did not know each other. This suggests that in Chinese business negotiations, similar to the factor of age, social distance factor has also some influence on the choice of vague syntactic forms, in particular on that of the most commonly used vague syntactic forms. It could be interpreted that in Chinese business negotiations, the negotiators who know each other well (D-) tend to be more relaxed and friendly to each other by using conditionals most, while other groups of negotiators tend to be more polite and indirect by using both conditionals and interrogatives.

Vague syntactic forms are prevalent as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations, and play a crucial role in running and achieving a successful negotiation. By using vague syntactic forms, negotiators can increase the flexibility of their speech and avoid coming into deadlock. A possible explanation for the higher usage of vague syntactic forms by the Chinese negotiators is a cultural preference for hedging which is coupled with a preference for indirectness generally (Cheng 2003). According to Zhang and Li (1999), in Chinese culture indirectness and VEs are more acceptable than direct and specific references. Sentences are frequently left unfinished so that the other person may conclude in their own mind. They are layers of soft language with various degrees of courtesy and respect. Bilbow (1997) states Chinese discourse is considerably less direct than Western discourse. Also, Chinese hearers tend to interpret indirectness in more positive ways than Westerners. For example, circumlocutory discourse is often regarded by the Chinese as highly authoritative in a way that is far from common among Western hearers, for whom circumlocutory discourse tends to be 'manipulative' or 'long-winded'.

According to Bilbow (1997), Chinese discourse is markedly more formal than Western discourse, and overt markers of politeness are common. Bilbow also states that 'face' considerations play a greater role in determining whether a speaker's discourse is interpreted more sensitively by Chinese hearers than by Westerners. Although the dynamic changes in interpersonal behaviour are taking place in China, the present study indicates that the Chinese still tend to conduct business communication in a rather indirect manner. As for the reasons the participants least used passives, one possibility could be that, unlike English, passives in the Chinese language are used primarily with an unfortunate tone, so that they are not normally used unless they are needed.

Detailed pragmatic functions of VL in Chinese business negotiations will be further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Pragmatic analysis

This chapter discusses VL strategies and also uncovers the relationship between the socio-cultural factors and their corresponding VL strategies. It also attempts to explore the possible reasons for using these strategies, in conjunction with the contextual information from the data, with respect to three factors: age, gender and social distance. Age is represented by A+ (older) and A- (younger). For the convenience of analysis in this study, 'older' is defined as 45 years old and above, and 'younger' as below 45 years old. Gender consists of F (female) and M (male). Social distance has three variables, D-: 'friends'; D=: 'acquaintances'; D+: 'strangers'.

In this study, Channell's (1994) framework is adopted for describing and analysing pragmatic functions of VL. It is chosen for its systematic and rigorous description of VL, used in real and varied contexts of communication, detailing how it is employed by speakers. Channell's framework has been applied to a variety of interaction contexts, ranging from studies in intercultural communication (Drave 2000) to adolescent talk (Stenstrom and Hasund 2002).

Vague and 'imprecise' language tends to be associated with more informal types of speech (Chafe 1982, Powell 1992, Overstreet and Yule 1997a). However, VL is extensively used in Chinese business negotiations. These are relatively formal situations, where facts and information are often purposely discussed in vague terms. This seeming contradiction is explained in this chapter, by showing how these negotiators use the different types of VL and the functions which these VEs perform.

Cheng and Warren (2001) find that speakers are able to consciously manipulate the resources of VL to perform a variety of functions in social interaction. These include

to achieve solidarity, to disguise linguistic and knowledge deficiencies, to demonstrate knowledge of information quantity rules in varied speech situations, and to protect one's face and that of others. With the emergence of growing academic interest in pragmatic devices with respect to VL, a wide range of more specific functions has been identified. These include verbal fillers (Edmondson 1981), turn-taking devices (Schiffrin 1987) and devices for the creation of discourse coherence (Lenk 1996), together with markers of uncertainty (Lakoff 1975) and of interpersonal politeness (Overstreet 1999).

Cutting (2007 p. 123) points out that 'some but not all VL has avoidance (defensive/protective) purposes, and some but not all avoidance behaviour is expressed through vague language.' This chapter analyses some relevant pragmatic functions of VL in the context of Chinese business negotiations, including self-protection, deliberately withholding information, politeness, informality, filling in lexical gaps and giving the right amount of information, and explores how the cultural values and social relationships influence the way VL is performed in Chinese business negotiations.

7.1 Self-protection

Trappes-Lomax (2007) views VL as a means of addressing issues of face, by using it as a tool for expressing politeness while protecting self. He argues that speakers use strategies to minimize risks, and specifically, to avoid interpersonal trouble (threats to the face of the addressee), interactional trouble (misunderstandings, misalignments), and personal trouble (threats to the face of the addressor). He notes that work on politeness, tact and hedging, has focused little on strategies to avoid personal trouble, or self-protective behaviour in the biologist's sense, for example, 'behaviour that tends to protect an animal by minimizing its exposure to hazard' (Allaby 1999, p. 189).

VL can be used as a shield (Prince *et al.* 1980) to safeguard against being placed in the dilemma of having to subsequently admit a previous wrong statement, to avoid committing oneself, and saying something inappropriate. Jucker *et al.* (2003) state that VEs serve as a major means for conveying different levels of certainty regarding the propositional content of an utterance. In addition, Jucker *et al.* believe VEs convey the newsworthiness or expectedness of a statement, or help convey evaluative meaning. VEs serve as softening implicit complaints and criticisms. The most frequently used VEs to realize pragmatic function of self-protection in Chinese business negotiations are *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly', 10.97% and 8.77% in N1 and N2 respectively), *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some', 19.09% in N3), *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively', 15.67% in N4) and *yǒude* (有的 'some/certain', 9.66% in N5). These are shown in extracts (7.1), (7.2), (7.3), (7.4), and (7.5) respectively. They are the typical VEs used in this data to serve the function of self-protection. These VEs may be used elsewhere in the same form but for different functions, and this may also be the case for other VEs in the data.

7.1.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.1) 你 海运　是　十万，　还是　八万，　我们　　有　个　比较，　对

Nǐ hǎiyùn shì shíwàn, háishì bāwàn, wǒmen yǒu gè bǐjiào, duì

不 对？根据　时间，根据 我们　　的 (indistinct) 现场　　　情况

bù duì? Gēnjù shíjiān, gēnjù wǒmen de (indistinct) xiànchǎng qíngkuàng

我们　　再 考虑。如果 我们　　确实　坚持　不 住 了,<u>可能</u>，　有

wǒmen zài kǎolǜ. Rúguǒ wǒmen quèshí jiānchí bù zhù le, <u>kěnéng</u>, yǒu

<u>可能</u>　我们　　就 多 花　点儿 钱 空运，　　但 你 海运　也 应该

<u>kěnéng</u> wǒmen jiù duō huā diǎnr qián kōngyùn, dàn nǐ hǎiyùn yě yīnggāi

报 给　　我 价。

bào gěi wǒ jià.

'Ocean transportation is one hundred thousand, or eighty thousand; we can compare, is it right? According to the site situation, we will consider it again. If we truly can't insist on it, probably, possibly we will spend a little more money to resort to air transportation, but you still should give me the price for ocean transportation.'   (N1S1:14)

As shown in Extract (7.1), the client wanted to obtain some information from the opponents of the transportation costs; However, the other party was reluctant to provide it. The client stated his desires but did not want to make any premature decisions on air or sea transport to avoid being wrong later. In these circumstances, the client strategically used *kěnéng* (可能 'probably/possibly') to protect himself.

(7.2) 基本 保额 就 是 说　我 交纳 了 一 笔 保险　费，保险　公司
　　　Jīběn bǎoé jiù shì shuō wǒ jiāonà le yī bǐ bǎoxiǎn fèi, bǎoxiǎn gōngsī
　　　承担　 的 这个 保险 、 保障、　保险　 责任。你 比如说 你 买
　　　chéngdān de zhègè bǎoxiǎn, bǎozhàng, bǎoxiǎn zérèn. Nǐ bǐrúshuō nǐ mǎi
　　　个 短期　意外 保险，　 那么 交纳　一 百 元　 钱，可能　保险　公司
　　　gè duǎnqī yìwài bǎoxiǎn, nàme jiāonà yī bǎi yuán qián, kěnéng bǎoxiǎn gōngsī
　　　要 承担　 五万　 块　钱 的 保险　责任。一旦 有　这些 方面
　　　yào chéngdān wǔwàn kuài qián de bǎoxiǎn zérèn. Yīdàn yǒu zhèxiē fāngmiàn
　　　的 事故 发生　了，保险　公司 可能　就要 赔付 五万　元。
　　　de shìgù fāshēng le, bǎoxiǎn gōngsī kěnéng jiùyào péifù wǔwàn yuán.

'The principal amount of insurance is well, the insurance, protection, the insurance responsibilities carried by the insurance company after I've paid a sum of insurance money. For example, you buy some short-term accident insurance, well then you pay one hundred yuan, but the insurance company may carry the insurance responsibility of fifty thousand yuan. If the accidents related to these aspects happened, the insurance company might pay fifty thousand.'   (N2S2:16)

Extract (7.2) differs from Extract (7.1), where the client used *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might') as a protection strategy. In Extract (7.2), the insurance agent gave her client a possible case, as she was uncertain of how much the client could claim from the insurance company for an unforeseen accident. In this way, the agent purposely employed *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might') to defend herself, and to avoid later being accused of being wrong.

(7.3) (overlap) 嗯，不 会。因为 咱 这个 游轮 呢，就 等于
(overlap) En, bù huì. Yīnwèi zán zhègè yóulún ne, jiù děngyú
说 已经 是 一 个 <u>深度</u> 游。就 比 正常 行程， 更 <u>深度</u>
shuō yǐjīng shì yī gè <u>shēndù</u> yóu. Jiù bǐ zhèngcháng xíngchéng, gèng <u>shēndù</u>
去 了解 这个 埃及，所以 它 的 行程 就 走 的 更 详细
qù liǎojiě zhègè āijí, suǒyǐ tā de xíngchéng jiù zǒu de gèng xiángxì
<u>一些</u>，更 仔细 <u>一些</u>。
<u>yīxiē</u>, gèng zǐxì <u>yīxiē</u>.

'Well, no, because this cruise is already an <u>in-depth</u> tour. It explores Egypt in a more <u>in-depth</u> manner than the normal tour does, so its itinerary is <u>a bit</u> more detailed and <u>a bit</u> more carefully-planned.' (N3S2:106)

In Extract (7.3), the agent did not describe the itinerary in detail, how in-depth the tour would be or how carefully the itinerary would be planned, in order to prevent future possible complaints. She intentionally utilised *shēndù* (深度, 'in-depth') and *yīxiē* (一些, 'a bit') to achieve her goal of self-protection.

(7.4) 对。还 有 就 是 咱们 这个 行程 都 很 充实，
Duì. Hái yǒu jiù shì zánmen zhègè xíngchéng dōu hěn chōngshí,
但是 晚上 <u>可能</u> 会 有 <u>一些</u> 自由 活动 的 时间。你 出去
dànshì wǎnshang <u>kěnéng</u> huì yǒu <u>yīxiē</u> zìyóu huódòng de shíjiān. Nǐ chūqù

尤其 一 个 人　一定　要 注意 安全。　不 要　走 太 远，还 有　跟

yóuqí yī gè　rén yīdìng yào zhùyì ānquán. Bù yào zǒu tài yuǎn, hái yǒu gēn

导游　商量　　之后　就 问问　　导游　啊建议 你去　一些 比较，

dǎoyóu shāngliàng zhīhòu jiù wènwèn dǎoyóu a jiànyì　nǐ qù　yīxiē bǐjiào,

嗯，离 酒店　近 一点儿 的 然后　有 小吃　街 啊 比较 卫生

En,　lí jiǔdiàn jìn yīdiǎnr de ránhòu yǒu xiǎochī jiē a bǐjiào wèishēng

的 一些 地方。 你 可以 去 品尝　　一下 当地　的 风味。

de yīxiē dìfāng. Nǐ kěyǐ qù pǐncháng yīxià dāngdì de fēngwèi.

'Right. Moreover, our itinerary is very tight, but in the evening there <u>might</u> be <u>some</u> free activity time. If you go out, particularly alone, you must be mindful of your safety. Don't go too far, and also after consulting with the tour guide, you can ask him to recommend to you <u>some</u> places which are <u>quite</u>, well, a little closer to the hotel, <u>quite</u> hygienic and have a snack street. You can go to have a taste of the local flavor.'　　　　　　　　　　　　(N4S1:105)

In Extract (7.4), the agent was unsure whether there would be or how much free activity time clients would be allowed, so she used *kěnéng* (可能 'might') and *yīxiē* (一些 'some') to protect herself from being wrong. For a similar reason, *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite/rather/relatively') and *yīxiē* (一些 'some') were employed later to describe the places the agent was unfamiliar.

(7.5) 嗯，另外　一 个，这个，(0.2) 学校　呢，就 是 (0.1)

En, lìngwài yī gè, zhègè，(0.2) xuéxiào ne, jiù shì (0.1)

根据 你 的 成绩　来 这个 接收　学生。　　比如说 你 想　　上

gēnjù nǐ de chéngjī lái zhègè jiēshōu xuésheng. Bǐrúshuō nǐ xiǎng shàng

八 大 名校。　　你 这个，如果　要是 211　　工程　　大学 的

bā dà míngxiào. Nǐ zhègè, rúguǒ yàoshi èryāoyāo gōngchéng dàxué de

学生，　　(0.5) 平均　分 <u>有的</u> 大学 可以 七 十 五，<u>有的</u> 大学 要求

xuésheng, (0.5) píngjūn fēn <u>yǒude</u> dàxué kěyǐ qī shí wǔ, <u>yǒude</u> dàxué yāoqiú

八十 分。 如果 不 是 211 工程 的 大学 的 学生， 那就 是

bāshí fēn. Rúguǒ bù shì èryāoyāo gōngchéng de dàxué de xuésheng, nà jiù shì

平均 分 要 八十 分 以上， 还 有的 大学 甚至 要 八十 五 分儿。

píngjūn fēn yào bāshí fēn yǐshàng, hái yǒude dàxué shènzhì yào bāshí wǔ fēnr.

'Well, on the other hand, well, the university admits students according to their grades. For example, you want to go to the top eight universities. Well, if you are a student of Project 211 universities, some universities require the average mark of seventy five percent, and some require eighty percent. If you are not a student of Project 211 universities, well, the average mark must be over eighty percent, and some universities even require eighty five percent.'   (N5S1:69)

In Extract (7.5), the agent was uncertain of the exact entrance scores for universities. Therefore, she utilised *yǒude* (有的 'some') to indefinitely refer to any university, to avoid being wrong.

Moreover, the negotiators were unsure of the degree of the possibility of their statements. This is demonstrated in the extracts (7.6) and (7.7) below:

(7.6) 另外， 这 是 一 种 长期性 的 东西， 有 可能 三 到 四 年
      Lìngwài, zhè shì yī zhǒng chángqīxìng de dōngxi, yǒu kěnéng sān dào sì nián
      可能 还 要 换掉。
      kěnéng hái yào huàndiào.

      'In addition, this is a long-term thing, and probably, they might be replaced in three or four years again.'   (N1S3:216).

(7.7) 作为 我们 公司，不 允许 那个(0.2) 预计的很 高，保守 一些。
      Zuòwéi wǒmen gōngsī, bù yǔnxǔ nàgè (0.2) yùjì de hěn gāo, bǎoshǒu yīxiē.

这样　你 到手　了 以后 <u>可能</u>　就 很 高兴。

Zhèyàng nǐ dàoshǒu le yǐhòu <u>kěnéng</u> jiù hěn gāoxìng.

'As our company does not allow to, well, estimate it very high, but a little conservative. Thus, after you get it, you might be very happy.'　(N2S2:470)

In the above two cases, by employing *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), the speakers achieved both goals of implying possibility and safeguarding themselves.

(7.8) 它 因为　有 <u>一些</u> 景点，　像　埃 及 吧，它 有 <u>一些</u> 地区

Tā yīnwèi yǒu　<u>yīxiē</u> jǐngdiǎn, xiàng　āijí　ba, tā yǒu <u>yīxiē</u>　dìqū

就 是 你 想　安排 购物 它 也 没、没 有 什么　地方 可以

jiù shì nǐ xiǎng ānpái gòuwù tā yě méi, méi yǒu shénme dìfāng kěyǐ

买　的。(overlap)

mǎi de.　(overlap)

'Because there are <u>some</u> scenic spots like Egypt, there are <u>some</u> areas where you can find nowhere to go for shopping even if you want to arrange shopping.'　(N3S2:130)

(7.9) 因为　我 <u>比较</u>　在乎 这个。

Yīnwèi wǒ <u>bǐjiào</u> zàihu zhègè.

'Because I'm <u>quite</u> concerned about this.'　(N4S2:12)

(7.10) 你 这个，如果　要是　211 工程　　大学 的学生，　　(0.5) 平均　　分

Nǐ zhègè, rúguǒ yàoshi 211 gōngchéng dàxué de xuésheng, (0.5) píngjūn　fēn

<u>有的</u>　大学 可以七十　五，<u>有的</u>　大学　要求　　八十 分。

<u>yǒude</u> dàxué kěyǐ　qīshí wǔ,　<u>yǒude</u> dàxué　yāoqiú bāshí fēn.

'Well, if you are a student of Project 211 universities, <u>some</u> universities require the average mark of seventy five percent, and <u>some</u> require eighty percent.'   (N5S1:69)

As shown in the above extracts (7.8), (7.9) and (7.10), it is possible that the negotiators knew where scenic spots and areas were, knew how much she 'cared about this', and which universities were being referenced. However, they did not express this information explicitly in order not to allow for the possibility of a faulty memory. Their defensiveness led to their use of VEs. This point is further illustrated in the following example:

(7.11)　对，它 会 去 <u>一些</u> 就 是 电影　　的 拍摄 地。

　　　　Duì, tā huì qù <u>yīxiē</u> jiù shì diànyǐng de　pāishè dì.

　　　　'Yes, it will go to <u>some</u> movie-shooting sites.'   (N3S2:20)

In Extract (7.11), the speaker did not want to commit herself by suggesting how many movie-shooting sites the client might go to, instead she employed *yīxiē* (一些 'some') as a defensive tactic to protect herself.

Channell (1994) claims that vagueness can be used as a safeguard against being later shown to be wrong, and speakers use VEs when there is uncertainty about what they want to say. Channell states that two situations in which speakers are often uncertain is when they are talking about the past or the future. Interestingly, in the above examples the speakers were talking about the present, rather than the past or the future. Therefore, it appears that speakers use VL for self-protection regardless of whether topics are discussed in the past, the present, or the future.

7.1.2 Social factor comparison

There are three social factors to be discussed in this section: gender, age and social distance. Age is represented by A+ (older) and A- (younger). For the convenience of analysis in this study, 'older' is defined as 45 years old and above, and 'younger' as below 45 years old. Gender consists of F (female) and M (male). Social distance has three variables, D=: 'acquaintances'; D-: 'friends'; D+: 'strangers'. It applies to all figures.
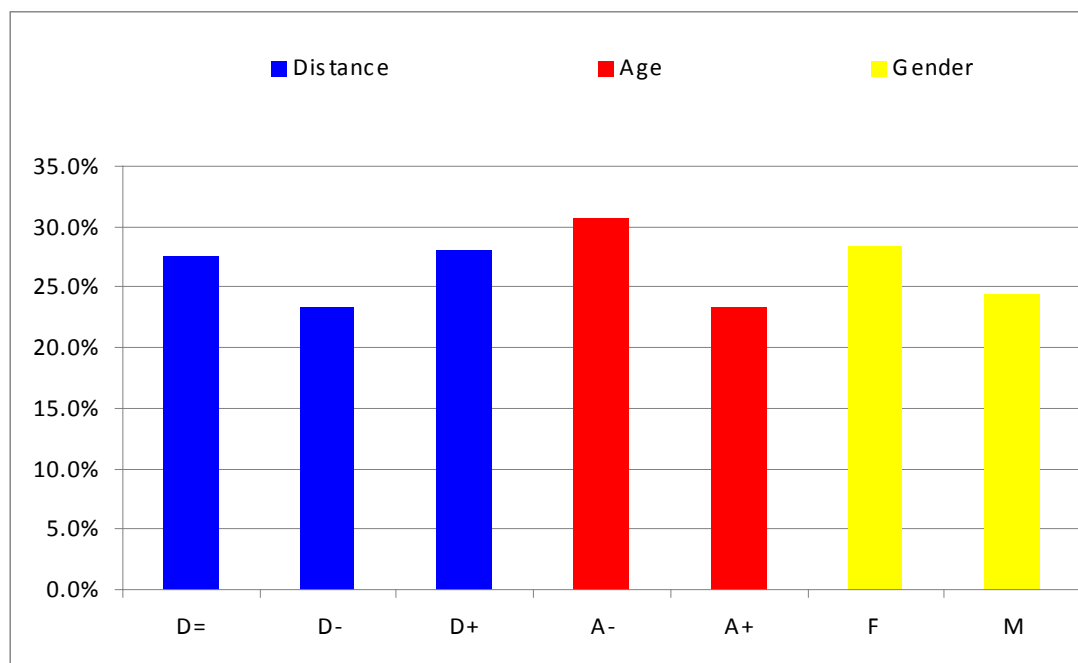
Figure 7.1: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for self-protection
Note: D=: acquaintances, D-: friends, D+: strangers; A-: younger (below 45 years old), A+: older (45 years old and above); F: Female, M: male. The same applies to the following figures.

Figure 7.1 shows that VL was not needed for self-protection among the friends (D-) as much as between the strangers (D+) and the acquaintances (D=). Therefore, it appears that the distance factor had some influence on the choice of VL for self-protection. In the order of least to most, VL for self-protection was utilized between friends, acquaintances, and strangers. This makes sense, because generally speaking one does not need to protect oneself from friends as much as one does from strangers.

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It also shows in Figure 7.1 that age and gender factors did have an impact on the choice of VL for self-protection. It seems that the factor of age made the biggest impact among all three factors, which is that there is greater discrepancy between the younger and the older. The younger (A-) negotiators preferred more to employ VL for self-protection than the older (A+) negotiators; the female negotiators favoured it more than the male negotiators. This implies that in Chinese negotiations, younger negotiators and female negotiators tend to be more protective towards themselves due to younger ones' possible lack of experience and females' stronger sense of prudence.

VL has a mitigating effect and is used in cases of uncertainty as hedges (G. Lakoff 1973, Zadeh 1987), which are often treated as a category of VL. According to Ruzaite (2007), hedges are expressions that help the speaker avoid categorical and straightforward assertions; they allow the speaker to distance him or herself from a claim and in return reduce his or her commitment to the claim (e.g. Fraser 1975, Brown and Levinson 1987, Itani 1996, Markkanen and Schroder 1997, Hyland 1998a). Hedges can be used as a good means to carry out the task of self-protection.
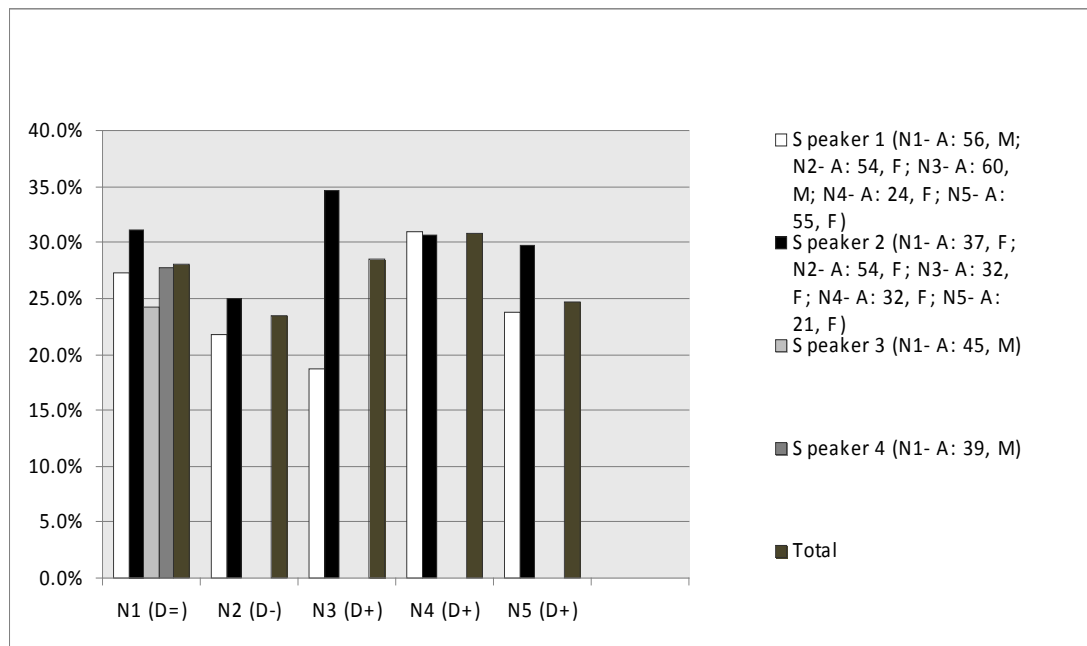
Figure 7.2: VL used for self-protection

Note: Speaker 1: the first speaker in each negotiation. N1: Negotiation 1. A: the age of the negotiator. F: female   M: Male . The same applies to the following figures.

As demonstrated in Figure 7.2, more interestingly, it seems that all the sellers (Speaker 2 in N1, N2 and N3; Speaker1 in N4) employed more VL for self-protection than the purchasers (Speaker 1, 3 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3; Speaker 2 in N4) except N5. A possible reason for this trend is that sellers have more pressure taking risks than purchasers, and have to make more efforts to protect themselves while maximizing their interests or profits to their best abilities. The exceptional case N5 was about an overseas education service that tends to be windfall profit-driven for agencies, where the young female client used much more VL to protect herself, while the older agent did not. This could be due to the inexperienced young female who might not trust the agent, and the fact that she would pay heavily (such as expensive tuition fees, etc.) if she were not extremely careful.

7.2 Deliberately withholding information

VEs are frequently employed when negotiators intend to manipulate the amount of

information they provide. VL is often used to hide the crucial information negotiators possess for strategic reasons. VL is not giving information which the negotiators possess, and would be appropriate under the circumstances. *diǎnr/yīdiǎnr* (点儿/一点儿 'a little', 14.56% in N1), *jǐ* (几 'several/more', 12.94% and 14.43% in N2 and N5 respectively), *duo* (多 'many', 12.94% in N2) and *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some', 31.82% and 23.08% in N3 and N4 respectively) are the most commonly utilized VEs for deliberately withholding information as illustrated in extracts (7.12), (7.13), (7.14), (7.15) and (7.16) respectively:

7.2.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.12) 不光　　是 照顾 好，还 得，还 得，　还 得 让利，实惠
　　　 Bùguāng shì　zhàogù hǎo, hái děi, hái děi,　hái děi rànglì, shíhuì

点儿，主动　　　点儿。(0.2) 你 看　你 这个 价格，
diǎnr,　zhǔdòng　diǎnr.　(0.2) Nǐ kàn nǐ zhègè jiàgé,

'Not only look after us well, but also should give us a discount. Should be <u>a little</u> more practical and a little more voluntary. You see your price,'　(N1S1:59)

In Extract (7.12), the client wanted the supplier to give a discount, but he would not like to say how much of a discount he was expecting first. He deliberately utilised *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little') to withhold his expected minimum discount, persuading the supplier to give more discount and leaving more room for further negotiation at a later time.

(7.13) 你 乘　　上　　二 十 二，才 二十 <u>多</u> 万　嘛。二十 一 万
　　　 Nǐ chéng shàng èrshí èr,　cái èrshí <u>duō</u> wàn ma.　èrshí yī wàn

几，二 十 一 万 几，　对 不 对？
jǐ,　èrshí yī wàn jǐ,　duì bù duì？

'Multiplying twenty two, it's only <u>over</u> two hundred thousand. It's <u>a little more</u> than two hundred and ten thousand, <u>a little more</u> than two hundred and ten thousand, isn't it?' (N2S1:630)

In Extract (7.13), the client was not satisfied with the dividend. She expressed her dissatisfaction by withholding the exact amount of the dividend through the use of *duō* (多 'over') and *jǐ* (几 'a few/more').

(7.14) 嗯，有 领队，(.) 但是 北京　的领队。 他会 给
En, yǒu lǐngduì, (.) dànshì Běijīng de lǐngduì.　Tā huì gěi
你们 协调 <u>一些</u>就 是 你们 和就 是 当地 导游　之间 有
nǐmen xiétiáo <u>yīxiē</u> jiù shì nǐmen hé jiù　shì dāngdì dǎoyóu zhījiān yǒu
<u>一些</u> <u>东西</u>，　就 不 用　你们　直接　跟 他们　沟通　了。
<u>yīxiē</u> <u>dōngxi</u>，jiù bù yòng nǐmen zhíjiē gēn tāmen gōutōng le.

'Yes, there is a group leader, but it's the leader from Beijing. He will coordinate <u>some</u> <u>things</u> between you and the local tour guide for you, and you don't need to directly communicate with them.' (N3S2:122)

In Extract (7.14), the agent was talking about some potential unpleasant issues that might happen between the client and the tour guide. In order to lessen the negative impact of these uncertain issues and avoid leaving the client with some unpleasant impression or feelings, the agent employed *yīxiē* (一些 'some') and *dōngxi* (东西 'things') to withhold these potential problems.

(7.15) 对。还 有　就 是 咱们　这个 行程　　都 很　充实，
Duì. Hái yǒu jiù shì zánmen zhègè　xíngchéng　dōu hěn chōngshí,
但是 晚上　　可能　会 有 <u>一些</u>自由 活动　的 时间。你 出去
dànshì wǎnshang　kěnéng huì yǒu <u>yīxiē</u> zìyóu huódòng de shíjiān. Nǐ chūqù

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尤其 一 个人 一定　要注意　安全。不　要　走　太远，　还有　跟

yóuqí yī　gè　rén yīdìng yào zhùyì ānquán. Bù yào zǒu tài yuǎn, hái yǒu gēn

导游　商量　　　之后　就 问问　　　导游　啊 建议　你去 <u>一些</u> 比较，

dǎoyóu shāngliàng zhīhòu jiù wènwèn　dǎoyóu a　jiànyì　nǐ qù　<u>yīxiē</u> bǐjiào,

嗯，离 酒店　近 一点儿 的 然后　有 小吃　　街 啊 比较　卫生

En,　lí jiǔdiàn jìn yīdiǎnr　de ránhòu yǒu xiǎochī　jiē a bǐjiào　wèishēng

的 <u>一些</u> 地方。你 可以　去 品尝　　一下 当地　的 风味。

de　<u>yīxiē</u> dìfāng. Nǐ kěyǐ　qù pǐncháng yīxià dāngdì de　fēngwèi.

'Right. Moreover, our itinerary is very tight, but in the evening there might be <u>some</u> free activity time. If you go out, particularly alone, you must be mindful of your safety. Don't go too far. Consulting your tour guide, you can ask him to recommend to you <u>some</u> places that are quite, well, a little closer to the hotel, quite hygienic and have a snack street. You can go and taste the local flavor.'

(N4S1:106)

In Extract (7.15), the agent was not specific about the amount of free activity time and the places that the client could go to for the local food, so as to add more attraction arousing the client's interest in this travel. She reached this goal by withholding the details about these two aspects through using *yīxiē* (一些 'some').

(7.16) (overlap) 嗯，会计 专业　　在 澳洲　是 属于，一直 都

　(overlap) En,　kuàijì zhuānyè zài Aòzhōu shì shǔyú, yīzhí dōu

是 属于 紧缺　职业，在 这个　紧缺　职业 清单　里面。这个

shì shǔyú jǐnquē zhíyè, zài zhègè jǐnquē zhíyè qīngdān lǐmiàn. Zhègè

前　几天 我 在　网上　　看 了那个，还 是 在 那个紧、(overlap)

qián jǐ tiān wǒ zài wǎngshàng kàn le nàgè, hái shì zài nàgè jǐn, (overlap)

紧缺　清单　里面。

jǐnquē qīngdān lǐmiàn.

'Well, an accounting major is always a highly demanded occupation in Australia and it's on the Migration Occupations in Demand List. Well, <u>several</u> days ago, I saw, well, on the internet it's still, well, on the Migration Occupations in Demand List.'   (N5S1:95)

In Extract (7.16), the agent withheld the exact time she checked the Migration Occupations in Demand List, by strategically utilising *jǐ* (几 'several') to indicate the shorter duration of time or the latest act, which can help to make the selling points more catchy.

According to Channell (1994), speakers often use VL to withhold information that in some sense might be expected by their hearers, in a given situation. For instance, in the example *Nà xíng. Nà jiù ná <u>diǎnr</u> guǎnggàofèi ba.* (那行。那就拿<u>点儿</u>广告费吧。That's all right. Well then, pay <u>a little</u> for advertising. N1S1:221), the speaker knew the addressee understood he was joking in this given situation, so he used *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little') to withhold the amount of the advertising fee. In *Yīnwèi xiàng wǒ, wǒmen* (.) *dào le zhè gè niánlíng, jiùyào, zài yǒu <u>jǐ</u> nián jiùyào tuìxiū le, hā.* (因为像我、我们(.)到了这个年龄，就要，再有<u>几</u>年就要退休了，哈。Because like me, us, we've reached this age, we will retire in <u>several</u> years. N2S1:9), by utilising *jǐ* (几 'several'), the speaker withheld the number of the years within which she will retire as she expected the hearer, her friend, would know the number. The above examples support Channell's claim above.

Furthermore, as Channell (1994) states, speakers may withhold information because they feel that they can be more persuasive by doing so. For instance, in *Zhèyàng duì wǒmen de yèwù* (0.2) *yào yǒu <u>hěn duō</u> de yīxiē, dài lái <u>hěn duō</u> de máfan.* (这样对我们的业务，要有<u>很多</u>的一些、带来<u>很多</u>的麻烦。Otherwise, it will make <u>so much</u>, some, <u>so much</u> trouble for our business. N2S2:58), *hěn duō* (很多 'so much') was used to withhold how much trouble it may cause to the speaker, and by doing so, the

speaker enhanced her argument. Similarly, in *Wǒmen qián jǐ tiān yǒu yī gè xuésheng qù xīní dàxué, tā hái shì lǐgōng dàxué nàgè, (0.2).* (我们前几天有一个学生去悉尼大学，他还是理工大学那个，(0.2) <u>Several</u> days ago, we received a student who is going to Sydney University. He is also, well, the university of technology, (0.2) N5S1:39), *jǐ* (几 'several') was employed to withhold the specific information, indicating a very short duration to make the speaker sound more persuasive.

Deliberately withholding information by utilizing VEs may also avoid negotiators' intention being easily seen through by others and ensure their commercial secrets and interests are kept under protection as in the following extract (7.17):

(7.17): from N4S1:83 to N4S1:85, 2 speakers over 3 turns.

N4S1:83：这些　景点儿　就　是　如果　下雨，(.) 不　会　受　<u>很</u>
　　　　　Zhèxiē jǐngdiǎnr jiù shì rúguǒ xiàyǔ, (.) bù huì shòu <u>hěn</u>
　　　　　<u>大</u>影响，　　但是　里边　就　有　一个，就　是　分界洲　岛。
　　　　　<u>dà</u> yǐngxiǎng, dànshì lǐbian jiù yǒu yī gè, jiù shì fēnjièzhōu dǎo.
　　　　　看见　了？
　　　　　Kànjiàn le?

　　　　　'If it rains, these scenic spots will not be affected <u>a lot</u>, but there is one among these, which is Fenjiezhou Island. Have you seen it?'

N4S2:84：嗯　嗯　嗯。
　　　　　En, en, en.

　　　　　'Yes'

N4S1:85：那个　小岛　会　(.) 有　<u>一些</u>影响。　但　如果　要是
　　　　　Nàgè xiǎodǎo huì (.) yǒu <u>yīxiē</u> yǐngxiǎng. Dàn rúguǒ yàoshi

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出现　　天气　原因　　的 话，嗯, (.) 要是　　去 不 了，咱们　　要

chūxiàn tiānqì yuányīn de huà,　en, (.) yàoshi qù　bù le,　zánmen yào

退款。

tuìkuǎn.

'There will be some influence on that Island. However, if it's for the weather reason, well, if you can't go for the weather reason, we will refund you.'

In Extract (7.17), the agent may know the impact that the rain will have on these scenic spots, but she successfully protected her commercial secrets and interests by withholding the specific impact the rain might have through the employment of (bù huì shòu) *hěn dà* ([不会受] 很大 '[would not suffer] very big') and *yīxiē* (一些 'some').

7.2.2 Social factor comparison
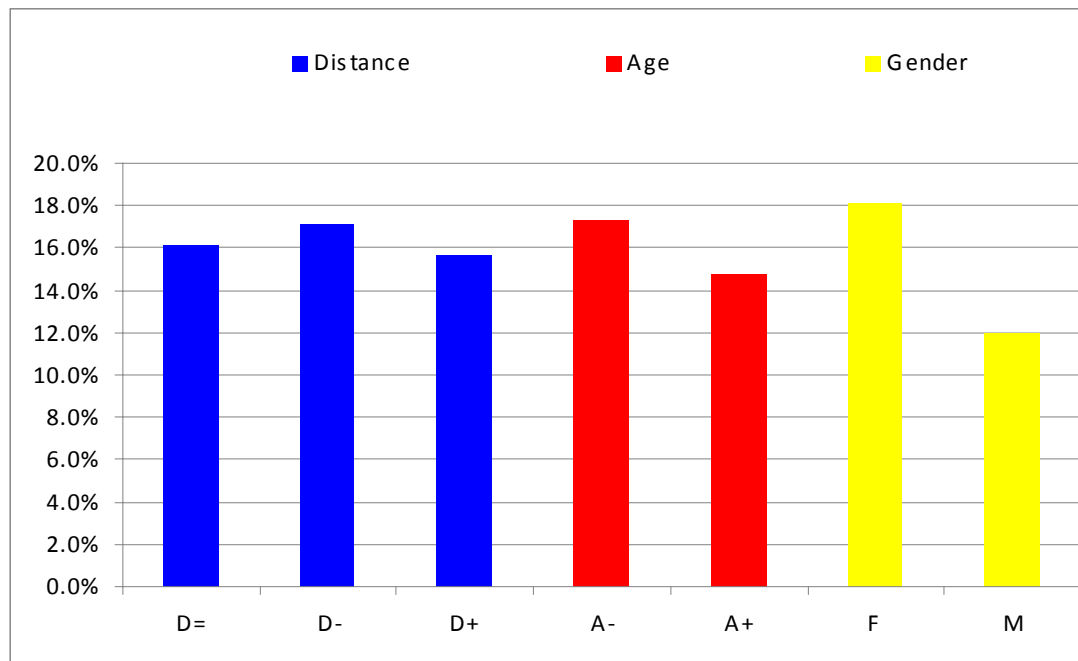
Figure 7.3: Three factors' influence on the use of VL deliberately withholding information

As shown in Figure 7.3, VL deliberately withholding information was most frequently used by the friends (D-), then by the acquaintances (D=), and least by the strangers (D+). Although there is only a slight difference among these three groups, it shows that the factor of distance had some influence on the choice of VL for the purpose of deliberately withholding information. The possible reason for friends to employ more VL deliberately withholding information could be that they are so familiar and know quite a lot about each other's detailed information; consequently, they are forced to withhold some information deliberately to meet their needs and achieve their commercial goals in Chinese business negotiations.

It also appears that VL deliberately withholding information was more popular with the younger (A-) negotiators and the female negotiators; in particular, the females utilized it far more than the males. This reveals that age and gender factors had an

impact on the choice of VL to deliberately withhold information, and the factor of gender had the biggest impact on the use of VL for this purpose. This could be interpreted that younger negotiators are more inexperienced, and female negotiators are less confident than their male counterparts in business negotiations.
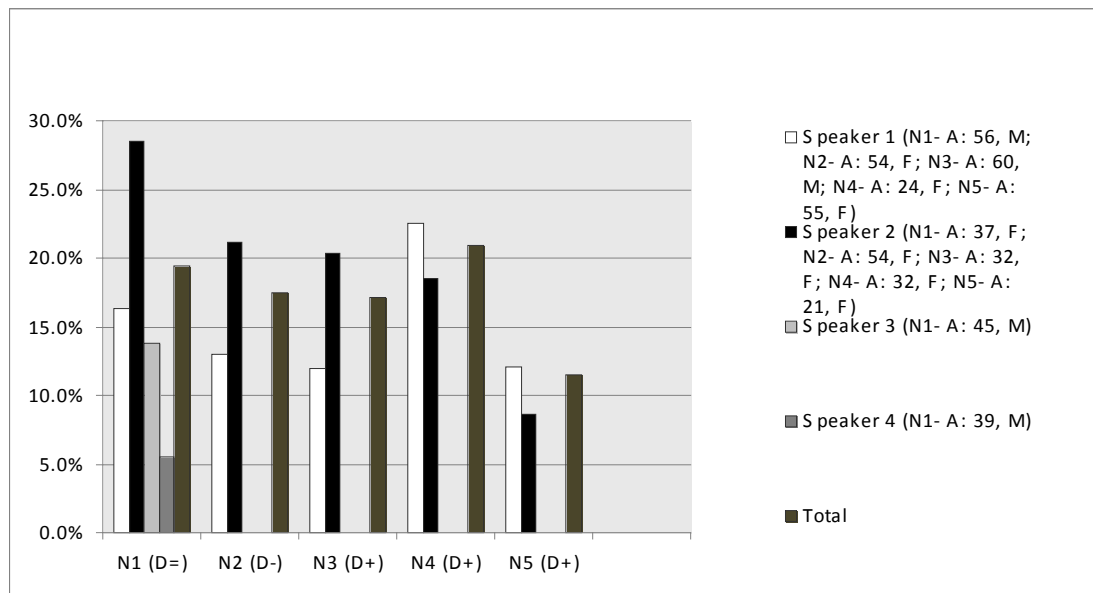
Figure 7.4: VL used for deliberately withholding information

As presented in Figure 7.4, similar to Section 7.1, all the selling parties (Speaker 2 in N1, N2 and N3; Speaker1 in N4 and N5) had a tendency in employing more VL, deliberately withholding information than the purchasing parties (Speaker 1, 3 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3; Speaker 2 in N4 and N5). A possible reason is that the selling parties are obviously more active to deliberately withhold information so as to serve their intentions and maximize their commercial gains.

7.3 Politeness

As Stubbs (1996) claims, VL can be utilized as a strategy of politeness. Leech (1983) states that politeness is relevant to a relationship between two interlocutors: speaker and hearer, where it is essential to shun or try to decrease conflict. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) and R. Lakoff (1990) also see politeness as an important way to

avoid conflict. Politeness is closely tied with the notion of face. This term was introduced and defined by Goffman (1967, p. 5) as 'the positive social value claimed by a person for himself or herself'. In the same vein, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) define it as 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself'. In order not to lose face, people have to communicate cooperatively throughout an interaction and to attend their faces constantly. Therefore, Scollon and Scollon draw our attention to the constant negotiation of face since, as they claim, 'any communication is a risk to face' (1995, p. 47).

In communication face threats can arise, which, as Mey (2001) states, can be avoided or minimized by using mitigation devices (e.g. VL in the present study), which reduce the effects of impolite statements (cf. Fraser 1980, Caffi 1999). Hence, VL is closely related to politeness. Hamilton and Mineo (1998) point out that VL can be used as a strategy to minimize face threat; whereas 'a precisely worded message might come across as too personal, threatening a receiver's self-esteem' (1998, p. 6). One of the ways of being polite is to soften the tone, so as to not sound too imposing. VEs can soften speakers' tone and make them sound less direct and aggressive, and consequently the potential for conflict is minimized to the greatest degree.

Yào/yàoshi (要/要是 'in case', 33.33% and 33.1% in N1 and N5 respectively), *rúguǒ* (如果 'if', 17.69% and 18.75% in N2 and N3 respectively), and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability', 29.67% in N4) are the most frequently used VEs to show respect and politeness in each respective Chinese business negotiation as indicated in extracts (7.18), (7.19), (7.20), (7.21) and (7.22). Besides, other typically-employed words, *kěnéng* (可能 'may/might/probably/possibly'), *yǒushí* (有时 'sometimes') and *yǒudiǎnr* (有点儿 'sort of') etc., can also be used to maintain politeness where it is needed.

7.3.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.18) 要是 押 三 年 质 保 金，那 太 长 了，那 公司

<u>Yàoshi</u> yā sān nián zhì bǎo jīn, nà tài cháng le,　nà gōngsī

真 地 是 受不了。

zhēn de shì shòubuliǎo.

'<u>In case</u> the quality assurance deposit is kept for three years, it will be too

long. Then, the company can not really afford it.'　　　　　　(N1S2:116)

In Extract (7.18), by utilizing *yào/yàoshi* (要/要是 'in case'), the supplier indirectly expressed her complaint and dissatisfaction, and avoided the potential direct conflict. By doing so, she saved both her own face and the client's face.

(7.19) 你 首先 自己 要 有 这个 财力，对 不 对？你 没有

Nǐ shǒuxiān zìjǐ yào yǒu zhègè cáilì,　duì bù duì? Nǐ méiyǒu

这 个 财力，(short laugh) 也 没有 用 啊，是 不 是 啊？完 了，所以

zhè gè cáilì, (short laugh)　yě méiyǒu yòng a,　shì bù shì a? Wán le, suǒyǐ

我 想 呢，如果 十万 呢，(0.2) 我 得 考虑 一下 了。

wǒ xiǎng <u>ne</u>,　<u>rúguǒ</u> shíwàn <u>ne</u>，(0.2) wǒ děi kǎolǜ <u>yīxià</u> le.

'First you yourself have to have this financial ability, right? If you don't have this financial ability, it will be no use, right? Therefore, I think, <u>well</u>, <u>if</u> it's one hundred thousand, <u>well</u>, I have to think it over <u>for a while</u>.'　　　(N2S1:41)

In Extract (7.19), instead of refusing directly the insurance agent's offer and possibly making her lose face, the client showed her respect and politeness for the agent through the employment of *ne* (呢 'well'), *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), which effectively softened her tone and made her sound quite circumlocutory. Meanwhile, through this means the client also left some

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room for eliciting further negotiation and a good deal in the end.

(7.20) 如果 你 随身　带 这 东西，　洗发水，牙膏 呢 都 要
Rúguǒ nǐ suíshēn dài zhè dōngxi, xǐfāshuǐ, yágāo ne dōu yào

放　 到 托运　行李。
fàng dào tuōyùn xíngli.

'If you bring these things with you, well, shampoo and toothpaste must be put
in the checked luggage.' (N3S2:468)

In Extract (7.20), by using *rúguǒ* (如果 'if') and *ne* (呢 'well'), the agent politely
gave the client a suggestion about what he could take with him when he travels.
These two VEs helped the agent not sound too inappropriate when she suggested the
client should put the shampoo and toothpaste in the checked luggage.

(7.21) 嗯，仔细 看　一下 合同。 (0.2) 还 有　现在　你 不 是 一
En, zǐxì kàn yīxià hétong。 (0.2) hái yǒu xiànzài nǐ bù shì yī

个 人 吗？ 出现　 单 房　差 的话 那边 是 单 房 差 费用
gè rén me? Chūxiàn dān fáng chā dehuà nàbiān shì dān fáng chā fèiyòng

是 三 百 块　钱。 可以 到 那儿 现付，但是 咱们　尽量 呢 就
shì sān bǎi kuài qián。 Kěyǐ dào nàr xiànfù, dànshì zánmen jǐnliàng ne jiù

不 出现　 这个 问题。 如果 能　插 进去 就 插 进去。
bù chūxiàn zhègè wèntí。 Rúguǒ néng chā jìnqù jiù chā jìnqù。

'Well, have a look at the contract carefully. In addition, now you are alone,
aren't you? If a single room price difference happens, the cost there for the
single room price difference is three hundred yuan. You can pay on the spot,
but we will try our best, well, to stop it happening. If we can squeeze you in,
we will.' (N4S1:39)

In Extract (7.21), the agent knew that requesting the client to pay more for the single room price difference would hardly be accepted by the client, so she resorted to the use of *dehuà* (的话 'if') and *ne* (呢 'well') to lower the possibility of this kind of difficult situation while still successfully conveying the warning in a polite manner.

(7.22) 那，澳大利亚 你 准备　 上　 哪个 大学 呢？ 你 目标　 的
　　　　<u>Nà</u>, Aòdàlìyà nǐ zhǔnbèi shàng nǎgè dàxué ne? Nǐ mùbiāo de
　　　　大学　 是 哪个 呢？ 你 <u>要是</u> 有 倾向　　 <u>的话</u>，我 就 想　　<u>听听</u>
　　　　dàxué shì nǎgè ne? Nǐ <u>yàoshi</u> yǒu qīngxiàng <u>dehuà</u>, wǒ jiù xiǎng <u>tīngtīng</u>
　　　　你 的 目标　　 大学。
　　　　nǐ de mùbiāo dàxué.

　　　　'<u>Well</u>, which university have you planned to go to in Australia? Which is your targeted university? <u>In case</u> you have a preference, I just want to <u>have a listen</u> to which university you plan to go to.'　　　　　　　　　　　(N5S1:15)

In Extract (7.22), through the use of *nà* (那 'well'), *yàoshi* (要是 'in case'), *dehuà* (的话 'if') and *tīngtīng* (听听 'have a listen'), the agent asked the client politely about those questions such as which university the client has planned to go to in Australia. The above VEs softened the agent's tone, making her sound quite polite, respectful and non-threatening the client's face.

Channell (1994) and Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, vagueness is used as one way of adhering to the politeness rules for a particular culture, and of not threatening face. As further illustrated in extracts (7.23), (7.24) and (7.25) below, VEs *nàgè* (那个 'well'), *yàoshi* (要是 'in case'), *gèng lǎo* (更好 'much better'), *nà* (那 'well/then'), *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), *dehuà* (的话 'if'), *hěn gāo* (很高 'very high'), *en* (嗯 'well') and *ne* (呢 'well') were used as means of showing respect and politeness in Chinese culture, and of not threatening face.

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(7.23) 就 是 同行， 他们 都 (indistinct) 就 是 它 真正
Jiù shì tóngháng, tāmen dōu (indistinct) jiù shì tā zhēnzhèng
的 代理商 能够 在 市场 上 做 的 价。在 这 方面 我
de dàilǐshāng nénggòu zài shìchǎng shàng zuò de jià. Zài zhè fāngmiàn wǒ
也 要 跟 他们 学习，我 不 想 再 这样 做 了。然后 那样
yě yào gēn tāmen xuéxí, wǒ bù xiǎng zài zhèyàng zuò le. Ránhòu nàyàng
其实 也 都 是 报价，所以 对 我们 那个， (indistinct, some noise of
qíshí yě dōu shì bàojià, suǒyǐ duì wǒmen nàgè, (indistinct, some noise of
chair-rocking) 服务 于 传统 客户 的 时候(?)， 我们 的
chair-rocking) fúwù yú chuántǒng kèhù de shíhou (?), wǒmen de
(?) 形象 最 好， 结果 报价 的 时候 却 低于 他们 报 的。
(?) xíngxiàng zuì hǎo, jiéguǒ bàojià de shíhou què dīyú tāmen bào de.
(overlap/indistinct, Mr. Zou laughs short) 要是 我们 报 的 八 千 多，
(overlap/indistinct, Mr. Zou laughs short) Yàoshi wǒmen bào de bā qiān duō,
再 降 、降 到 最少。 (0.2) 我 不 知道 怎么 做 更 好。(0.1)
zài jiàng, jiàng dào zuìshǎo. (0.2) Wǒ bù zhīdao zěnme zuò gèng hǎo. (0.1)
那 我们 做 的 底价 是 最少。 (0.3)
Nà wǒmen zuò de dǐjià shì zuìshǎo. (0.3)

'Even craft brothers, all of them; it's the price real sale agents can quote in the market. In this aspect I will learn from them, and I don't want to do it like this. Then, actually that's also quoted price, well, when serving our old clients, our image is the best, but, as a result, our quoted price is lower than theirs. In case we quote over eight thousand, then reduce and reduce to the lowest price. I don't know how I can do any better. Well, the bottom price we quoted is the lowest.'   (N1S2:195)

(7.24) (overlap) 你 如果 在 境外 提现 的话，那个 手续费 会 很 高。
(overlap) Nǐ rúguǒ zài jìngwài tíxiàn dehuà, nàgè shǒuxùfèi huì hěn gāo.

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'If you withdraw cash abroad, <u>well</u>, bank charges are <u>very high</u>.' (N3S2:214)

(7.25) 嗯，<u>要是</u> 有的 学校， 就 是 申请 学校 给 你 安排 那 种
En, <u>yàoshi</u> yǒude xuéxiào, jiù shì shēnqǐng xuéxiào gěi nǐ ānpái nèizhǒng
课程， 就 不 用 考 雅思，所以 <u>呢</u>，你 <u>要</u> <u>如果</u> 不 在 六 月 份
kèchéng, jiù bù yòng kǎo yǎsī, suǒyǐ <u>ne</u>, nǐ <u>yào</u> <u>rúguǒ</u> bù zài liù yuèfèn
把 签证 递 出 去 <u>的话</u>, <u>那</u> 你 二 月份 读 不 了 研。
bǎ qiānzhèng dì chūqù <u>dehuà</u>, <u>nà</u> nǐ èr yuèfèn dú bù liǎo yán.

'<u>Well</u>, <u>in case</u> you request some universities to arrange that kind of course, then you don't need to take an IELTS test, so, <u>well</u>, <u>if</u> you don't submit your visa application in June, <u>then</u> you can't start your postgraduate program in February.'   (N5S1:187)

McCarthy and Carter (2007) state that from a pragmatic politeness point of view, vagueness is in many ways the norm, a default position not only enabling speakers to fulfill requirements of face, but also permitting the sharing of real-world knowledge. McCarthy and Carter argue that speakers need only allude to the shared cultural knowledge, and may assume their listeners can fill in the detail. VL is also used to soften expressions so that they do not appear too direct or unduly authoritative or assertive as in the example *Zhāng xiǎojie, wǒ hái xiǎng zài wèn <u>yīxià</u>. Jiù shì nǐ zhègè shàngmian xíngchéng ānpái ma, rú yǒu <u>shénme</u> húdié gǔ a, bèiké guǎn dōu gǎnjué tǐng yòu rén de.* (张小姐，我还想再问<u>一下</u>。就是你这个上面行程安排嘛，如有<u>什么</u>蝴蝶谷啊，贝壳馆都感觉挺诱人的。Miss Zhang, I'd like to ask another <u>quick</u> question. The itinerary arrangements here, like <u>what</u>, Butterfly Valley and Shell Museum, all look attractive. N4S2:78).

All the above examples show some of the ways in which VEs are used to convey politeness. Being vague is one of Brown and Levinson's off-record strategies which can be used in such a way that a speaker's 'communicated intent remains ill-defined'

(1987, p.225). Actually, this so-called 'ill-defined' indirectness of speech allows the speaker to 'give a bow to H's face' and, as a result mitigate the threat of the FTA (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.225)

As evidenced in extracts (7.18) to (7.25) above, VEs can maintain the prestige of both negotiating parties and avoid the embarrassment from the direct controversy, in respect that those expressions can make their requirement and intention understood without being spoken explicitly. To be polite in social interaction involves people's cooperation in maintaining each other's face. In this sense, polite behaviours exist as a protective mechanism to keep people's face from being threatened. This is, in a large part, due to the vital role face plays in Chinese social life. VEs can display well-behaved manners and make a good impression on others as well. Particularly, for the Chinese negotiators, they are distinguished by concern for 'face' and 'specialization'. Negotiators must not be forced to lose face by, for instance, having to state explicitly an admission of wrong doing during negotiations.

To sum up, as the above examples show, VL can convey subtle, but salient information about the speaker's attitude towards the interlocutor or the business at hand, and can be used strategically for politeness. Successful use of such strategies can contribute towards a good business relationship, and ultimately successful business interactions.
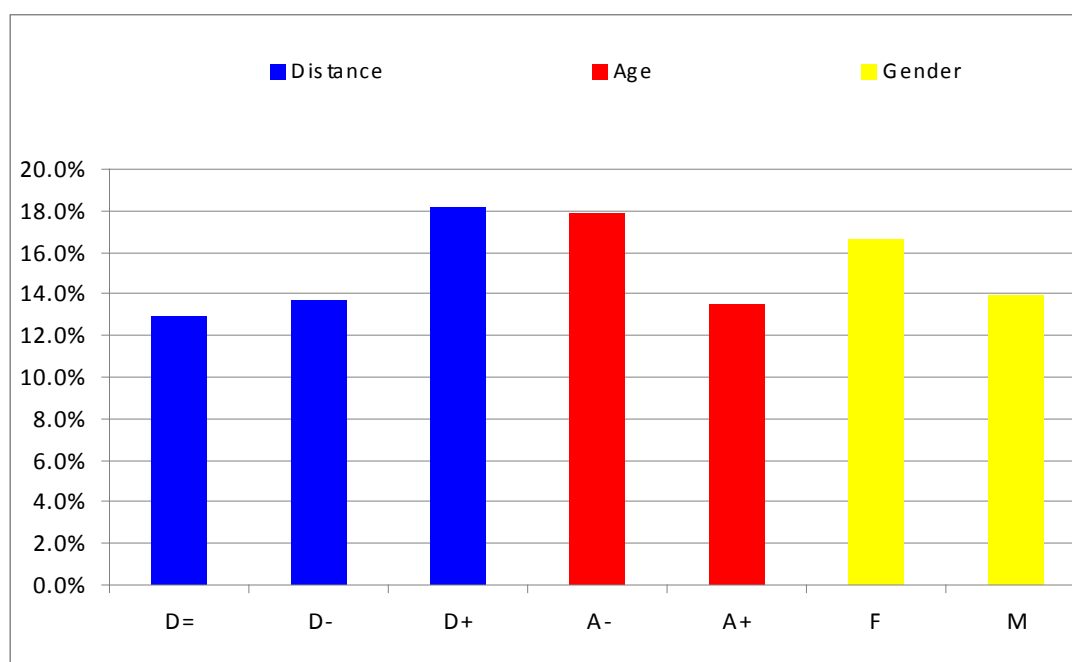
7.3.2 Social factor comparison

Figure 7.5: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for politeness

As indicated in Figure 7.5, VL for politeness was needed most for the strangers'
context (D+). The acquaintances (=D), and the friends (D-) did not utilize it that
much as the strangers did. This suggests that the distance factor did have an overt
influence on the choice of VL for politeness, and the fact that the negotiators who
did not know each other utilized VL for politeness more often implies that in
Chinese business negotiations, strangers are more polite to each other in order to
give each other a good impression, create a more harmonious atmosphere to have a
good start in doing business.

It also shows that age and gender factors did have an impact on the choice of VL for
politeness in that the younger (A-) negotiators and the females used more such VEs
than the older (A+) negotiators and male negotiators. It implies that in Chinese
business negotiations, younger negotiators and female negotiators may be more
polite than older and male negotiators. Among all three factors, both distance and age

factors seem to have more influence on the use of VL for politeness than the factor of gender, which suggests that it is the factors of distance and age that may play a more prominent role in negotiators' choice of VL for the politeness purpose.
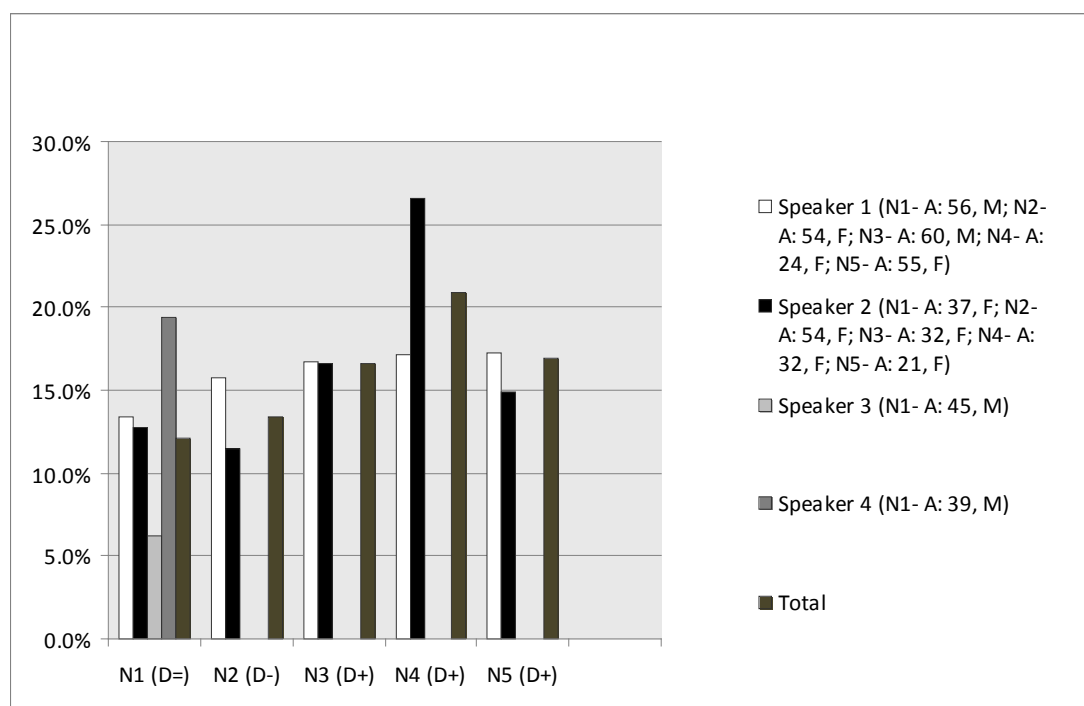
Figure 7.6: VL used for politeness

As shown in Figure 7.6, interestingly different from Section 7.1 and 7.2, it seems that most purchasers (Speaker 1 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3; Speaker 2 in N4) employed more VL for politeness than the sellers (Speaker 2 in N1, N2 and N3; Speaker1 in N4). This finding contradicts our common perception that sellers would generally be more polite than their customers. A possible reason for this tendency is that the purchasers in this study may purposely show their politeness towards the sellers and give face to them to make them feel good about themselves, and in this way the purchasers might have a chance to cut a good deal. The exceptional case N5 was about an overseas education business that tends to be more profitable for agencies, where the agent used more VL for politeness to make the client feel more comfortable and pleased, so that she could finally sign the contract.

Polite and indirect communication prevents embarrassing moment that might threaten the face of either speaker. In Chinese societies, 'face' is central to much of social behaviour, and people talk of giving, harming and protecting face. It is considered impolite to make others lose face, for example, by embarrassing them in public. Giving face to people through elaborate forms of respect and obligation is considered polite. Bond and Hwang (1986) comment that the concept of 'face' is not an exclusively Chinese one, although the ways in which 'face' operates appear to vary considerably from culture to culture (Bond and Hwang 1986 pp. 244-245). In an individualistic culture, for example, individuals are free to choose the image they project to others. Goffman (1955 p. 213) was referring to this when he stated that 'face' is 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes'. Infringement of that face leads to a very personally-based embarrassment.

In Chinese societies, on the other hand, 'face' is far more socially-based, and rooted in the collective perspective. The Chinese are, to a greater extent compared with Westerners, constrained by the existing social order. This social order requires that people respect their relative positions within the order, and accord respect, or 'face', to those around them (both superior and subordinate). In Lafayette De Mente's terms, this means 'doing everything possible to protect your face and the face of family and friends and stoically accepting the natural and manmade vicissitudes of life as things that cannot be avoided' (Lafayette De mente 1994 p. 169). Moreover, Hofstede (1980) comments that 'face' in Chinese societies is often used for social control which 'works' in situations where formal authority itself would not be enough, especially informal situations.

Methods of communication vary among cultures. Chinese people rely heavily on indirect, more complex methods of communication as Chinese culture is a high-context culture (Hall and Hall 1990). According to Hall and Hall, a high-context

communication is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while little is in the explicitly transmitted part of the message. In Chinese language, subtlety is valued and much meaning is conveyed by inference. One of the most often-mentioned expressions of indirect communications is the reluctance of Chinese to say 'no' directly. Vague indicators such as 'maybe', 'perhaps', 'rather', 'inconvenient', 'difficult' and 'I will consider it' can mean 'no' in Chinese culture. Sometimes 'yes' only means 'maybe'. VL is therefore often used in such a genre like Chinese business negotiations to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson 1987).

7.4 Informality

VL tends to be associated with informal conversational settings. VL, as Crystal and Davy (1975, p. 111) point out, 'is one of the most important features in the vocabulary of informal conversation', since a lack of precision and intellectual control 'helps create a relaxed conversational atmosphere and establish interpersonal rapport' (p. 112). In other words, VEs such as *zhīlèide* (之类的 'that sort of thing') and *shénmede* (什么的 'stuff like that'), which signal referential imprecision, simultaneously serve important affective functions. Different languages have different socio-pragmatic norms and conventions for the appropriate deployment of vagueness for informality purpose. McCarthy and Carter (2007) also note that vagueness is both necessary and desirable in informal interaction, since its absence can make utterances blunt and pedantic.

Nà/nàgè (那/那个 'well/then', 40.51%, 32.53% and 28.91% in N1, N2 and N4 respectively) and *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then', 31.82% and 34.4% in N3 and N5 respectively) are the most commonly employed VEs in the realization of the pragmatic function of informality in each of the five respective Chinese negotiations. Incomplete utterances, *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then') and *zhè/zhègè* (这/ 这 个

'well/then'), *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), and *en* (嗯 'well') etc. signal this as informal as revealed in extracts (7.26), (7.27), (7.28), (7.29), (7.30) and (7.31):

7.4.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.26) 那 我 给 你 一 份 海运 的 钱， 完 了 空运   我 再 给
<u>Nà</u> wǒ gěi nǐ yī fèn hǎiyùn de qián, wán le   kōngyùn wǒ zài   gěi
你 加，<u>那</u> 我 不 就 赔 大 了 嘛 。
nǐ jiā, nà wǒ bù jiù péi dà le ma.

'<u>Well then</u>, I pay you for ocean transportation, and after that I pay extra for air transportation on the top of that. Then I will pay too much.'   (N1S1:22)

In Extract (7.26), the client used *nà* (那 'well then') to link his utterances, creating an informal and relaxed atmosphere, which would help to ease the nerves of the negotiators on both sides.

(7.27) 王   经理，<u>那个</u> 上次   听 你们 公司 讲   的 那个
Wáng jīnglǐ, <u>nàgè</u> shàngcì tīng nǐmen gōngsī jiǎng de nàgè
财富 论坛，当中   就 是 介绍   这个 比较 好 的 保险   品种，
cáifù lùntán, dāngzhōng jiù shì jièshào zhègè bǐjiào hǎo de bǎoxiǎn pǐnzhǒng,
<u>哈</u>，我 <u>呢</u>，非常   想   听听，<u>哈</u>，就 是 你 、你 的 意见 啦。
<u>hā</u>, wǒ <u>ne</u>, fēicháng xiǎng tīngtīng, <u>hā</u>, jiù shì nǐ,   nǐ de yìjian la.
完 了，主要   就 是 你<u>那个</u>，分红   品种   就 主要   是 美满
Wán le, zhǔyào jiù shì nǐ <u>nàgè</u>, fēnhóng pǐnzhǒng jiù zhǔyào shì měimǎn
人生。   它 的 <u>那个</u> 特点， 就 是 对于 我 来 讲，啊， 我 的
rénshēng. Tā de <u>nàgè</u> tèdiǎn, jiù shì duìyú wǒ lái jiǎng, a,   wǒ de
要求 ， 想   买 你<u>那个</u>，你们 的 产品   <u>呢</u>，主要   就 是 两
yāoqiú, xiǎng mǎi nǐ <u>nàgè</u>,   nǐmen de chǎnpǐn <u>ne</u>, zhǔyào   jiù shì liǎng

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个，我 的，一 个 是 要　有 保障，　第 二 个 呢

gè,　wǒ de,　yī gè shì　yào yǒu bǎozhàng, dì èr gè ne

'Manager Wang, <u>well</u>, last time I listened to that Fortune Forum by your company, in which well, better varieties of insurances were introduced. <u>Well</u>, I very much want to listen to, <u>well</u>, your advice. It's mainly, <u>well</u>, profit-sharing kind, i.e. mainly 'Perfect Life'. <u>Well</u>, its main feature is, to me, <u>well</u>; if I want to buy your products, <u>well</u>, I mainly have two requirements. One is that it must be of a protective function, and <u>well</u> the other one is'   (N2S1:1)

In Extract (7.27), *nàgè* (那个 'well') *ha* (哈 'well') and *ne* (呢 'well') were repeatedly utilized by the client, which made her utterances smooth and well maintained, and at the same time set a positive, easygoing and relaxing tone from the outset of the negotiation, establishing a favourable setting for the following negotiation.

(7.28)　您 好！　嗯，(0.1) <u>这个</u> (0.2)，我 在 你们 青　旅 <u>啊</u>，

Nín hǎo!　<u>En</u>,　(0.1) <u>zhègè</u> (0.2)，　wǒ zài nǐmen qīng lǚ <u>a</u>,

<u>这个</u> 出去 外国　旅游　了多少　次。啊，从　安排、服务 各

<u>zhègè</u> chūqù wàiguó lǚyóu le duōshao cì.　<u>A</u>,　cóng ānpái, fúwù gè

方面　　都 非常　　满意。嗯，今天 利用 假期 啊，想　再次

fāngmiàn dōu fēicháng mǎnyì. <u>En</u>, jīntiān lìyòng jiàqī <u>a</u>,　xiǎng zàicì

(.) 到　你们　这 来 办理 (.)　到 埃及，埃及 十 日 游，啊，这个　旅游

(.) dào nǐmen zhè lái bànlǐ (.)　dào āijí,　　āijí shí rì yóu,　<u>a</u>,　zhègè lǚyóu

项目，　　嗯。

xiàngmù, <u>en</u>.

'Hello! <u>Well</u>, <u>well</u>, I, with your Youth Travel, <u>well</u>, travel abroad many times. <u>Well</u>, from arrangements to services, it was very satisfactory in each aspect. <u>Well</u>, today using the break time, I want to book with you again the tour to

Egypt, a ten-day tour to Egypt, <u>well</u>, this tour programme, <u>well</u>.'   (N3S1:1)

Similarly, in Extract (7.28), the client kept employing *en* (嗯 'well'), *zhègè* (这个 'well') and *a* (啊 'well') to well connect his utterances and meanwhile, make himself sound quite informal and relaxed, ensuring a natural interaction from the very beginning of the negotiation. Thus, the interpersonal rapport could be established as well, which contributed to the success of the negotiation.

(7.29) <u>嗯</u>，对，双飞　　的，往返　飞机。咱们　　这个　里边
       <u>En</u>, duì, shuāngfēi de, wǎngfǎn fēijī. Zánmen zhègè lǐbian
       包括　<u>那个</u> 住宿 费 <u>啊</u>，那边　的 用餐　<u>啊</u>，还 有　<u>那个</u> 那边　的
       bāokuò <u>nàgè</u> zhùsù fèi <u>a</u>, nàbiān de yòngcān <u>a</u>, hái yǒu <u>nàgè</u> nàbiān de
       导游　　服务，还 有　咱们　　旅行社　　的 保险　　这些 (overlap)
       dǎoyóu fúwù, hái yǒu zánmen lǚxíngshè de bǎoxiǎn zhèxiē (overlap)
       都　包括　　在内。
       dōu bāokuò zàinèi.

       'Well, right, it's round trip, return flight. Ours includes, <u>well</u>, accommodation, <u>well</u>, meals there, and <u>well</u>, tour guide service fee; in addition, our travel agency's insurance is included as well.'   (N4S1:7)

In Extract (7.29), through the use of *en* (嗯 'well'), *nàgè* (那个 'well') and *a* (啊 'well'), the agent showed her informality and friendliness towards the client, making the client tangibly feel the inclusive benefits and the light-hearted side of the travel.

(7.30) 会计　专业，　<u>嗯</u>，会计 专业，　<u>这个</u>，　有 伦敦　的
       Kuàijì zhuānyè, <u>en</u>, kuàijì zhuānyè, <u>zhègè</u>, yǒu lúndūn de
       <u>这个</u> 商学院，　　应该　是 最好 的，但是　能　不 能　去上
       <u>zhègè</u> shāngxuéyuàn, yīnggāi shì zuì hǎo de, dànshì néng bù néng qù shàng

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这个 学校　要 看 你 的 大学 成绩。 那 其它 的 国家 呢，美国
zhège xuéxiào yào kàn nǐ de dàxué chéngjī. Nà qítā de guójiā ne, Měiguó

(.) 两　年　研究生，　　澳大利亚 研究生　　有　一　年　的，有 一
(.) liǎng nián yánjiūshēng, Aòdàlìyà   yánjiūshēng yǒu yī nián de, yǒu yī

年　半 的，有 两　年　的。这个　呢，咱 中国　　的 学生
nián bàn de, yǒu liǎng nián de. Zhège ne, zán Zhōngguó de xuésheng

一般 地 去，都 是 学 两　年　的 研究生　　课程 。
yībānde qù,   dōu shì xué liǎng nián de yánjiūshēng kèchéng .

'Major in accounting, <u>well</u>, major in accounting, <u>well</u>, there is, <u>well</u>, London
Business School, which should be the best, but whether or not you can go to
this school depends on your university grades. <u>Well then</u>, for the other
countries, the length of schooling for postgraduates in the U.S. is two years,
and that in Australia is one year, one and a half year, or two years. <u>Well</u>, the
Chinese students generally go to study a two-year postgraduate program.'

(N5S1:13)

In Extract (7.30), the agent made her thoughts and utterances well organized and
interlinked through the employment of *en* (嗯 'well'), *zhège* (这个 'well'), *nà* (那
'well then') and *ne* (呢'well'), and simultaneously made her expression informal,
intimate and convincing.

(7.31) 你 不用　写　的 太 具体，就 是 一 个 大概 的 情况。
Nǐ bù yòng xiě de tài jùtǐ,   jiù shì yī gè dàgài de qíngkuàng.

领馆　那面　签证　的 时候 要 了解 <u>一下</u> 你 个人 的 <u>这个</u>
Lǐngguǎn nà miàn qiānzhèng de shíhou yào liǎojiě <u>yīxià</u> nǐ gèrén de <u>zhège</u>

经济　状况。　　<u>嗯 嗯</u>，只是 作为　一 个 了解。不 用　特别、
jīngjì zhuàngkuàng. <u>En en</u>, zhǐshì zuòwéi yī gè liǎojiě. Bù yòng tèbié,

特别 地 准确　的 那种。　(0.5)
tèbié de zhǔnquè de nèizhǒng.(0.5)

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'You don't have to write in detail, just general information. The consulate will have a <u>quick</u> check on your, <u>well</u>, individual financial situation when they process the visa. <u>Well</u>, it's just for a quick check. It doesn't have to be especially accurate.'   (N3S2:68)

In Extract (7.31), in order to reduce the seriousness of the visa matter, the agent purposely utilized *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *zhège* (这个 'well') and *en* (嗯 'well') to make her explanation sound quite informal and relaxed. Thus, the client's tenseness and worries about this issue could be eased.

VL is usually considered to be a typical feature of informal, casual conversation (Chafe 1982, Powell 1992), while the examples in this data demonstrate that VL is a pervasive feature not just of casual conversation, but of much work-related talk as well. As shown above, referring vaguely to items or categories enables emphasizing the common ground that exists between negotiators, even if perhaps they do not know each other that well. This has the effect of making the tone of negotiations more friendly and informal, and allows negotiators to reaffirm their existing relationship or establish familiarity in a new relationship.

Furthermore, as exemplified above, the instances of VL for informality in the data can help to maintain the relaxed atmosphere and create more favourable and friendly negotiating environment, which greatly facilitates the success of negotiations. As Aijmer (1984, p. 124) observes, vague elements such as 'kind of' function to prevent speakers from sounding too imposingly expert, while contributing to the informal tone of the interaction. Despite its significant function in managing tensions and minimizing impositions, the strategy of VL performing the function of informality has been neglected in the existing literature on business negotiations.
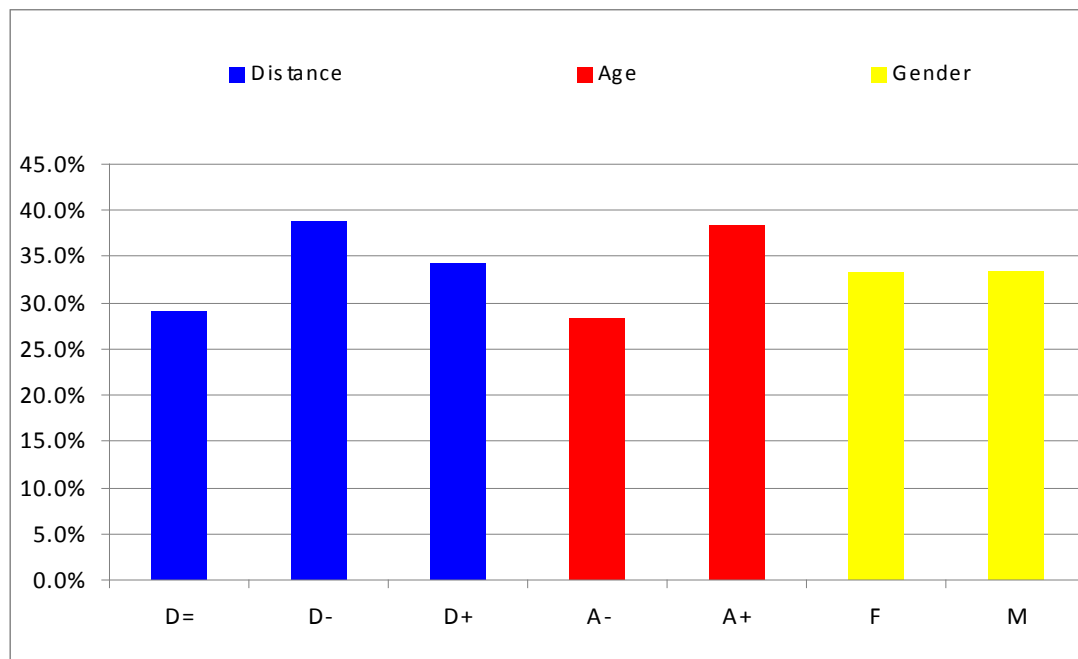
7.4.2 Social factor comparison

Figure 7.7: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for informality

As demonstrated in Figure 7.7, the acquaintances (D=) did not employ much VL for informality as the friends (D-) and the strangers (D+) did. This indicates that the factor of distance did have an influence on the choice of VL for informality. The fact that friends utilized such VEs the most does make sense in that they are quite familiar with each other and would like to display such intimacy through VL for informality. A possible reason for strangers to use more VL than acquaintances for this purpose is that they might want to intentionally create a more relaxed negotiating environment through such VEs to ease the tentions and stress caused by the unfamiliarity.

It seems that the age factor had more influence on the choice of VL for informality among the three factors. The older (A+) negotiators more frequently utilized it than the younger (A-) ones. The speculation for this phenomenon is that the older negotiators are more experienced in creating a favourable negotiating atmosphere by

using VL for informality. Differently and intriguingly, the gender factor did not have an impact in this case, as both females and males employed a similar rate of this type of VL, which shows the way in which VL is used for informality is very similar between the two gender groups.
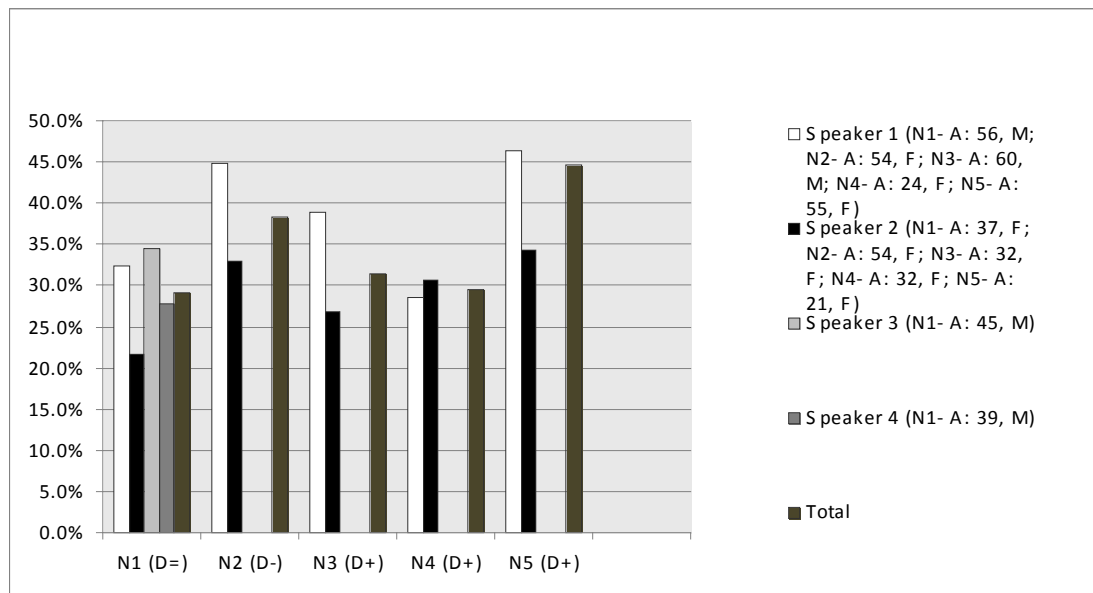

Figure 7.8: VL used for informality

As reflected in Figure 7.8, the same as Section 7.3, it appears that all the purchasers (Speaker 1, 3 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3; Speaker 2 in N4) utilized more VL for informality than the sellers (Speaker 2 in N1, N2 and N3; Speaker1 in N4) except N5, where speaker 1 (the seller) used more VL for informality among all the negotiators. The findings indicate that the purchasers were more relaxed than the sellers in the encounters, for the former used more VL for informality. To have a good deal, purchasers would normally like to use more VL for informality to establish a closer relationship with sellers first and then create a more favourable negotiating atmosphere. The exceptional case in N5 could be due to the nature of 'much at stake' business and the young client, where the agent tried extremely hard to create an informal and relaxing atmosphere, which would help to loosen up the young purchasers' tense nerves and reach the seller's goals more easily.

7.5 Filling in lexical gaps

Channell (1994) argues that speakers make use of vagueness to convey meaning in situations where they do not have at their disposal the necessary words or phrases for the concepts they wish to express. Moreover, Jucker *et al.* (2003) claim that vague utterances allow speakers to maintain fluency when they cannot access information at the point where it is needed in the conversation. In some cases, speakers may have information potentially available, but they cannot access it in a timely way. They may then decide that the processing cost of accessing it, and the cost to fluency are not warranted in terms of any benefits to be gained by precision.

As Channell (1994) points out, vagueness is a ploy speakers use when they cannot find the words they need. Word-finding difficulty and lexical lack in the language have been identified as two situations where a speaker might use a VE. *Nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then', 39.83%, 42.01% and 29.84% in N1, N2 and N4 respectively) and *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then', 28.1% and 33.77% in N3 and N5 respectively) are most utilized VEs in performing the pragmatic function of filling in lexical gaps in each respective Chinese business negotiation. *En* (嗯 'well'), *ne* (呢 'well') and *a* (啊 'well') etc. are also frequently employed VEs next to the above two for this purpose. This can be illustrated in the following extracts:

7.5.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.32) 我们　是 说，　像　是 <u>那个</u>，就 是 说 表达　我们
　　　　Wǒmen shì shuō, xiàng shì <u>nàgè</u>,　jiù　shì shuō biǎodá　wǒmen

　　　　的 难处。　我们　　会 努力，看看
　　　　de　nánchù.　Wǒmen huì nǔlì,　　kànkàn

　　　　'We are saying, like, <u>well</u>, that's to say, expressing our difficulties. We will try

hard and see' (N1S2:233)

In Extract (7.32), the supplier had to think a bit harder to find an appropriate word to express her difficult situation. By using *nàgè* (那个 'well'), she naturally filled in her lexical gap and finally found the term 'difficulties'.

(7.33) 王　　经理，那个 什么，　就 是，　这个 保单　 的话，　就
　　　　Wáng jīnglǐ,　nàgè shénme, jiù shì,　zhègè bǎodān dehuà,　jiù
　　　　是 你 给 我 的 收益 表 当中　　 的 你 这个 身 存 保险　 金
　　　　shì nǐ gěi wǒ de shōuyì biǎo dāngzhōng de nǐ zhègè shēn cún bǎoxiǎn jīn
　　　　和 那个 身故 保险　 金 以及 红利, 它们　 之间　 的 概念　 是 什么？
　　　　hé nàgè shēngù bǎoxiǎn jīn yǐjí hónglì, tāmen zhījiān de gàiniàn shì shénme?

　　　　'Manager Wang, well, what, well, if this policy; in the earnings statement you gave me, what are the inter-related ideas of and among, well, life insurance money, well, Death Benefits and the dividend?' (N2S1:573)

In Extract (7.33), the client might not be very familiar with those insurance technical terms and access them in a timely manner. With the help of *nàgè* (那个 'well') and *zhègè* (这个 'well'), she maintained her speech fluency and made her thoughts well expressed.

(7.34) 我 看看　 还 有 什么，　啊。 (0.1) 男　女，配偶，　出生　　日，
　　　　Wǒ kànkàn hái yǒu shénme, a.　(0.1) Nán nǔ, pèiǒu, chūshēng rì,
　　　　必须 写。(0.4) 你 在 国外　 打算　花费 多少？　 随时 在 国外
　　　　bìxū xiě. (0.4) Nǐ zài guówài dǎsuan huāfèi duōshao? Suíshí zài guówài
　　　　的 食宿 费用。　这 都 不用。　这 都 好 简单　 啊。我 再
　　　　de shísù fèiyòng. Zhè dōu bù yòng. Zhè dōu hǎo jiǎndān a.　Wǒ zài
　　　　问　下 这个，它 这个 是、这个 三 天 在 船　　上，　是 吧？
　　　　wèn xià zhègè,　tā zhègè shì, zhègè sān tiān zài chuán shàng, shì ba?

'Let me have a look at what else there is, well. Sex, spouse, and date of birth must be filled in. How much have you planned to spend abroad? Accommodation cost any time abroad. There is no need to fill in these. This is all so simple. I'd like to ask about this, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>, it's three days onboard, isn't it?'   (N3S1:69)

In Extract (7.34), it looks like that the client suddenly forgot what he wanted to ask. Through the repeated use of *zhègè* (这个 'well'), he kept his utterance going and meanwile allowed himself some time to recollect his thoughts on the question.

(7.35) 嗯，对，一定 是 这样　的。我们　　到 那边 肯定　　就

En, duì, yīdìng shì zhèyàng de. Wǒmen dào nàbiān kěndìng jiù

事先　　导游　　根据 你 <u>这个</u>　就 是 <u>那 个</u>。身份证　　　上　 不 都

shìxiān dǎoyóu gēnjù nǐ <u>zhègè</u> jiù shì <u>nàgè</u>.　Shēnfènzhèng shàng bù dōu

是 有 年龄　　 吗？

shì yǒu niánlíng ma?

'Yes, right, it must be like this. We will, and the tour guide there will surely do it in advance according to, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>. Isn't there age on the ID card?'

(N4S1:123)

In Extract (7.35), the agent could not have at her disposal the necessary words or phrases for the information she wished to convey. Utilizing *zhègè* (这个 'well') and *nàgè* (那个 'well'), she filled in the lexical gaps and ensured her ideas were delivered continuously.

(7.36) (overlap) 那 你 就 是 不 是 应该　 现在　 存，要是

(overlap) Nà nǐ jiù shì bù shì yīnggāi xiànzài cún, yàoshi

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现在　存　的话，　现在　是　三月，四、五、六、七、八、九，得 十

xiànzài cún dehuà,　xiànzài shì sānyuè, sì,　wǔ,　liù,　qī,　bā, jiǔ, děi shí

月份　才 能够，　　那 就 是 赶 二 月份　的，还有　你 还有　一

yuèfèn cái nénggòu, nà　jiù shì　gǎn èr yuèfèn de,　hái yǒu nǐ hái yǒu yī

个 问题，我 要 跟　你 说 清楚，　　这个，你 雅思 五 点儿　五，雅思

gè wèntí, wǒ yào gēn nǐ shuō qīngchu, zhègè, nǐ　yǎsī　wǔ diǎnr　wǔ,　yǎsī

五 点儿 五 的话，你 如果 要　想　　赶 二 月份　读研，那 你 还

wǔ diǎnr wǔ dehuà, nǐ rúguǒ yào xiǎng gǎn èr yuèfèn dú yán,　nà nǐ hái

不 能　十 月份　递 签证，　　你 要 给 你 留 出来 这个 五 个

bù néng shí yuèfèn dì qiānzhèng, nǐ yào gěi　nǐ liú chūlái zhègè wǔ gè

月 学 英语　　的 时间，是 不 是? 应该　　是 这个 五 个 月　左右

yuè xué Yīngyǔ de shíjiān, shì bù shì?　Yīnggāi shì zhègè wǔ gè yuè zuǒyòu

吧，因为　你 雅思 五 点儿　五，那 你 这、这个 二 月份　往　回 退

ba,　yīnwèi nǐ yǎsī　wǔ diǎnr wǔ,　nà　nǐ zhè, zhègè èr yuèfèn　wǎng huí tuì

五 个 月，应该　　是 几 、几 月份?

wǔ gè yuè, yīnggāi shì　jǐ,　　jǐ yuèfèn?

'Well, you should deposit the money now, shouldn't you? If you deposit it now, it's March now, April, May, June, July, August, September, and it won't be long enough until October. Well, that's to apply for February. In addition, you still have a problem I need to explain clearly to you. Well, your IELTS score is five point five. If the IELTS score is five point five, and you want to start your postgraduate program in February, then you can't submit your visa application in October. You need to allow you, well, five months to study English, don't you? It should be, well, about five months because your IELTS score is five point five. Well then, five months back from February, what month would it be?'　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(N5S1:173)

In Extract (7.36), the overseas study agent tried to calculate the client's preparation time for the deposit and visa application, which was a complicated matter to explain

clearly. Through the employment of *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well'), she was able to put her views well in a consecutive manner.

(7.37)　我　目标　大学，嗯，当然　　是 就 是 八 大 名校　　比较

Wǒ mùbiāo dàxué, en,   dāngrán shì jiù shì bā dà míngxiào bǐjiào

好，或者　 是 那个 就 是 说　会计 专业　比较 有名　　的 是

hǎo, huòzhě shì nàgè jiù shì shuō kuàijì zhuānyè bǐjiào yǒumíng de shì

那个 麦 、麦考里　 大学。

nàgè mài, màikǎolǐ dàxué.

'My targeted university, well, of course it is probably better to be one of the top eight universities or, well, the university whose accounting major is quite famous, namely, well, Macquarie University.'   (N5S2:16)

In Extract (7.37), the client had a difficulty remembering the name of the university she wanted to apply for. By using *en* (嗯 'well') and *nàgè* (那个 'well'), she filled the lexical gaps while allowing herself some time for thinking, and thus maintained the flow of her talk.

As shown above, such examples arise both where negotiators do not know the necessary word, or where they forget it, since in both cases, for the purpose of the utterance in hand, negotiators lack knowledge of the word. Related to this is the temporary lexical gap which occurs when a negotiator cannot remember a word or name, which can be filled with VEs such as *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/stuff like that'), *sháwányìr* (啥玩意儿 'whatisit'), *zhèyàng/shìr* (这样/式儿 'thus'), *nàme* (那么 'then'), etc..
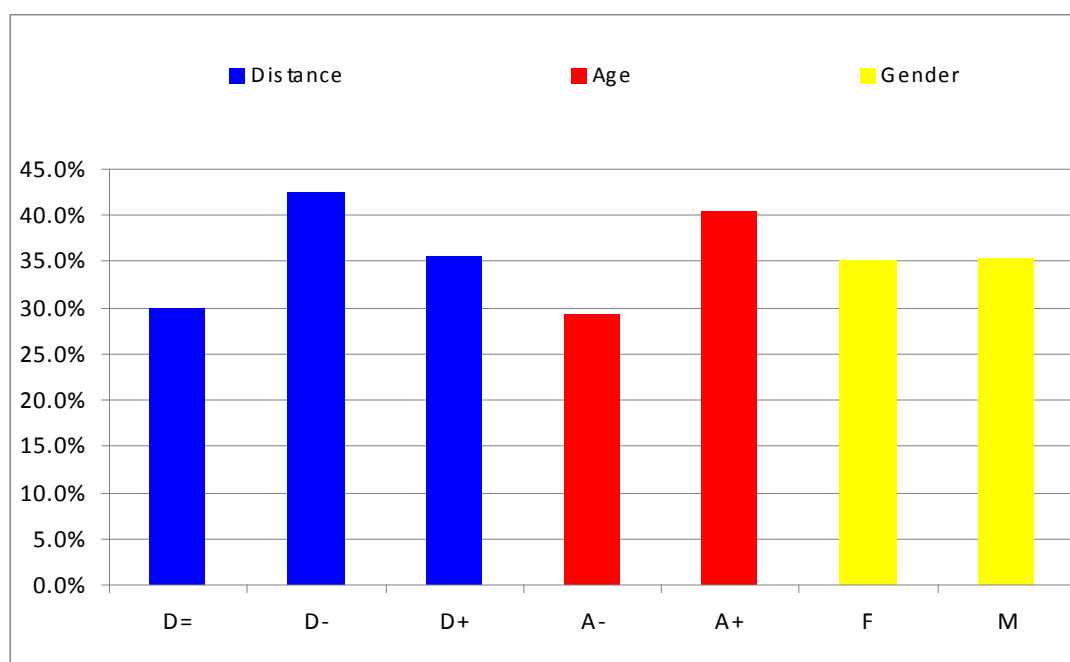
7.5.2 Social factor comparison

Figure 7.9: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for filling in lexical gaps

As presented in Figure 7.9, VL for filling in lexical gaps was most utilized by the friends (D-) and then by the strangers (D+); the acquaintances (D=) least employed it. This result shows that the distance factor did have an overt impact on the choice of VL for filling in lexical gaps. It could be interpreted that when friends negotiate, they feel most free to use such VEs to maintain the flow of the negotiating process as they know each other well and feel quite relaxed. As for strangers, a possibility could be that they could not help but to employ VL for this purpose, due to their tenseness around people they do not know.

The fact that the older (A+) negotiators used more VL for filling in lexical gaps than the younger (A-) ones indicates that the age factor also had a major influence on it. However, the gender factor did not seem quite relevant here since such VEs were equally employed by both females and males.
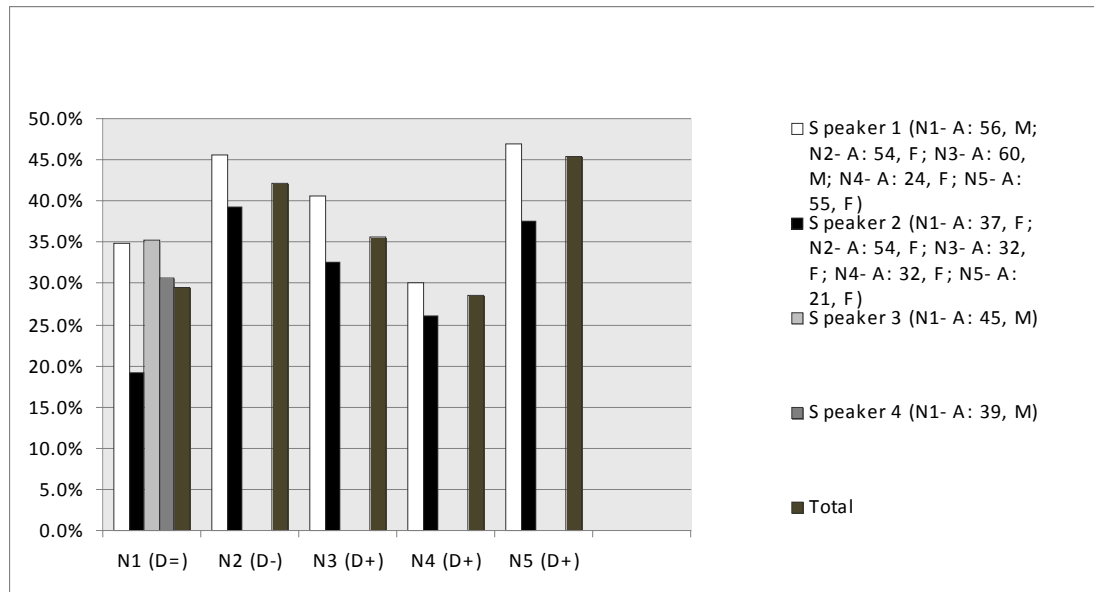
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Figure 7.10: VL used for filling in lexical gaps

As shown in Figure 7.10, the sellers in N1, N2 and N3 (all are Speaker 2) employed less VL for filling in lexical gaps than the purchasers (Speaker 1, 3 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3); in particular, Speaker 2 (the female supplier) in N1 did not use much VL for this purpose. This might be a reflection of the sellers' good memory needed for their profession, and mastery of the knowledge in their own fields. On the other hand, the sellers in N4 and N5 (Both are Speaker 1) utilized more VL for filling in lexical gaps than the purchasers (Speaker 2 in N4 and N5). A possible reason for the youngest seller (Speaker 1 in N4), using more VEs for this purpose is that she might be more nervous or inexperienced. As for Speaker 1 in N5 who used such VEs the most, it could be that she was over cautious in her word choice so as to ensure she can make more profits from the success of the negotiation.

7.6 Giving the right amount of information

According to Channell (1994), VEs are one device which speakers use to tailor their contributions so that they give the right amount of information for the purpose of the conversation. The amount of information given is tailored for the perceived purposes

of the interaction and VEs can be used where less precision is judged to be required. In most situations, VL is just as relevant and effective, if not more, as non-vague language (Jucker *et al.* 2003; Zhang 2004a, 2004b).

Diǎnr/yīdiǎnr (点儿/一点儿 'a little', 44.23% in N1), *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some', 22.03%, 50.6%, and 39.62% in N2, N3 and N4 respectively) and *hěn* (很 'very', 33.93% in N5) are the most frequently employed VEs in giving the right amount of information observed in the data., as shown in extracts (7.38), (7.39), (7.40), (7.41) and (7.42) below:

7.6.1 Contextualised analysis

(7.38)　可以　少　<u>一点儿</u>　吗？因为　它　这个　产品　　的　就是，

　　　　Kěyǐ shǎo <u>yīdiǎnr</u> ma? Yīnwèi tā zhègè chǎnpǐn de jiù shì,

　　　　价格　空间　　　特别　小。有　没　有　可能　　再　少　<u>一些</u>　质　保　金？

　　　　jiàgé kōngjiān tèbié xiǎo. Yǒu méi yǒu kěnéng zài shǎo <u>yīxiē</u> zhì bǎo jīn?

　　　　'Can it be <u>a little</u> less? Because its, this product's, price range is especially

　　　　small. Is it possible to reduce <u>some</u> quality assurance deposit?'　　　(N1S2:65)

In Extract (7.38), the supplier deliberately employed *yīdiǎnr* (一点儿 'a little') and *yīxiē* (一些 'some') to express her expected amount of the reduction vaguely. By doing so, she not only clearly expressed what she expected but also left more space for further negotiation on the possible amount of the reduction.

(7.39)　就是　刚才　　我　说　的　第一　个　啊。它　的　红利　持续　的

　　　　Jiù shì gāngcái wǒ shuō de dìyī gè a.　Tā de hónglì chíxù de

　　　　时间　　最　长。　还　有　一　个　就是　我们　　现在　　目前　　的　这个

　　　　shíjiān zuì cháng. Hái yǒu yī gè jiù shì wǒmen xiànzài mùqián de zhègè

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年龄。 你 现在 的年龄 是五十 三 岁。那么 选择 五 年，
niánlíng. Nǐ xiànzài de niánlíng shì wǔshí sān suì. Nàme xuǎnzé wǔ nián,

那 你 已经 五十 八岁了。那么 可能 以后 再做 一些 理财 的，
nà nǐ yǐjīng wǔshí bā suì le. Nàme kěnéng yǐhòu zài zuò yīxiē lǐcái de,

可能 有 些 产品 到五十 五 岁可能 就限制。 这个 门槛
kěnéng yǒu xiē chǎnpǐn dào wǔshí wǔ suì kěnéng jiù xiànzhì. Zhègè ménkǎn

就 把 你限定 住了，所以 在 这个 年龄 段 最 好 选择
jiù bǎ nǐ xiàndìng zhù le, suǒyǐ zài zhègè niánlíng duàn zuì hǎo xuǎnzé

时间 长 一些 的， 长 一些 的。
shíjiān cháng yīxiē de, cháng yīxiē de.

'It's just the first one I said. Its annuity will last the longest. Another one is our present age. Your present age is fifty three years old. Well then, if you choose the five-year one, then you will already be fifty eight years old. Well then, if you buy <u>some</u> financing products again in the future, <u>some</u> of them may have some restrictions for people aged fifty five. This threshold will restrict you, so at this age, you'd better choose a longer one, a little longer one.'

(N2S2:126)

In Extract (7.39), the agent did not have to precisely point out to the client how many financing products she would buy in the future and could not tell exactly either how many the client could possibly buy in the future, so she effectively utilized *yīxiē/xiē* (一些/些 'some') to give just the right amount of information for her perceived purpose of interaction.

(7.40) 对，你 可以 带 一 张 卡。然后 随身 带 的 这 种，
Duì, nǐ kěyǐ dài yī zhāng kǎ. Ránhòu suíshēn dài de zhè zhǒng,

就 是 现金 不 用 带 太 多，就 足够 你买 一些 小 纪念品
jiù shì xiànjīn bù yòng dài tài duō, jiù zúgòu nǐ mǎi yīxiē xiǎo jìniànpǐn

和 就 是 路上　自己 买 点儿 水　喝 什么的　就 可以 了。如果 万一
hé jiù shì lù shang zìjǐ mǎi <u>diǎnr</u> shuǐ hē shénmede jiù kěyǐ le. Rúguǒ wànyī
你 有 就 看 到 好 的 <u>一些</u> 特别，就 是 价格 比较 贵 的、大
 nǐ yǒu jiù kàn dào hǎo de <u>yīxiē</u> tèbié, jiù shì jiàgé bǐjiào guì de, dà
的 东西，你 可以 刷卡　消费，　所以 就 不用　(overlap) 随身　　带
de dōngxi, nǐ kěyǐ shuākǎ xiāofèi, suǒyǐ jiù bù yòng (overlap) suíshēn dài
那么　多　现金
nàme <u>duō</u> xiànjīn

'Right, you can bring a bank card. Then, you don't need to bring, well, <u>too much</u> cash with you, and just enough for you to buy <u>some</u> small souvenirs and <u>a little</u> water for yourself on the way, and things like that. If you see <u>some</u> good and special, relatively expensive big things, you can swipe your card, so you don't need to bring so <u>much</u> cash with you.'   (N3S2:212)

In Extract (7.40), the agent was giving the client some suggestions on how much cash he needed to bring and what he might want to buy during the travel. Under such circumstances, the amount of information was tailored by the agent through the use of *tài duō/duō* (太多/多 'too much/much'), *diǎnr* (点儿 'a little') and *yīxiē* (一些 'some') for the purpose of the conversation, since the agent assumed that the client understood how much cash would be too much to him and exactly how many souvenirs or how much water he needed.

(7.41) 嗯，好，谢谢。 (0.2) 我们　的 行程　　是 这些，然后
En，hǎo，xièxie。(0.2) wǒmen de xíngchéng shì zhèxiē, ránhòu
我 想　　问 一下。去 完 这些　地方 后 咱们　还 有
wǒ xiǎng wèn yīxià. Qù wán zhèxiē dìfāng hòu zánmen hái yǒu
别 的 地方，就 是 跟 当地　的 那些，就 是 说　像　比如，
bié de dìfāng，jiù shì gēn dāngdì de nàxiē，jiù shì shuō xiàng bǐrú,

我 看 好 多 有 什么 篝火 活动 啊。跟 当地 人民 一起 搞

wǒ kàn hǎo duō yǒu shénme gōuhuǒ huódòng a. Gēn dāngdì rénmín yīqǐ gǎo

<u>一些</u>、<u>一些</u> 活动， 那些， 有 吗？

<u>yīxiē</u>, <u>yīxiē</u> huódòng, nàxiē, yǒu ma?

'Ok, well, thanks. This is our itinerary, and now I want to ask. After visiting these places, do we have any other places to go to? Say, with the local, well, for example, I see there are so many activities, well, like the fire activity. Let's organize <u>some</u> activities together with the local people, shall we?'

(N4S2:170)

In Extract (7.41), the client asked about the activities she might have a chance to take part in during the travel. In this case, she was not sure about how many she could have, thus less precision was judged to be required. Hence, she correctly mentioned the amount by utilizing *yīxiē* (一些 'some').

(7.42) 对，它 才能 接收， 因为 他们 认为 学 多 长

Duì, tā cáinéng jiēshōu, yīnwèi tāmen rènwéi xué duō cháng

时间 能 提高 多少 分儿。他们 都 是，在 这 方面 是

shíjiān néng tígāo duōshao fēnr. Tāmen dōu shì, zài zhè fāngmiàn shì

<u>很</u> 有 经验 的，学校 就 是 这样 给 安排 的。

<u>hěn</u> yǒu jīngyàn de, xuéxiào jiù shì zhèyàng gěi ānpái de.

'Right, it can admit you because they know how much students can improve their marks in a certain amount of time. They are <u>very</u> experienced in this aspect, and it's arranged like this by the university.'   (N5S1:67)

In Extract (7.42), the agent might not know how experienced those examiners were or did not want to tell even though she might know, as she judged that the precise information was not needed in this situation. By employing *hěn* (很 'very'), she

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could not only realize the purpose of the negotiation, but also enhance her assertion and make her explanation more firmly expressed and persuasive. Thus, she tailored her words, so that she could give the right amount of information for her purpose.

Jucker *et al.* (2003, p. 1743) argue that 'more precise expressions imply to the listener that more individuation and focus is needed, whereas less precise expressions imply that a referent can remain in the background and that processing resources should be directed to other elements of the situation.' As in (7.38), (7.39), (7.40), (7.41) and (7.42), negotiators employed VEs to make their contributions as appropriate as required. Examples like these also illustrate the working of the maxim of Quantity (Grice 1975), part of which is the rule of 'do not say that for which you lack sufficient evidence' and 'do not say more than you need to say' (1975, p. 46).

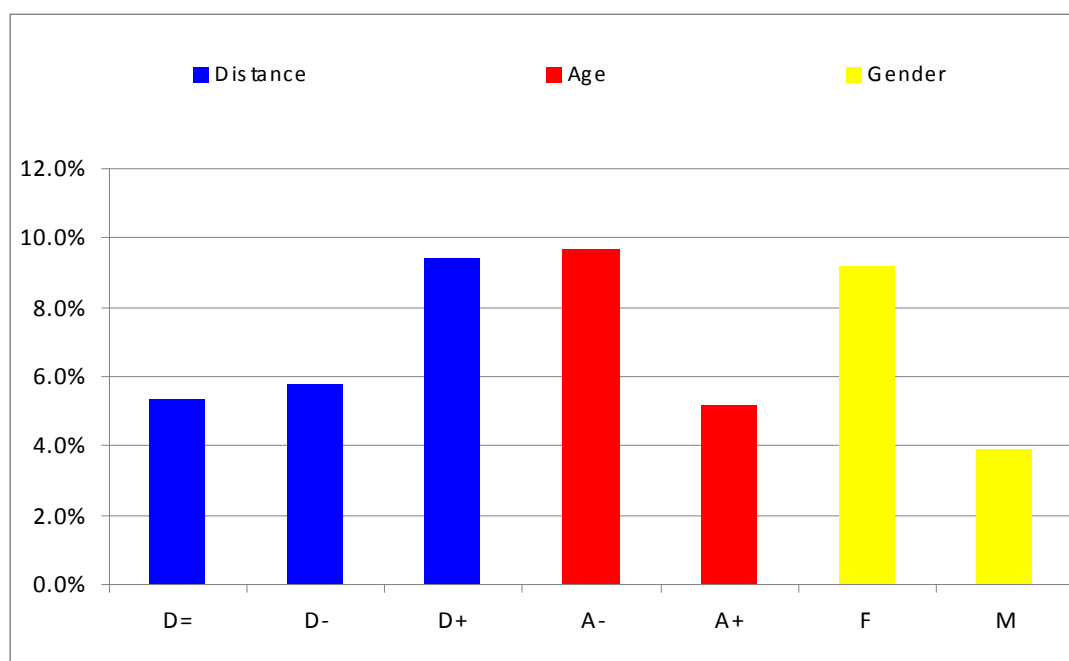## 7.6.2 Social factor comparison

Figure 7.11: Three factors' influence on the use of VL giving the right amount of information

As indicated in Figure 7.11, there is much more discrepancy in all three factors compared with the other five VL pragmatic functions discussed previously. It seems that all three factors almost equally have a big influence on the use of VL giving the right amount of information. It was prominently required for the strangers (D+), the younger (A-) negotiators and females. A possible explanation for this different trend could be that unfamiliar negotiating opponents for strangers, carefulness of younger negotiators and stronger sense of prudence and meticulousness for females have probably contributed to these three groups' preference for VL giving the right amount of information.
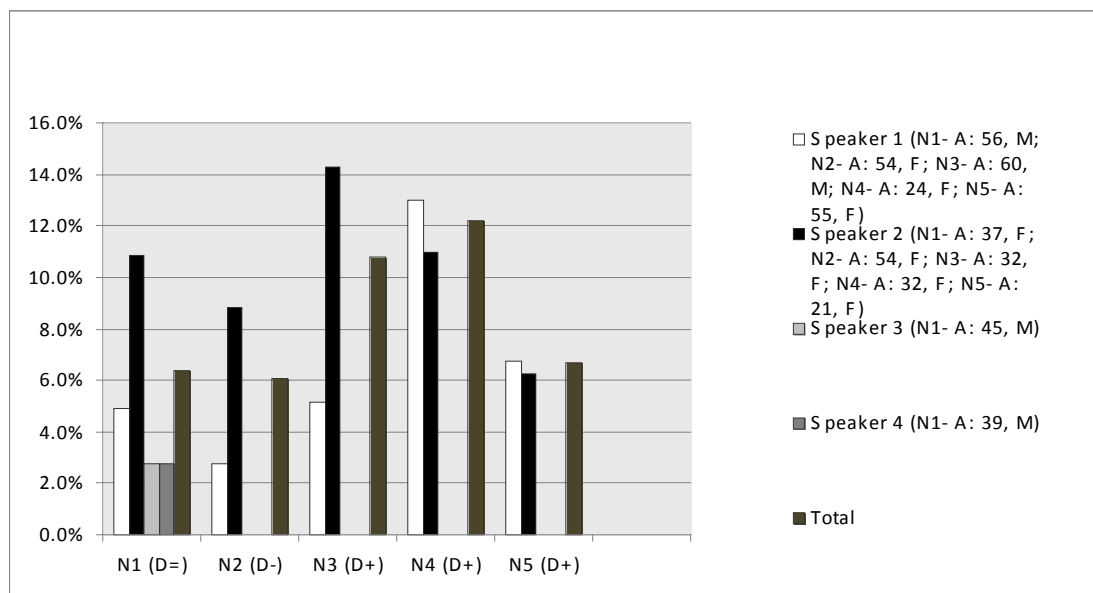

Figure 7.12: VL used for giving the right amount of information

As indicated in Figure 7.12, the same as Section 7.2, all the selling parties (Speaker 2 in N1, N2 and N3; Speaker1 in N4 and N5) were more willing to employ more VL to give the right amount of information than the purchasing parties (Speaker 1, 3 and 4 in N1, Speaker 1 in N2 and N3; Speaker 2 in N4 and N5), which shows the sellers' skills and efficiency in choosing appropriate VL in communication.

7.7 Summarising remarks

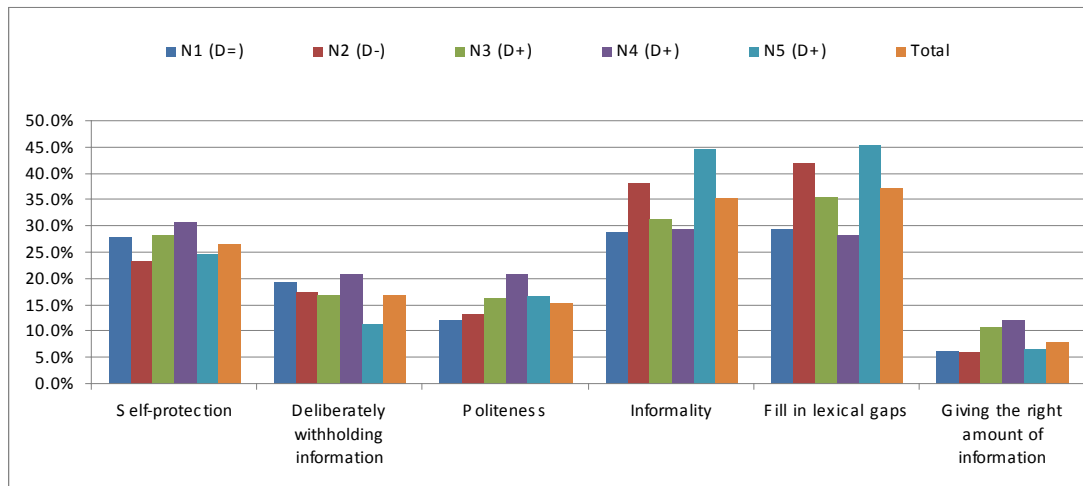The findings of pragmatic functions of VL can be summarised in Figure 7.7:

Figure 7.13: VL pragmatic functions in five negotiations

Figure 7.7 shows that on average VL was mostly employed for the purpose of filling in lexical gaps, next most used for informality, second least for politeness, and least for the function of giving the right amount of information. This seems to imply that in Chinese business negotiations, VL is most frequently used to perform the pragmatic function of filling in lexical gaps, which plays a key role in maintaining negotiators' speech fluency and ensuring a smooth flow of negotiations.
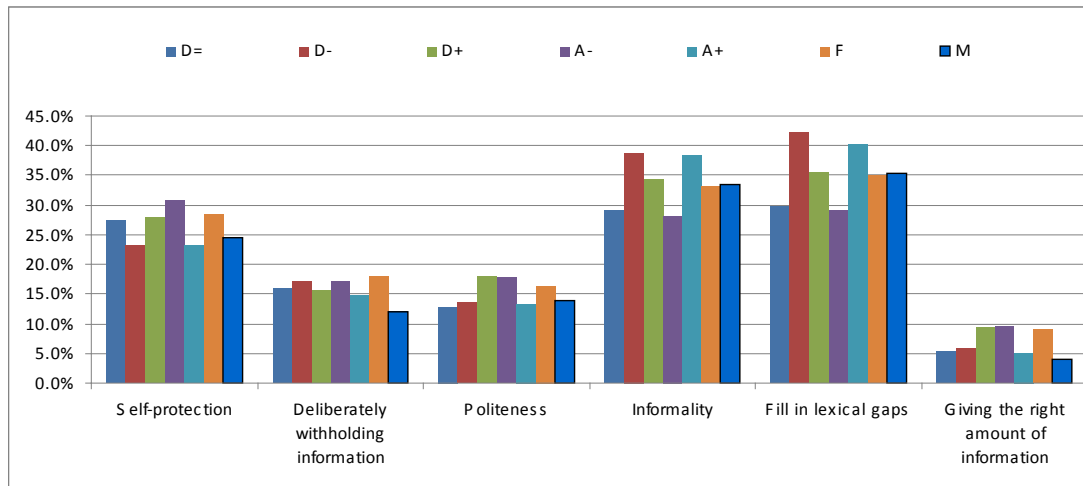
Figure 7.14: Three factors' influence on VL pragmatic functions

As shown in Figure 7.14, the distance factor did have an impact on all six VL strategies. In particular, it seems that in Chinese business negotiations, VL for informality and filling in lexical gaps is not only popular with the negotiators who are friends, but also with those who do not know each other. The use of such VEs contributes greatly to the favourable and friendly atmosphere and the smooth flow of negotiations, which is conducive to the success of negotiations. In the order of least to most, VL for self-protection was utilized between the negotiators who were friends, acquaintances and strangers, and VL for giving the right amount of information was employed between the negotiators who were acquaintances, friends and strangers. This suggests that in Chinese business negotiations, the negotiators who do not know each other are more protective towards themselves and prudent than those who are familiar with each other; consequently, they have to make greater effort to achieve success. Similarly, the negotiators who did not know each other employed VL for politeness more than friends and acquaintances, which indicates that strangers have to adopt more polite language so as to establish a new closer business relationship.

The factor of age had an influence on the choice of VL for all the six pragmatic functions discussed above. The younger negotiators employed VL more than the older ones for self-protection, deliberately withholding information, politeness and

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giving the right amount of information; whereas, the older negotiators more frequently utilized VL for informality and filling in lexical gaps than the younger ones. It is speculated that in Chinese business negotiations, the younger negotiators might feel more unsecure, and be more unconfident and prudent than their counterparts; while the older negotiators might be more confident and experienced, more conscious about their power positions, and lack of a good memory.

The factor of gender did not have much impact on the choice of VL for informality and filling in lexical gaps as they were almost equally favoured by both females and males. However, it did have an influence on the use of VL for self-protection, deliberately withholding information, politeness and giving the right amount of information, and it was the female participants who used more. A possible reason for this is that the Chinese female negotiators were more cautious and polite than the males.

Interestingly, the selling parties appeared to have a tendency to employ more VL for self-protection, deliberately withholding information and giving the right amount of information than the purchasing parties did. It shows as well that the purchasers employed more VL for politeness and informality than the sellers did except in case N5. These two findings indicate that sellers are more likely to cover themselves and guard their commercial interests through the use of VL in order to make a sale, while purchasers tend to be more polite and create a more informal atmosphere by utilizing VL to achieve their goals of obtaining a good deal.

Drew and Heritage (1992 p. 22) state that workplace or institutional interaction 'involves an orientation /---/ to some core goal, task or identity /---/ conventionally associated with the institution'. That is, it is characterized by a focus of the discourse participants on accomplishing workplace tasks. Such a focus on workplace goals should result logically in a kind of discourse which is factual and precise, and does not contain too much vagueness, and the use of VEs such as *nà/nàgè* (那/那个

'well/then'), *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 'well/then'), *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability') and *en* (嗯 'well') etc. should be usually associated with informal, casual conversation, not with work-related talk. It is therefore perhaps surprising that this study found that VL actually occurred regularly in interactions with focus on workplace tasks, such as business meetings or business negotiations. The above findings show that such VL devices, which introduce vagueness into a proposition, play an important role in work-related talks.

This chapter has investigated the pragmatic functions of VL in Chinese business negotiations, where VL is traditionally seen as inappropriate and undesirable. The findings suggest that the view that VL impairs communication needs to be replaced with the view that it facilitates communication when used appropriately in context. VL's roles, such as in the maintenance of face and communicating informality, are indispensable and a key strategic resource for Chinese business negotiators. Another unique role of VL as an interactional strategy and vehicle in sequential organization in Chinese business negotiations will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 8 Sequential analysis of VL

This chapter discusses negotiators' sequential strategies of interaction through VL and examines whether they create problems among participants. The discussion shows how the negotiators interact in Chinese business negotiations by revealing sequential moves they employed.

A successful communication primarily depends on the exploitation of common ground, thus sequential organization (e.g. turn-opening, turn-holding, turn-taking and turn-yielding), strategies of turn change, turn resumption, topic shift and topic drift are normally involved in the process of negotiating common ground along the lines of communicative intent.

8.1 Sequential organization through the use of VL

Sequential analysis has been underinvestigated in the field of VL studies, which makes this chapter important in that it may uncover some new and intriguing features of VL.

Wouk (2001) claims that a turn is an uninterrupted (although possibly partially overlapping) utterance by a single speaker. In the study of turn-taking organization, the major concern of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) is how to account for the complex system by which parties engaged in talk manage to take turns at speaking. CA emphasizes the significance of 'sequential analysis'. One central concept is the speaking turn. With an examination of the structural organization of turns, one can understand contextual variations in how speakers manage sequences, as well as the internal design of turns. It is noted that speakers speak mainly one at a time, that

speakers change occurs quite smoothly, that overlapped speech is brief, and that transitions occur from one turn to the next with very little gap.

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) point out that principally the aim of studying the interactions is to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus being on how sequences of actions are generated. In other words, the objective is to uncover the tacit reasoning procedures and sociolinguistic competencies underlying the production and interpretation of talk in organized sequences of interaction.

Wooffitt (2005) notes that turns at talk are built out of turn construction units: these are syntactically bounded lexical or sentential units. They are, loosely, the building blocks from which turns are constructed. In addition to grammatically complete sentences, turns can be built from single words, non-lexical utterances, single phrases and clauses. According to Wooffitt (2005), turn-transfer becomes relevant at the end of a turn construction unit to emphasize that it is not mandatory; rather, that if it is going to occur, this is where it is likely to happen. Speakers overwhelmingly try to initiate their turns at, or in close proximity to, transition relevance places. This demonstrates that people operate with a tacit understanding that initiating turn-transfer at these places is normatively appropriate. A property of turn construction units is that once they are underway, people can anticipate when they will end.

Consequently, the turn management system regulates the interaction flow and minimises overlapping speech and pauses in the conversation. For this system, VL also plays a role in turn-managing in Chinese business negotiations as exemplified in the below extracts. It is coded by the four types: *Turn-opening, Turn-holding, Turn-taking and Turn-yielding* as summarized in Table 8.1 below:

Table 8.1: Turn types

Types	Descriptions and Functions
Turn-opening	A new speech act sequence starts.
Turn-holding	The current speech act sequence is going on.
Turn-taking	The speaker takes a turn that is not offered, possibly by interrupting, or accepts a turn that is being offered.
Turn-yielding	The speaker releases the turn under pressure, offers the turn to the interlocutor, or signals completion of the turn for a strategic purpose.

8.1.1 Analysis of sequential organization

(8.1): from N2S1:21 to N2S2:22, 2 speakers over 2 turns.

N2S1:21：我 想 这样 啊，因为 什么，(.) 像 我 这个 年龄

Wǒ xiǎng zhèyàng a, yīnwèi shénme, (.) xiàng wǒ zhègè niánlíng

吧，那个 你 可能 买 这个 美满 人生。 它 的 那个，

ba, nàgè nǐ kěnéng mǎi zhègè měimǎn rénshēng. Tā de nàgè,

假如 说， 就 是 说， 将 (.) 如果 想 买，假如 说 咱们 俩

jiǎrú shuō, jiù shì shuō, jiāng (.) rúguǒ xiǎng mǎi, jiǎrú shuō zánmen liǎ

猜仿 一下，因为 你、你、我 自己 现在 的 想法 呢 就 是

cāifǎng yīxià, yīnwèi nǐ, nǐ, wǒ zìjǐ xiànzài de xiǎngfa ne jiù shì

想 买。嗯 (0.1) 五 年 也 好， 还是 十 年 也 好， 就 对于

xiǎng mǎi. En (0.1) wǔ nián yě hǎo, háishì shí nián yě hǎo, jiù duìyú

我 来 讲 这 毕竟 更 合适 吧。

wǒ lái jiǎng zhè bìjìng gèng héshì ba.

'I think, thus, because, whatisit, like my age, well, you probably buy, well, 'Perfect Life'. Its, well, if, say, if I want to buy, if, say, let's guess, because you, my present thought is that, well, I want to buy. Well, no matter it is the five-year one or the ten-year one, this one is after all more suitable for me.'

N2S2:22： 我 不 建议 你买 <u>这个</u> 期限 短 的，因为 我们 这个

Wǒ bù jiànyì nǐ mǎi <u>zhègè</u> qīxiàn duǎn de, yīnwèi wǒmen zhègè

年龄， <u>嗯</u> (0.1) 还 是 期限 长 的好。一 个 <u>呢</u>，因为 它

niánlíng, <u>En</u> (0.1) hái shì qīxiàn cháng de hǎo. Yī gè <u>ne</u>, yīnwèi tā

是 复利 滚存，时间 越 长， 像 滚 雪球 似的，它 是 成

shì fùlì gǔncún, shíjiān yuè cháng, xiàng gǔn xuěqiú shìde, tā shì chéng

几何级数 递增， 时间 越 长 <u>呢</u>，它 的 获利 (.) 越 大 。 <u>嗯</u> ---

jǐhéjíshù dìzēng, shíjiān yuè cháng <u>ne</u>, tā de huòlì (.) yuè dà. <u>En</u> ---

'I don't suggest you buy, <u>well</u>, the short-term one because our age, <u>well</u>, still the long-term one is good. One reason is that it's continuously deposited every year at the compound interest rate; like rolling a snow ball, which is increased exponentially, the longer the time is, the greater its profit is. <u>Well</u> ---'

Using the VEs underlined in Extract (8.1), both N2S1 (client) and N2S2 (insurance agent) strategically managed their turns to keep the negotiation on. Using the VEs *wǒxiǎng* (我想 'I think') and *zhèyàng* (这样 'thus'), N2S1 opened her turn, and then she held her turn by employing the VEs *shénme* (什么 'whatever/whatisit'), *nàgè* (那个 'well'), *zhègè* (这个 'well'), *jiǎrú* (假如 'if'), *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), *ne* (呢 'well') and *en* (嗯 'well'), and meanwhile withheld her real final decision. Likewise, N2S2 held her turn by utilising the VEs *zhègè* (这个 'well'), *en* (嗯 'well') and *ne* (呢 'well').

Similarly, the following extracts have demonstrated such strategies as well:

(8.2): from N3S1:57 to N3S2:62, 2 speakers over 6 turns.

N3S1:57： 能。 (?) 它 这 资料 <u>比较</u> 简单。

Néng. (?) tā zhè zīliào <u>bǐjiào</u> jiǎndān .

'Yes, I can. The information needed is <u>quite</u> simple.'

N3S2:58：嗯，就 是，(0.2) <u>相当</u>　　简单　了。今天 <u>最　好</u> 能

En, jiù shì, (0.2) <u>xiāngdāng</u> jiǎndān le.　Jīntiān <u>zuì hǎo</u> néng

给 我，要 不 行　明天　　也 行。

gěi wǒ, yào bù xíng míngtiān yě xíng.

'Yes, it is <u>quite</u> simple. You<u>'d better</u> give them to me today; otherwise, tomorrow will also be Ok.'

N3S1:59：<u>这个</u>，<u>这个</u>　<u>的话</u>，<u>一般</u>，　我 <u>一会儿</u> 就 给 填　出 来 了。

<u>Zhègè</u>, <u>zhègè</u> <u>d</u>e<u>huà</u>, <u>yībān</u>,　wǒ <u>yīhuìr</u>　jiù gěi tián chūlái le.

'<u>Well</u>, <u>well</u>, <u>generally</u>, I can fill it out <u>in a moment</u>.'

N3S2:60：你 <u>一会儿</u> 在 <u>这儿</u>、在 <u>这儿</u> 填 一下　就 行。(overlap)

Nǐ <u>yīhuìr</u> zài <u>zhèr</u>,　zài <u>zhèr</u> tián yīxià jiù xíng. (overlap)

'It will be Ok for you to fill it out <u>here</u> <u>shortly</u>.'

N3S1:61：(overlap) 在 <u>这儿</u> 就 可 以 呗？

(overlap) Zài <u>zhèr</u> jiù kěyǐ bei?

'<u>Here</u> will be Ok?'

N3S2:62：嗯，在 <u>这儿</u> 填　一下 就 行。(0.2)

En, zài <u>zhèr</u> tián yīxià jiù xíng. (0.2)

'Yes, it will be Ok to fill it out <u>here</u>.'

As indicated in Extract (8.2), safely-speaking, N3S1 (client) utilized the VE *bǐjiào* (比较, 'quite') to express the possibility of finishing filling in the form within a short time in turn 57, and following N3S1's turn, N3S2 (international travel agent) strongly supported his utterance by the VE *xiāngdāng* (相当 'quite'), and politely asked N3S1 to submit it as soon as possible using the VE *zuìhǎo* (最好 'had better'). Then in turn 59, by using the VE *zhège* (这个 'well'), N3S1 opened and held his turn and employed the VEs *yībān* (一般 'generally') and *yīhuìr* (一会儿 'in a moment') to protect himself. Repeating the VE *yīhuìr* (一会儿 'in a minute') in the following turn, N3S2 urged N3S1 to do it shortly. In turn 61, N3S1 also repeated the VE *zhèr* (这儿 'here') by N3S2 to get the venue clarified. The turns were thus managed smoothly through the employment of the above underlined VEs.

(8.3): from N1S1:8 to N1S2:19, 2 speakers over 12 turns.

N1S1:8：对 呀，是 多少？　　你们　空运　报 的 是 十八 万，你

Duì ya, shì duōshao?　Nǐmen kōngyùn bào de shì shíbā wàn, nǐ

<u>这样　　式</u> 的，海运　是

<u>zhèyàng shì</u> de,　hǎiyùn shì

'Right, how much is it? You offered eight hundred thousand for air transportation. You, <u>thus</u>, how much is ocean transportation?'

N1S2:9：您　就 放心。这　报 的 都 是 <u>真实　　的</u> 价格，都

Nín jiù fàngxīn. Zhè bào de dōu shì <u>zhēnshí de</u> jiàgé, dōu

是 按 <u>规定</u>　报 的。

shì àn <u>guīdìng</u> bào de.

'You can be assured of it. The price offered is exactly the <u>real</u> price, and offered as <u>stipulated</u>.'

N1S1:10：我 知道　你 这 是 按 <u>规定</u>　报 的。你 应该　给 个 价格，
Wǒ zhīdao nǐ zhè shì àn <u>guīdìng</u> bào de.   Nǐ yīnggāi gěi gè jiàgé,

你 肯定　　应该　　有　个 价。
nǐ kěndìng yīnggāi　yǒu gè jià.

'I know it is offered as <u>stipulated</u>. You should offer the price, and surely

you should have a price.'

N1S2:11：报价　的 时候　已经　含　在 <u>里</u> 面　了。
Bàojià de shíhou   yǐjīng hán zài <u>lǐ</u> miàn le.

'It has been <u>included</u> when the price was offered.'

N1S1:12：我　知道 你 含 在 <u>里</u> 面　了，你 都　含 在 二 百 五 十
 Wǒ zhīdao nǐ hán zài <u>lǐ</u> miàn le,   nǐ dōu hán zài èr bǎi wǔshí

七 万 <u>里</u> 头，不管　二 百 七 十 五 万，还是 二 百 五 十 七 万
qī wàn <u>lǐ</u> tou,   bùguǎn <u>èr bǎi qīshí wǔ wàn, háishì èr bǎi wǔshí qī wàn</u>

<u>里</u> 头，你 <u>这个</u> 海运，　<u>现在</u>　空运　是 十 八 万，对 不 对？
<u>lǐ</u> tou, nǐ <u>zhège</u> hǎiyùn, <u>xiànzài</u> kōngyùn shì shíbā wàn, duì bù duì?

'I know it has been <u>included</u>, and has been included <u>in</u> two million five

hundred and seventy thousand. Either <u>in</u> <u>two million seven hundred and</u>

<u>fifty thousand or two million five hundred and seventy thousand.</u> Well,

ocean transportation ---. <u>Now</u> it is one hundred and eighty thousand for air

transportation. Is it right?'

N1S2:13：对　对。
 Duì duì.

'Right, Right.'

N1S1:14：你 海运　是 十万，还是　八万，我们　有 个 比较，对

Nǐ hǎiyùn shì shí wàn, háishì bā wàn, wǒmen yǒu gè bǐjiào, duì

不 对？根据　时间，根据 我们　 的 (indistinct) 现场　　情况

bù duì? Gēnjù shíjiān, gēnjù wǒmen de (indistinct) xiànchǎng qíngkuàng

我们　再 考虑。如果　我们　 确实　坚持　不 住 了, 可能，

wǒmen zài kǎolǜ. Rúguǒ wǒmen quèshí jiānchí bù zhù le, kěnéng,

有可能　　我们　　就 多　花　点儿　钱　空运，　　但 你 海运

yǒukěnéng wǒmen jiù duō huā diǎnr qián kōngyùn, dàn nǐ hǎiyùn

也 应该　　报　给 我 价。

yě yīnggāi bào gěi wǒ jià.

'Ocean transportation is one hundred thousand, or eighty thousand; we can compare, is it right? According to time, and our (overlap/indistinct), the site situation, we will consider it again. If we truly can't insist on, probably, possibly we will spend a little more money to resort to air transportation, but you still should give me the price for ocean transportation.'

N1S2:15：海运　 是 多少　 钱，得 需要　查 一下。

Hǎiyùn shì duōshao qián, děi xūyào chá yīxià.

'A quick check must be given on how much ocean transportation costs.'

N1S1:16：那 现在　 能 不 能　查？

Nà xiànzài néng bù néng chá?

'Well, can it be checked out now?'

N1S2:17：反正　　含 在 这个 底 价格 里 面 了。

Fǎnzhèng hán zài zhège dǐ jiàgé lǐ miàn le.

'Everything has been included in the bottom price.'

N1S1:18：我　知道　你 含 在 里 面　了。

Wǒ zhīdao nǐ hán zài lǐ miàn le.

'I know it has been included in it.'

N1S2:19：我 想　　只要　不到 十 万 块 钱 就 应该 可以 足够 了=

Wǒ xiǎng zhǐyào bùdào shí wàn kuài qián jiù yīnggāi kěyǐ zúgòu le =

'I think less than one hundred thousand should be enough'

In Extract (8.3), N1S1 (purchaser) kept chasing N1S2 (seller) for the price of sea freight by comparing it with airfreight using the VE *zhèyàng shì* (这样式 'thus') in turn 8. Taking her turn, N1S2 tried to avoid telling what the price was by employing the VEs *zhēnshí de* (真实的 'real') and *guīdìng* (规定 'stipulated') in turn 9. Then, by repeating N1S2's VE *guīdìng* (规定 'stipulated'), N1S1 resumed his turn and insisted on knowing what the price was by using the VEs *lǐ* (里 'in'), *èr bǎi qīshí wǔ wàn, háishì èr bǎi wǔshí qī wàn* (二百七十五万还是二百五十七万 'two million seven hundred and fifty thousand or two million five hundred and seventy thousand'), *zhège* (这个 'well') and *xiànzài* (现在 'now'). To hold her turn, N1S2 continued using the VE *lǐ* (里 'in') in turn 11. However, by repeating N1S2's VE *lǐ* (里 'in') and utilizing the VEs *shí wàn, háishì bā wàn* (十万还是八万 'one hundred thousand or eighty thousand) and *kěnéng* (可能 'probaly/possibly') in turn 14, N1S1 managed his following turns and did not give up pushing for the price. After this, through the VEs *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *na* (那 'well'), *xiànzài* (现在 'now'), *dǐ* (底 'bottom'), and *lǐ* (里 'in'), N1S1 and N1S2 went on taking their turns

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and negotiating the price for sea freight until N1S2 gave an estimated amount in turn 19 by using the VEs *wǒxiǎng* (我想 'I think'), *bùdào shíwàn* (不到十万 'less than one hundred thousand') and *zúgòu* (足够 'enough'). In this way, N1S2 also successfully safeguarded her own commercial interests.

(8.4): from N3S2:96 to N3S1:99, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N3S2:96：这个　团队　啊，人 啊，目前为止　　收 的 是 <u>不到 二十</u> 个 人。

　　　　 Zhège tuánduì <u>a</u>,　 rén <u>a</u>,　 mùqiánwéizhǐ shōu de shì <u>bùdào èrshí</u> gè rén.

　　　　 'This group, <u>well</u>, the number of this group we are recruiting, <u>well</u>, up to now is <u>less than twenty</u> people.'

N3S1:97：它、它，<u>一般</u>　都　收　多少　　人？

　　　　 Tā,　 tā, <u>yībān</u> dōu shōu duōshao rén?

　　　　 '<u>Generally</u>, how many people does it recruit?'

N3S2:98：<u>一般</u>　是 不 会　<u>超过</u>　　二十 个 人。

　　　　 <u>Yībān</u> shì bù huì <u>chāoguò èrshí</u>　 gè rén.

　　　　 '<u>Generally</u>, it won't be <u>more than twenty</u> people.'

N3S1:99：对呀，别　<u>二、三十</u> 人，<u>一大堆</u> 人。

　　　　 Duìya, bié <u>èr　 sānshí</u> rén, <u>yīdàduī</u> rén.

　　　　 'Right, don't make it <u>twenty or thirty</u> people, <u>a large number of</u> people.'

In Extract (8.4), N3S2 (international travel agent) and N3S1 (client) talked about the possible number of the tourists. Using the VEs *a* (啊 'well') and *bùdào èrshí* (不到二十 'less than twenty') in turn 96, N3S2 opened and held her turn, and then N3S1 and

N3S2 took their turns by utilizing and repeating the VE *yībān* (一般 generally) respectively. Through the employment of the VEs *èr sān shí* (二、三十 twenty or thirty) and *yīdàduī* (一大堆 a large number of), N3S1 yielded his turn in the following turn. Thus, N3S2 and N3S1 not only succefully managed their turns, but also protected themselves from making a mistake in giving an exact number through the use of the above-mentioned VEs.

(8.5): from N3S1:125 to N3S2:132, 2 speakers over 8 turns.

N3S1:125：比如说，比如说 要 购物 的话，我 看 这 里 头，

　　　　　Bǐrúshuō, bǐrúshuō yào gòuwù dehuà, wǒ kàn zhè lǐ tóu,

　　　　(.) 我 看 安排 购物 了。

　　　　(.) wǒ kàn ānpái gòuwù le.

　　　　'For example, if I'd like to do some shopping, I see in here, I see shopping has been arranged. '

N3S2:126：有 几 个 购物。

　　　　　Yǒu jǐ gè gòuwù.

　　　　'There are several times for shopping.'

N3S1:127：三十 一 号，(overlap) 购物 了。

　　　　　Sānshí yī hào, (overlap) gòuwù le.

　　　　'On the thirty first, shopping is arranged.'

N3S2:128：(overlap) 对 对，但 不 是 很 多。

　　　　　(overlap) Duì duì, dàn bù shì hěn duō.

　　　　'Yes, correct, but there aren't so many.'

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N3S1:129：唉。

ài.

'Right'

N3S2:130：它 因为 有 一些 景点， 像 埃及 吧，它 有 一些 地区

Tā yīnwèi yǒu yīxiē jǐngdiǎn, xiàng āijí ba, tā yǒu yīxiē dìqū

就 是 你 想 安排 购物 它 也 没、没有 什么 地方 可以

jiù shì nǐ xiǎng ānpái gòuwù tā yě méi, méiyǒu shénme dìfāng kěyǐ

买 的。(overlap)

mǎi de. (overlap)

'Because there are some scenic spots like Egypt, there are some areas where you can not find any place to go to for shopping even if you want to arrange shopping.'

N3S1:131：(overlap) 主要 是 自然 景观。 (overlap)

(overlap) Zhǔyào shì zìrán jǐngguān. (overlap)

'They are mainly natural scenic places.'

N3S2:132：(overlap) 对 对。它 主要 是 以 自然 景观 为 主 的。

(overlap) Duì duì. Tā zhǔyào shì yǐ zìrán jǐngguān wéi zhǔ de.

'Right, that's right. It's mainly natural scenery-oriented.'

In Extract (8.5), N3S1 (client) discussed the issue of shopping with N3S2 (international travel agent). Employing the VEs *dehuà* (的话 'if') and *lǐ* (里 'in'), N3S1 opened and held his turn in turn 125. In the following turns, N3S2 assumed that N3S1 might not like shopping activities, so she intentionally utilized the VEs *jǐ*

(几, several), *hěn duō* (很 多 'so many'), *yīxiē* (一些 'some'), and *shénme* (什么 'whatever') to hold her turns and tone down or understate her opinions at the same time. Correspondingly, N3S1 employed the VE *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly') to take his turn. Then, N3S2 took her turn by repeating N3S1's VE *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly') in trun 132.

(8.6): from N4S2:16 to N4S1:19, 2 speakers over 4 turns.
N4S2:16：我 问 <u>一下</u> 来着，那边 的 现在 的 温度 是 多 高 啊？

Wǒ wèn <u>yīxià</u> láizhe, nàbiān de xiànzài de wēndù shì duō gāo a?

'I'd like to ask a <u>quick</u> question. How high is the temperature now there?'

N4S1:17：<u>嗯</u>，<u>将近</u> 三 十 度。

<u>En</u>, <u>jiāngjìn</u> sān shí dù.

'<u>Well</u>, it's <u>nearly</u> thirty degrees.'

N4S2:18：<u>那</u> <u>比较</u> 热。

<u>Nà</u> <u>bǐjiào</u> rè.

'<u>Well</u>, that's <u>quite</u> hot.'

N4S1:19：对。到 那边 你 都 带着 短袖 衣服，夏天 的 服装。

Duì. Dào nàbiān nǐ dōu dài zhe duǎnxiù yīfu, xiàtiān de fúzhuāng.

嗯，<u>最好</u> 还 带 把 雨伞。

<u>En</u>, <u>zuìhǎo</u> hái dài bǎ yǔsǎn.

'Right. Going there, you take short-sleeved clothes, summer clothes. <u>Well</u>, you<u>'d better</u> take an umbrella as well.'

By employing the VEs *yīxià* (一下 'a little in scale, scope or capability'), *en* (嗯 'well') and *jiāngjìn* (将近 'nearly') respectively, N4S2 (client) and N4S1 (domestic travel agent) opened their turns. Then, N4S2 took and held her turn using the VEs *na* (那 'well') and *bǐjiào* (比较 'quite'), and N4S1 held her turn by utilising the VEs *en* (嗯 'well') and *zuìhǎo* (最好 'had better'). Through the use of the above VEs, both N4S1 and N4S2 secured that the discussion could proceed smoothly and naturally with relevant and appropriate information provided. By doing so, both of them successfully spared their processing efforts and carried forward the negotiation.

(8.7): from N5S1:35 to N5S1:39, 2 speakers over 5 turns.

N5S1:35：CPA，应该， 是 CPA，对 不 对？应该 是 那个，嗯，对，

CPA, Yīnggāi, shì CPA, duì bù duì? Yīnggāi shì nàgè, en, duì,

是 那个、那种 考试。它 那个 连 那个 考试 费 都 含 在

shì nàgè, nèizhǒng kǎoshì. Tā nàgè lián nàgè kǎoshì fèi dōu hán zài

里面 了。那个 学费 应该 说 是 还 可以，但是 麦考里

lǐ miàn le. Nàgè xuéfèi yīnggāi shuō shì hái kěyǐ, dànshì màikǎolǐ

入学 条件 也 是 有 门槛儿 了，也 是 挺 高 的。你 知 不

rùxué tiáojiàn yě shì yǒu ménkǎnr le, yě shì tǐng gāo de. Nǐ zhī bù

知道 这个 读 研 雅思 应该 几 分儿？

zhīdao zhègè dú yán yǎsī yīnggāi jǐ fēnr?

'CPA, it should be CPA, shouldn't it? It should be that, well, right, it's that kind of test. Well, the test fee is included in it as well. Well, the tuition fee should be alright, but there is also a threshold for entering Macquarie, which is quite high as well. Do you know what IELTS score, well, the postgraduate programs require?'

N5S2:36：嗯，不 太 清楚。

En, bù tài qīngchu.

'Well, not <u>too</u> clear.'

N5S1:37：不 <u>太</u> <u>清楚</u> 啊。研究生 　　 <u>一般</u> 地 来说

Bù <u>tài</u> <u>qīngchu</u> a.　Yánjiūshēng <u>yībān</u> de láishuō

'Not <u>too</u> clear. <u>Generally</u>-speaking, postgraduate programs'

N5S2:38：(overlap) 六　点 五。

(overlap)　Liù diǎn wǔ.

'Six point five.'

N5S1:39：(overlap) 都　是，唉，对，都 是 六 点　五。不 <u>太</u> <u>清楚</u>，

(overlap)　Dōu shì,　ài,　duì,　dōu shì liù diǎn wǔ.　Bù <u>tài</u> <u>qīngchu</u>,

你还 是 <u>清楚</u>。　(laughs short) <u>一般</u> 地 都 是 六 点　五。那 有

nǐ　hái shì <u>qīngchu</u>. (laughs short) <u>Yībān</u> de dōu shì liù diǎn wǔ.　<u>Nà</u> yǒu

一点　就 是 说，写作　的 分儿 不 能　　低于 六 分儿。<u>如果</u>

yī diǎn jiù shì shuō, xiězuò de fēnr　bù néng dīyú　liù fēnr.　<u>Rúguǒ</u>

写作　的 分儿 要　低于 六 分儿 <u>的话</u>，会 给 你 加 <u>这个</u>

xiězuò de fēnr　yào dīyú　liù fēnr <u>dehuà</u>, huì gěi nǐ　jiā <u>zhège</u>

英语　课。我们 　　前 <u>几</u> 天 有　一 个 学生 　　去 悉尼 大学，他

Yīngyǔ kè.　Wǒmen qián <u>jǐ</u> tiān yǒu yī gè　xuésheng qù xīní dàxué,　tā

还 是 理工　大学 <u>那个</u>，(0.2) 就 是 理工　　大学 成人　　学院

hái shì lǐgōng dàxué <u>nàgè</u>,　(0.2) jiù shì lǐgōng dàxué chéngrén xuéyuàn

的。(overlap) 他 去

de.　(overlap) Tā qù

'All require, yes, right, six point five. Not <u>too</u> clear, actually you are <u>clear</u>.
It's <u>generally</u> six point five. <u>Well</u>, there is one point that the writing score
can't be lower than six points. <u>If</u> the writing score is lower than six points,

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an English class, <u>well</u>, will be added for you. <u>Several</u> days ago, we received a student who is going to Sydney University, and he is from the University of Technology, <u>well</u>, the Adults' College of the University of Technology'

As shown in Extract (8.7), in turn 35, N5S1 (overseas education agent) elicited her question through the use of the VEs *lǐ* (里 'in') and *tǐng* (挺 'quite') and held her turn using the VEs *en* (嗯 'well'), *nàgè* (那个 'well') and *zhègè* (这个 'well'). By employing the VEs *en* (嗯 'well'), *tài* (太 'too') and *qīngchu* (清楚 'clear'), N5S2 (client) took her turn and indicated her uncertainty. Then in turn 37, N5S1 continued her turn by repeating N5S2's VEs *tài* (太 'too') and *qīngchu* (清楚 'clear'), and yielded her turn utilizing the VE *yībān* (一般 'generally'). In the following turn, N5S1 took and held her turn by repeating N5S2's VEs *tài* (太 'too') and *qīngchu* (清楚 'clear'), and using the VEs *yībān* (一般 'generally'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well'), and *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), *dehuà* (的话 'if'), *zhègè* (这个 'well') and *jǐ* (几 'several'). Through the employment of these VEs in turn 39, N5S1 evaded and expressed her uncertainty; meanwhile, in this way, she also effectively protected herself from being proved wrong at the later stage.

(8.8) from N5S2:242 to N5S2:248, 2 speakers over 7 turns.

N5S2:242：嗯，<u>现在</u> <u>主要</u> 是 澳大利亚 那边 人口 <u>大约</u> 是 多少？

En, xiànzài zhǔyào shì Aòdàlìyà nàbiān rénkǒu dàyuē shì duōshao?

好 <u>不好</u> 找 工作？

Hǎo bù hǎo zhǎo gōngzuò?

'<u>Well</u>, <u>mainly</u>, <u>approximately</u> how many people are there in Australia <u>now</u>? Is it <u>easy</u> to find a job?'

N5S1:243：嗯，那个 地方 工作。 前 <u>几</u> 天 看 网上， <u>这个</u>

En, nàgè dìfāng gōngzuò. Qián jǐ tiān kàn wǎngshàng, zhègè

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澳大利亚 的 失业 率 是 百分之 三。所以 倒 过来 说，
Aòdàlìyà de shīyè lù shì bǎifēnzhī sān. Suǒyǐ dǎo guòlái shuō,
也 就 说 就业 率 很 高，(0.2) <u>明白</u> 吧？
yě jiù shuō jiùyè lù hěn gāo, (0.2) <u>míngbai</u> ba?

'<u>Well</u>, the jobs there. <u>Several</u> days ago I saw on the internet, <u>well</u>, the unemployment rate in Australia was three percent. Therefore, oppositely, it shows that the employment rate is very high. Are you <u>clear</u>?'

N5S2:244：它 那儿、它 那儿 人口 <u>大约</u> 有 多少？
Tā nàr, tā nàr rénkǒu <u>dàyuē</u> yǒu duōshao?

'<u>Approximately</u> how many people are there in Australia?'

N5S1:245：应该 是 <u>几</u> 千万 吧？
Yīnggāi shì <u>jǐ</u> qiānwàn ba?

'It should be <u>several</u> tens of million, shouldn't it?'

N5S2:246：<u>几</u> 千万。
<u>Jǐ</u> qiānwàn.

'<u>Several</u> tens of million.'

N5S1:247：嗯，<u>几</u> 千万。 <u>四 千 多 万，还是 六 千 多 万</u>？
En, <u>jǐ</u> qiānwàn. <u>Sì qiān duō wàn, háishì liù qiān duō wàn</u>?
我 忘 了。
Wǒ wàng le.

'Yes, <u>several</u> tens of million. Is it <u>over forty million or sixty million</u>? I forgot.'

N5S2:248：嗯，(0.2) 好 吧。那，行。那 谢谢 王 老师。

<u>En</u>, (0.2) hǎo ba. <u>Nà</u>, xíng. <u>Nà</u> xièxie wáng lǎoshī.

'<u>Well</u>, alright. <u>Well</u>, it's Ok then. <u>Well</u>, thanks, Teacher Wang.'

As revealed in Extract (8.8), utilising the VEs *en* (嗯 'well'), *xiànzài* (现在 'now'), *zhǔyào* (主要 'mainly'), *dàyuē* (大约 'approximately'), and *hǎobùhǎo* (好不好 'easy or not'), N5S2 (client) opened and held her turn, and elicited her questions about the population and job market in Australia in turn 242. Then, N5S1 (overseas education agent) took and held her turn using the VEs *en* (嗯 'well'), *jǐ* (几 'several') and *zhège* (这个 'well'), and made her confirming question by the VE *míngbai* (明白 'clear'). In turn 244, N5S2 continued her turn by repeating the VE *dàyuē* (大约 'approximately') and kept asking the population question. In the following turns, both N5S1 and N5S2 employed the VE *jǐ* (几 'several') to take their turns, and finally N5S2 yielded her turn through the employment of the VEs *en* (嗯 'well') and *nà* (那 'well'). In this segment, N5S1 used VL to cover her lack of knowledge of Australia. Another possibility is that she knew the answer, but for some reason she did not want to inform the client.

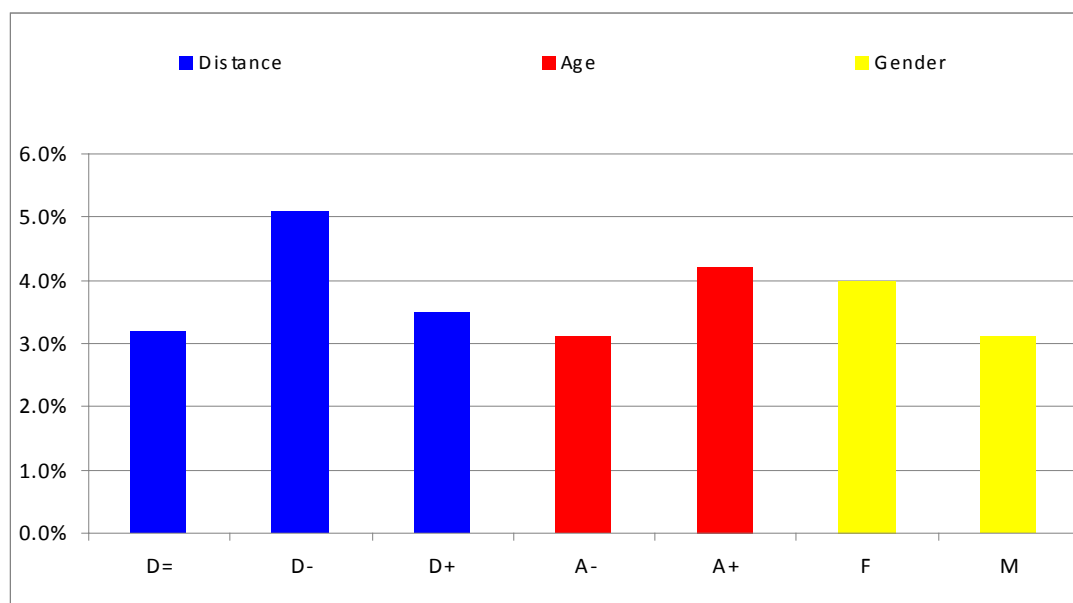## 8.1.2   Summary of sequential organization

Figure 8.1: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn-opening
Note: D=: acquaintances, D-: friends, D+: strangers; A-: younger (below 45 years old), A+: older (45 years old and above); F: Female, M: male. The same applies to the following figures.

As demonstrated in Figure 8.1, VL as a vehicle in turn-opening was most frequently employed by the friends (D-), then by the strangers (D+), and least by the acquaintances (D=). This shows that distance factor had an influence on the choice of VL for turn-opening. It seems that the factor of distance made the most impact among the three factors since there is greater discrepancy between the friends and the acquaintances, and between the friends and the strangers. The reason behind this might be that the negotiators who know each other feel less stressed to use VL to open their turns as they are familiar with each other. Age and gender factors had an impact on this as well in that the older (A+) negotiators and the female negotiators employed more VL for turn-opening purpose than the younger (A-) negotiators and the male negotiators, which implies in Chinese business negotiations, older negotiators and females tend to be more skilled in using VL to start their turns.
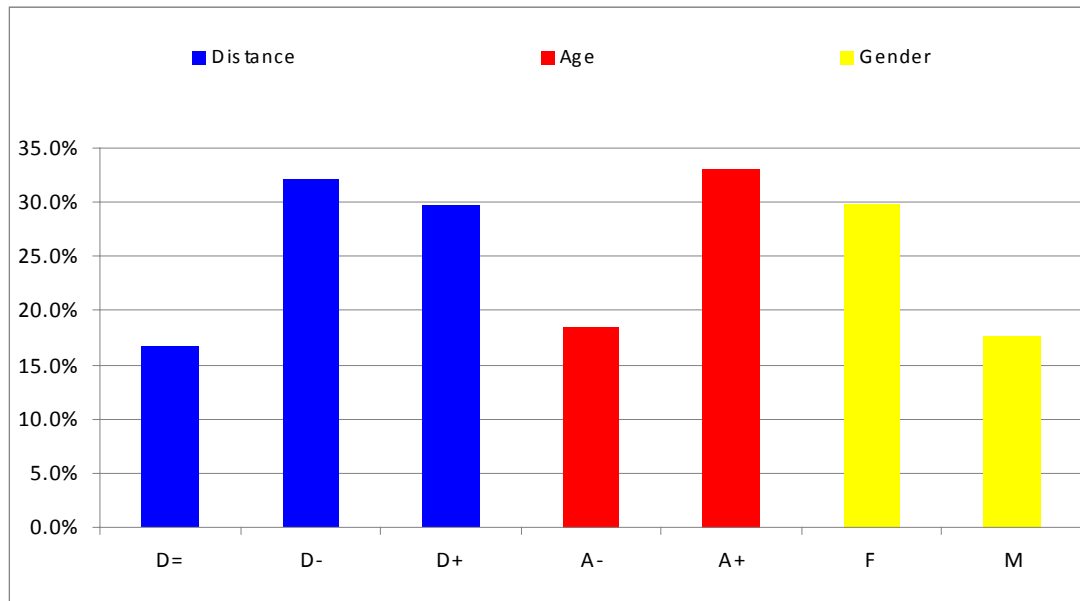
Figure 8.2: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn-holding

Figure 8.2 shows that among the acquaintances (D=) VL for turn-holding was not needed as much as between the friends (D-) and the strangers (D+). This indicates that the factor of distance had an impact on the use of VL for turn-holding. The possibility is that the familiarity and intimacy might make the friends relaxed and be better understood by each other when they employed VL to hold their turns. On the contrary, the unfamiliarity could make the strangers more tense and stressed, which may lead the strangers to use VL to hold their turns. Age and gender factors did have an influence on the choice of VL for turn-holding as well in that the older (A+) negotiators and the female negotiators utilized VL for turn-holding more than the younger (A-) negotiators and the male negotiators, which suggests that older negotiators and female negotiators are better and more confident in applying VL in holding their turns. Overall, it seems that there is greater discrepancy among all the three factors.
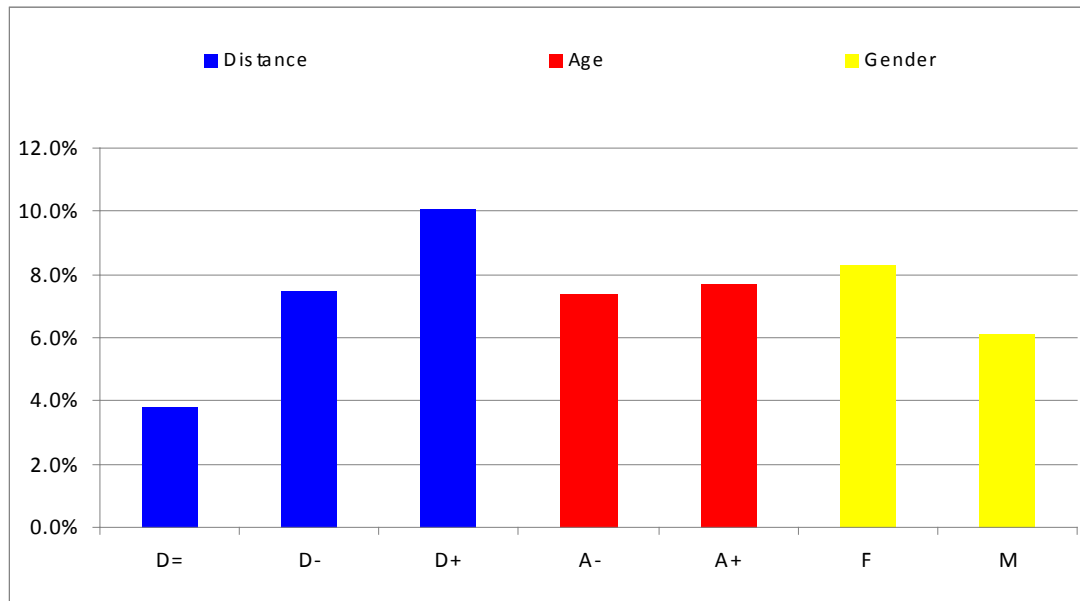
Figure 8.3: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn-taking

As indicated in Figure 8.3, VL for turn-taking was most employed by the strangers (D+), then by the friends (D-) and least utilized by the acquaintances (D=). This shows that the factor of distance also had an influence here. It seems that it made the biggest impact among the three factors. The possible reason for the strangers to most use VL for taking turns is that they might be more polite, careful and proactive in Chinese business negotiations. As for the friends, it could be a reflection of their friendliness and informality. As for the reason that the acquaintances used the least VL here, it could be that they do not need to be polite or informal towards each other, so simply no motivation for the acquaintance group to make the effort. The fact that the females used more VL for this purpose than the males demonstrates that gender factor did have an influence on the choice of VL for turn-taking. It can be speculated that in Chinese business negotiations, the female negotiators could be more considerate and polite in taking their turns. However, it is noticed that the age factor's impact is limited, implying that the older (A+) and the younger (A-) use this VL strategy in a similar fashion, although the former used slightly more VL than the latter.
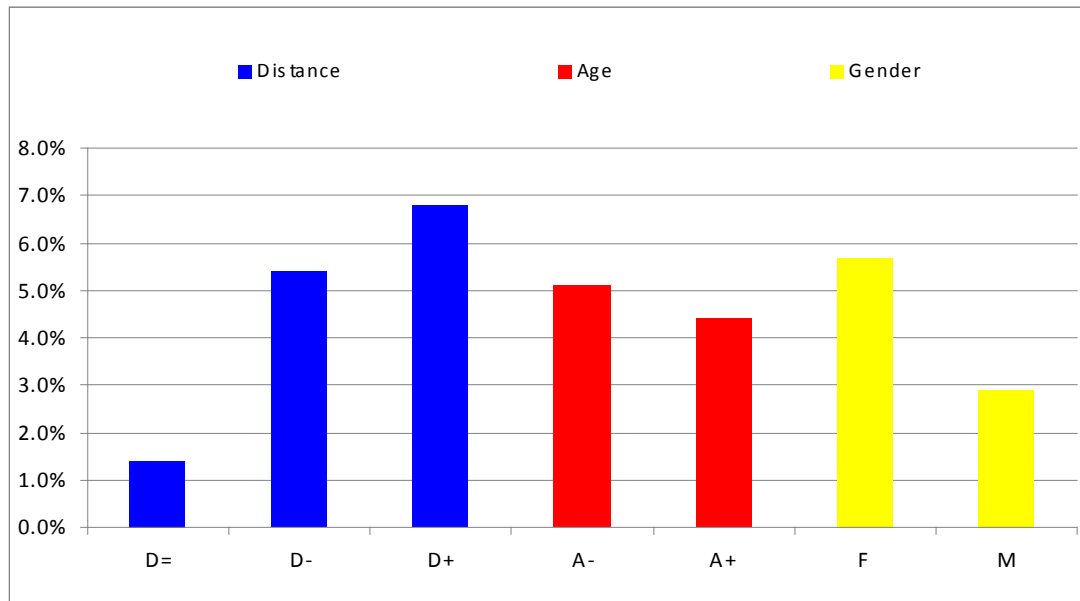
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Figure 8.4: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn-yielding

As shown in Figure 8.4, VL for turn-yielding was most used by the strangers (D+), then by the friends (D-), and least utilized by the acquaintances (D=). This indicates that the factor of distance did have an overt influence here, and made more impact among the three factors. It could be interpreted that in Chinese business negotiations, strangers would be more mindful about yielding their turns or offering their turns so that they could appropriately show their politeness and respect. As for friends, it could be that they might often have to release their turns under pressure or for a strategic purpose since they know each other so well. Both age and gender factors had an impact on the choice of VL for turn-yielding as well, although the impact is of a less extent to the age group. The younger (A-) negotiators and the females employed more VL in yielding their turns than the older (A+) negotiators and the males. It seems to suggest that younger negotiators might be more polite, but less experienced and confident in managing their turns; that female negotiators might sometimes face more pressure to yield or they were able to more strategically yield their turns in the negotiations by employing VL.

8.2 Sequential strategies through the employment of VL

As Sacks *et al.* (1974) state, another important concept of CA is the examination of the adjacency pair that is required to understand sequencing of conversations. An adjacency pair is uttered by separate speakers; the first one initiates an exchange that produces certain expectations and constrains the possibilities of the second speaker's response. Examples of the adjacency pair are greeting-greeting, question-answer, and request-acceptance. They also propose a simple set of rules which describe how turns come to be allocated at transition-relevance places (places where turn-transfer may be initiated). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), there are two main rules, with the first one being subdivided into three. At the initial transition-relevance place of a turn:

Rule One	a) If the current speaker has identified, or selected, a particular next speaker, then that speaker should take a turn at that place.
	b) If no such selection has been made, then any next speaker may (but need not) self-select at that point. If self-selection occurs, then first speaker has the right to the turn.
	c) If no next speaker has been selected, then alternatively the current speaker may, but need not, continue talking with another turn-constructional unit, unless another speaker has self-selected, in which case that speaker gains the right to the turn.
Rule Two	Whichever option has operated, then rules 1a-c come into play again for the next transition-relevance place.

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) note that the rules are intended as descriptions of the practices which participants display an orientation to in actual, local occasions of turn-taking. Although they are different from the more prescriptive rules of grammar, as with those rules it is not necessary for speakers to 'know' these rules in any discursive sense. It is more accurate to say that they are instantiated and therefore reproduced on each concrete occasion of talk-in-interaction. The parts of adjacency pairs do not need to be strictly adjacent. There are systematic insertions that can legitimately come between first and second pair parts. Some classes of utterances are

conventionally paired such that, on the production of a first pair part, the second part becomes relevant and remains so even if it is not produced in the next serial turn.

According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), adjacency pairs thus constitute a powerful normative framework for the assessment of interlocutors' actions and motives by producers of first parts. This shows that talk-in-interaction is not just a matter of taking turns but is a matter of accomplishing actions. Within this framework, failure (or perceived failure) to take a turn in the appropriate place can itself be interpreted as accomplishing some type of action. Close monitoring is needed to identify when an   appropriate juncture to take a turn occurs; by the same token, failure to take a turn when one is 'required' to can also be treated as an accountable action. In Chinese business negotiations, sequential strategies through the employment of VL can be summarized as in Table 8.2 below:

Table 8.2: Types of sequential strategies through the use of VL

Types	Descriptions and Functions
Turn change	A turn is brought about
Turn resumption	An interrupted turn is continued later on.
Topic shift	What people talk about and pay attention to is shifted relatively suddenly once for all thoroughly.
Topic drift	What people talk about is gradually alternated with effort.

8.2.1 Analysis of sequential strategies

(8.9): from N1S3:73 to N1S1:76, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N1S3:73：我 觉得 质 保 金 也 是，质 保 金 就 是 我们   公司

　　　　Wǒ juéde zhì bǎo jīn yě shì，zhì bǎo jīn jiù shì wǒmen gōngsī

　　　　如果 按照　(overlap)

　　　　rúguǒ ànzhào (overlap)

　　　　'I think the quality assurance deposit is also, the quality assurance deposit is, if our company, according to'

N1S1:74：通常 　　都 是 这么 做 的。不 要 因为 你 这个 完
　　　　　Tōngcháng dōu shì zhème zuò de.　　Bù yào yīnwèi nǐ zhège wán

　　　　了 就 改，看见 　　没有。
　　　　le jiù gǎi,　kànjiàn méiyǒu.

　　　　'Usually it's done like this. Don't change it, well, because of you. Do you

　　　　see it?'

N1S3:75：不 好 办。

　　　　Bù hǎo bàn.

　　　　'Not easy to do it.'

N1S1:76：那 就 不 好 说 　了，对 不 对？

　　　　Nà jiù bù hǎo shuō le,　duì bù duì?

　　　　'Well, it will be hard to explain, won't it?'

(8.10): from N3S2:168 to N3S2:174, 2 speakers over 7 turns.

N3S2:168：或者 　是 你 带 那种 　　就 是 国际 的 维萨 卡 、国际 卡。

　　　　Huòzhě shì nǐ dài nèizhǒng jiù shì guójì de wéisà kǎ,　guójì kǎ.

　　　　'Or you take, well, international Visa Card, international Card.'

N3S1:169：嗯。

　　　　En.

　　　　'Ok.'

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N3S2:170：嗯，过去 直接 刷 卡 消费 也 可以。

En，guòqù zhíjiē shuā kǎ xiāofèi yě kěyǐ.

'Well, it will also be all right to directly swipe your card for purchases there.'

N3S1:171：它 那个 大 城市 行 。一般 的 小 商店 可以 吗？

Tā nàgè dà chéngshì xíng. Yībān de xiǎo shāngdiàn kěyǐ ma?

'It will be Ok in big cities. Will it be alright in ordinary small shops?

N3S2:172：嗯 。

En.

'Well.'

N3S1:173：大 商店 可以 。

Dà shāngdiàn kěyǐ.

'It will be alright in big stores.'

N3S2:174：大 的 商店 都 可以，小 的 店 不 行。

Dà de shāngdiàn dōu kěyǐ, xiǎo de diàn bù xíng.

'It will be alright in big stores, but not in small shops.'

As shown in Extract (8.9), by the VEs *juéde* (觉得 'feel'), *rúguǒ* (如果 'if'), *tōngcháng* (通常 'usually'), *bùhǎo* (不好 'not easy') and *nà* (那 'well'), were the turns naturally changed between N1S3 (negotiator) and N1S1 (leading negotiator of

the same party); similarly, as in Extract (8.10), N3S1 (client) and N3S2 (international travel agent) smoothly changed their turns as well by using the VE *en* (嗯 'well').

(8.11): from N5S1:107 to N5S2:110, 2 peakers over 4 turns,

from N5S1:127 to N5S2:130, 2 speakers over 4 turns.

N5S1:107：那 你 要 想 出国 留学，我 还 想   问 一个 问题

Nà nǐ yào xiǎng chūguó liúxué, wǒ hái xiǎng wèn yī gè wèntí

呢 。你 父母 给 你 准备   多少   资金?

ne.   Nǐ fùmǔ gěi nǐ zhǔnbèi duōshao zījīn?

N5S2:108：嗯，三 、 四十 万 吧。

En，sān   sìshí wàn ba.

N5S1:109：三 、 四十 万?

Sān   sìshí wàn?

N5S2:110：嗯。

En.

【…】

N5S1:127：嗯，你 刚才   说 的 这个 四十 万 吧。四十 万   应该

 En，nǐ gāngcái shuō de zhège sìshí wàn ba. Sìshí wàn yīnggāi

是 够 了。

shì gòu le.

'Well, it's, well, four hundred thousand you said just now. Four hundred thousand should be enough.'

N5S2:128：差不多。

Chàbùduō.

'Almost.'

N5S1:129：嗯，应该 是 够 了。

En, yīnggāi shì gòu le.

'Well, should be enough.'

N5S2:130：(overlap) 够 了。

(overlap) Gòu le.

'Enough.'

As indicated in Extract (8.11), in turn 127 N5S1 (overseas education agent) smoothly resumed her turn and returned to the previous topic of the total amount of money discussed earlier in turns 107, 108, 109 and 110 by utilizing the VEs *en* (嗯 'well'), *gāngcái* (刚才 'just now') and *zhègè* (这个 'well'). Then N5S1 and N5S2 (client) continued to keep their sequences flowing naturally and finished up this topic through the effective employment of the VEs *chàbùduō* (差不多 'almost'), *en* (嗯 'well') and *gòu* (够 'enough').

(8.12): from N5S1:159 to N5S2:166, 2 speakers over 8 turns.

N5S1:159：你，(.) 你 父亲 在 什么 单位 工作？

Nǐ, (.) nǐ fùqin zài shénme dānwèi gōngzuò?

'Where does your father work?'

N5S2:160：嗯，海事 大学。

En, hǎishì dàxué.

'Well, Maritime University.'

N5S1:161：海事　大学。教授，　　还是　这个　领导？

Hǎishì dàxué.　Jiàoshòu, háishì zhègè lǐngdǎo?

‘Maritime University. Is he a professor or, <u>well</u>, a leader?’

N5S2:162：<u>嗯</u>，不　是。

<u>En</u>,　bù shì.

‘<u>Well</u>, he isn’t.’

N5S1:163：不　是　啊。不　是　领导　　还是　不　是　教授　　呢？

Bù shì　a.　Bù shì lǐngdǎo háishì　bù shì jiàoshòu ne?

‘He isn’t. Isn’t he a professor or a leader?’

N5S2:164：<u>嗯</u>，不　是　领导。

<u>En</u>,　bù shì lǐngdǎo.

‘<u>Well</u>, he isn’t a leader.’

N5S1:165：嗯，不 是 领导　 是 教授。　<u>那么</u>　就 说，　<u>那个</u>，　你

En,　bù shì lǐngdǎo shì jiàoshòu. <u>Nàme</u> jiù shuō, <u>nàgè</u>,　　nǐ

<u>这个</u>　父母 <u>这个</u>　工作　　方面　　的 经济 担保　金 应该

<u>zhègè</u>　fùmǔ <u>zhègè</u> gōngzuò　fāngmiàn de　jīngjì dānbǎo jīn yīnggāi

是 没　有　 问题 的。他 的 工作　　单位　要　出具 一些 工作

shì méi yǒu　 wèntí de.　Tā de gōngzuò dānwèi yào chūjù yīxiē gōngzuò

证明。　　　等　　到你考虑好 了，你 过来　的 时候，我　会 给

zhèngmíng. Děng dào nǐ kǎolǜ hǎo le,　nǐ　guòlái de shíhou, wǒ huì gěi

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你 一个 做 材料 的 清单， 都 需要 准备 什么 材料。

nǐ yī gè zuò cáiliao de qīngdān, dōu xūyào zhǔnbèi shénme cáiliao.

'Well, he isn't a leader, but a professor. Well, that's to say, well, there shouldn't be a problem with the financial support deposit, well, which is related to your parents' work. His work unit will issue some working certificates. After you think it over and are ready to go ahead, I will give you a document list regarding what documents you need to prepare when you come over.'

N5S2:166：嗯。

En.

'All right'

As presented in Extract (8.12), using the VE *en* (嗯 'well') and a vague negative answer (unspecified negation, did not make it clear whether her father was not a boss or not a professor) in turn 162, N5S2 (client) held her turn and tried to evade answering N5S1's (overseas education agent) question; while N5S1 took her turn by repeating N5S2's vague negative answer and kept asking N5S2 for a more specific question of choice in the negative form. Then N5S2 had to give a more specific negative answer out of two choices in the following turn still employing the same VE *en* (嗯 'well') to take and hold her turn, and N5S1 continued her turn in the same way of utilizing the same VE *en* (嗯 'well') and repeating N5S2's specific negative answer. After that, N5S1 shifted the topic of N5S2's father's job to the topic of the financial support from N5S2's parents by utilising the VEs *nàme* (那么 'well'), *nàgè* (那个 'well') and *zhègè* (这个 'well').

(8.13): from N2S1:33 to N2S2:40, 2 speakers over 8 turns.

N2S1:33：那 你 设计 的 这个 计划书，你 给 我 按照 我 这个

Nà nǐ shèjì de zhègè jìhuàshū, nǐ gěi wǒ ànzhào wǒ zhègè

量体裁衣 了 啊，给 我 专门 设计 了 个 计划书，因为

liángtǐcáiyī le a, gěi wǒ zhuānmén shèjì le gè jìhuàshū, yīnwèi

上次 在 那个 (0.1) 财富 论坛 那个 座谈会 上， 啊, 对 不 对。

shàngcì zài nàgè (0.1) cáifù lùntán nàgè zuòtánhuì shàng, a , duì bù duì.

'Well, the proposal you designed was tailored by you according to my; well, you specially designed a proposal for me because last time, well in that Fortune Forum, ah, right?'

N2S2:34：你 <u>看 一看</u>，你 先 <u>看 一看</u>。(overlap)

Nǐ <u>kàn yī kàn</u>, nǐ xiān <u>kàn yī kàn</u>.(overlap)

'Have a look, you <u>have a look</u> first.'

N2S1:35：(overlap) 但是 <u>这</u>、<u>这</u>、<u>这个</u> (overlap)

(overlap) Dànshì <u>zhè</u>, <u>zhè</u>, <u>zhègè</u> (overlap)

'But <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>, <u>well</u>'

N2S2:36：(overlap) <u>看看</u> 有 什么 异议。

(overlap) <u>Kànkàn</u> yǒu shénme yìyì.

'<u>Have a look</u>, and see what different opinions you have.'

N2S1:37：但是 <u>这个</u> 呢，问题 是，(.) 咱 还得 <u>实话</u> 实说 了。

Dànshì <u>zhègè</u> ne, wèntí shì, (.) zán hái děi <u>shí huà</u> shí shuō le.

‘But, well, the problem is; let’s tell the truth.’

N2S2:38：对、对。(both laugh a little)

Duì, duì. (both laugh a little)

‘Right, that’s right.’

N2S1:39：实话 实说， 也 就 是，就假如 说 我 现在 每 年

Shí huà shí shuō，yě jiù shì，jiù jiǎrú shuō wǒ xiànzài měi nián

拿 十万， 对 不 对，那 要是 (.) 交费 期 是 十 年，那 实际就

ná shíwàn, duì bù duì, nà yàoshi (.) jiāofèi qī shì shí nián, nà shíjì jiù

是 一 百万。

shì yī bǎiwàn.

‘To tell the truth, i.e., if I now pay one hundred thousand, right, well, in case the paying period is ten years, well, actually it is one million.’

N2S2:40：一 百万。

Yī bǎiwàn.

‘One million.’

As indicated in Extract (8.13), N2S2 (insurance agent) tried to drift from N2S1’s (client) topic back to her pre-prepared proposal by using the VEs *kàn yī kàn* (看 一 看 ‘have a look’) and *kànkàn* (看看 ‘have a look’). Whereas, employing the VEs *zhè/zhège* (这/这个 ‘well/then’), *ne* (呢 ‘well’), *nà* (那 ‘well’), *shíhuà* (实话 ‘the truth’), *jiǎrú* (假如 ‘if’) and *yàoshi* (要是 ‘in case’), N2S1 also did her best to successfully drift from N2S2’s topic in order not to directly face N2S2’s request.

(8.14): from N3S2:132 to N3S1:133, 2 speakers over 2 turns.

N3S2:132：(overlap) 对　对。它 主要　是 以 自然 景观　　为　主　的。

　　　　　(overlap) Duì duì.　Tā zhǔyào shì yǐ zìrán jǐngguān wéi zhǔ de.

　　　　　'Right, that's right. It's mainly natural scenery-oriented.'

N3S1:133：<u>那么</u> 它 的 <u>这个</u>，我们　去 了 <u>这个</u>。比如说，换　它

　　　　　<u>Nàme</u> tā de <u>zhège</u>,　wǒmen qù le <u>zhège</u>. Bǐrúshuō, huàn tā

　　　　　的 币 怎么　换？　是 旅行社　　跟 着 换　还是、还是 (0.1)

　　　　　de bì zěnme huàn? Shì lǚxíngshè gēn zhe huàn háishì, háishì (0.1)

　　　　　'<u>Well then</u>, its, <u>well</u>, when we go, <u>well</u>. If we want to change their money,

　　　　　how can we exchange money? Is it the travel agency that will help

　　　　　exchange, or'

As revealed in Extract (8.14), in turn 133, N3S1 (client) smoothly drifted from the topic of sceneries to another topic (currency exchange) by utilizing the VEs *nàme* (那么 'well then') and *zhègè* (这个 'well').

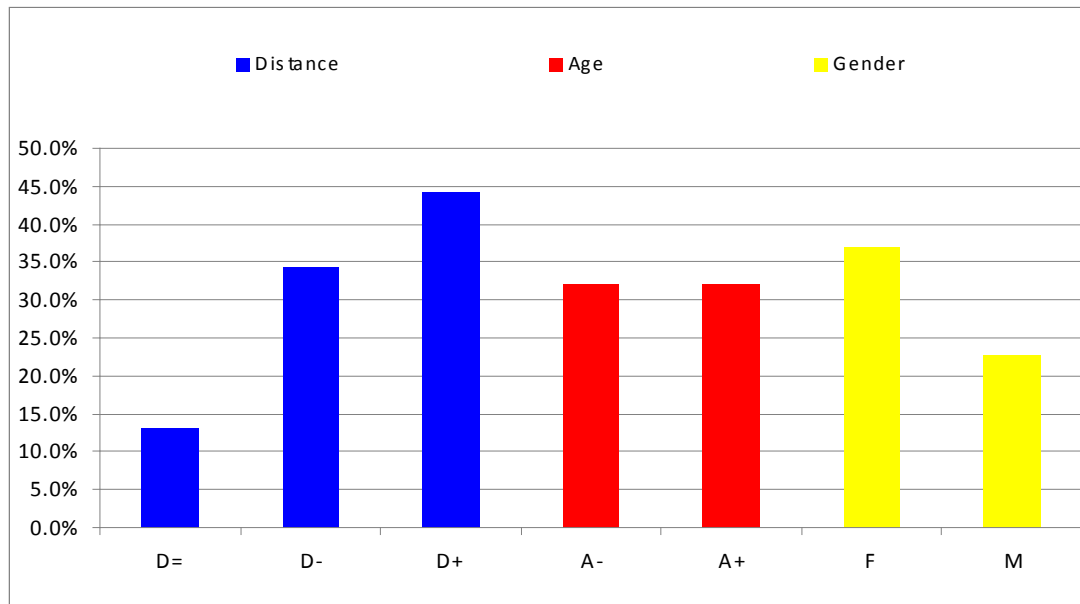## 8.2.2 Summary of sequential strategies

Figure 8.5: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn change

As demonstrated in Figure 8.5, the acquaintances (D=) employed VL the least for turn change. The strangers (D+) utilized it the most, and then the friends (D-). It appears that the factor of distance made the biggest impact among the three factors. The possible reason for the strangers to most use VL to bring about their turns could be that the negotiators who do not know each other are more polite and self-effacing when they change their turns, so as to leave their business contacts a good impression and to lay a solid foundation for building a closer collaborative partnership.

It appears that the factor of age is not relevant here in that both the younger (A-) negotiators and the older (A+) negotiators employed the same rate of VL for turn change. However, the factor of gender did have an impact on the choice of VL for this purpose, as the female negotiators utilized it more than the males. This suggests that female negotiators are more courteous and better at using VL to change their turns, which would help them to make a more comfortable and smooth sequential flow in the negotiation.
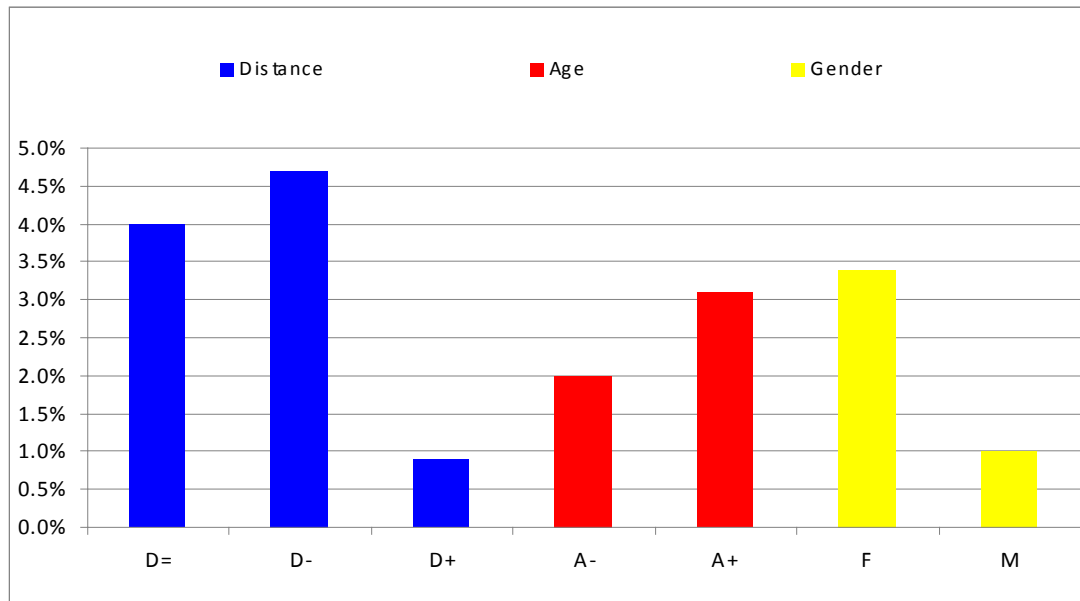
Figure 8.6: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for turn resumption

As shown in Figure 8.6, VL for turn resumption was most utilized by the friends (D-), then by the acquaintances (D=), and least by the strangers (D+). It seems that the factor of distance had the greatest influence among the three factors. The reason for this phenomenon might be that in Chinese business negotiations, acquaintances and friends may feel more relaxed or light-hearted in interaction, and it could be easier for them to interrupt each other's turns and then resume later on through the employment of VL, as they are so familiar with each other. The fact that the older (A+) negotiators and the females employed such VEs more than the younger (A-) ones and the males indicates that age and gender factors did have an influence on the choice of VL for turn resumption. This implies that older negotiators and females are more likely to create more familiar and friendly atmosphere to resume their turns easily.
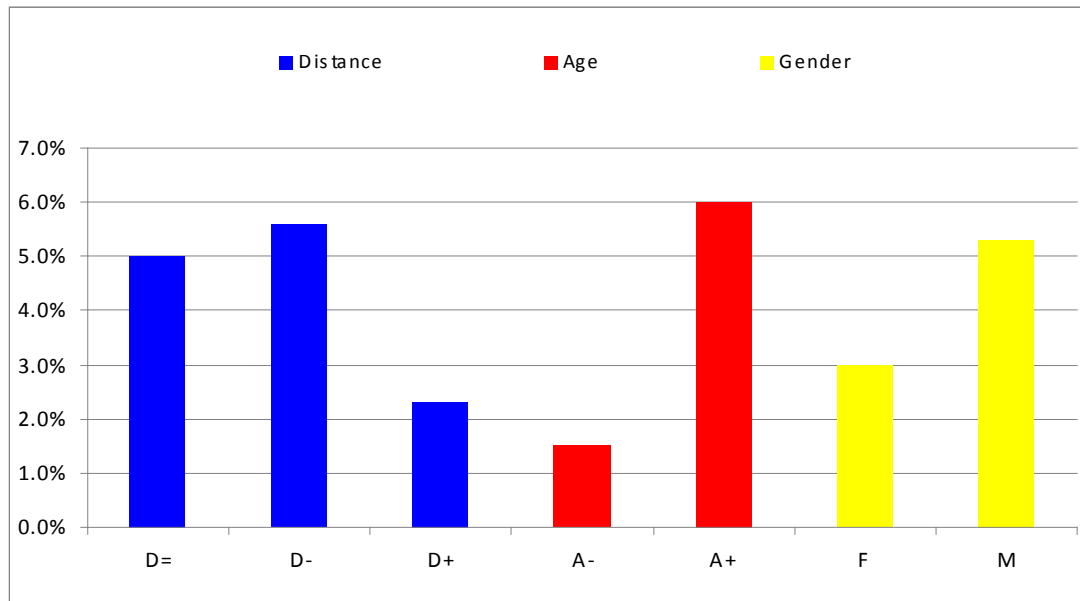
Figure 8.7: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for topic shift

As indicated in Figure 8.7, the friends (D-) used most VL for topic shift, the acquaintances (D=) second most and the strangers (D+) least used it. This shows that distance factor had an influence on the choice of VL for topic shift. It is speculated that in Chinese business negotiations, it could be more simple and comfortable for friends and acquaintances to use VL to shift topics in that they are more aware of each other's background and share more common understandings. It appears that age and gender factors also had an impact on the choice of VL for topic shift, as the older (A+) negotiators and the males employed more VL for this purpose than the younger (A-) ones and the females. Among the three factors, the factor of age made the biggest impact in that there is greater discrepancy between the younger and the older. This seems to suggest that older negotiators and males might be more courteous and skilled in shifting topics in the negotiations.
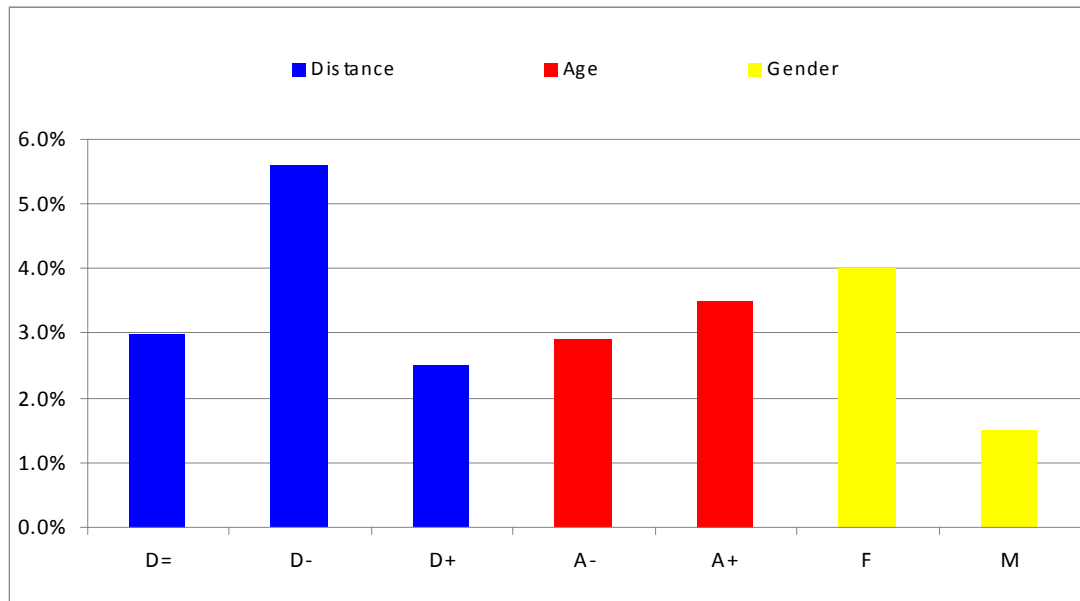
Figure 8.8: Three factors' influence on the use of VL for topic drift

As revealed in Figure 8.8, VL for topic drift was most employed by the friends (D-), then by the acquaintances (D=), and least by the strangers (D+). It appears that the factor of distance had the greatest influence among the three factors. The speculation is that in Chinese business negotiations, friends are more likely to drift their topics during the interaction, which would have a low possibility of being misunderstood or being treated as impolite due to the intimacy and familiarity among friends. The older (A+) negotiators and the females utilized more VL for topic drift than the younger (A-) negotiators and the males. This shows that age and gender factors did have an impact on the use of VL for topic drift. It implies that older negotiators and females are more likely to skip the current topic and generate a new one during the negotiating process and they are more skilled to use VL to carry out the tasks.

8.3 Summarising remarks

The findings of sequential analysis of VL can be summarised as in Table 8.3 below:

Table 8.3: Top six most used VEs as sequential organizing strategies

VEs	*zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then')	*nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then')	*en* (嗯 'well')	*ne* (呢 'well')	*a* (啊 'well')	*shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever/ stuff like that')
Frequency	390	385	178	160	109	95
Parts of Speech	Pronoun	Pronoun	Auxiliary word	Auxiliary word	Auxiliary word	Pronoun

Table 8.3 shows that VEs *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well'), *ne*(呢 'well'), *a* (啊 'well') and *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever') were most used VEs in sequential flow and turn management. Jucker *et al.* (2003) argue that VEs may be more effective than precise ones, carrying more relevant contextual implications, the speaker's attitude, expectations, assumptions, beliefs, the degree of commitment, and serving social functions and softening implicit criticisms. As Extracts (8.1) to (8.8) illustrate, by employing VL, the negotiators successfully negotiated their common ground and managed their turns. This suggests that VL also plays an indispensable and effective role in unfolding negotiations and organizing sequences in Chinese business negotiations.
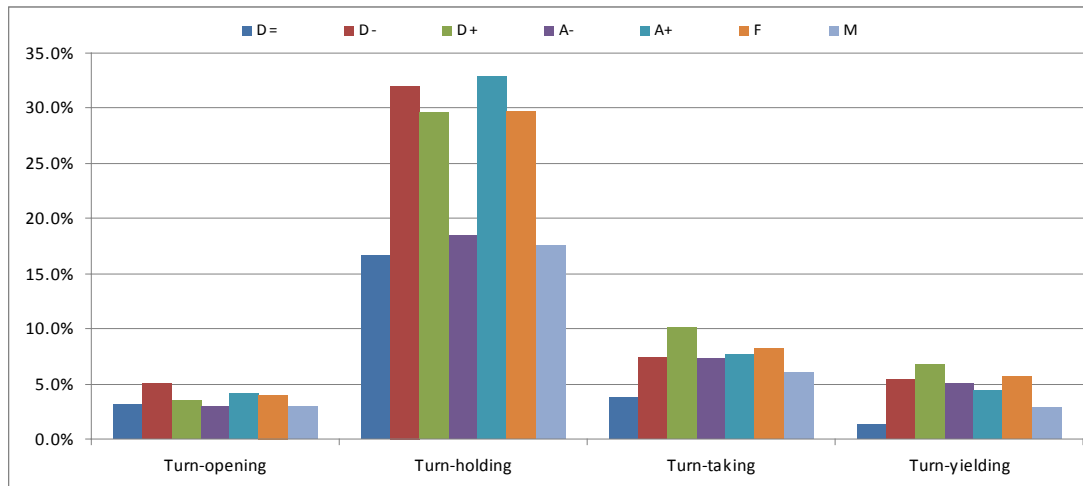
Figure 8.9: Three factors' influence on VL for sequential organization

As shown in figure 8.9, VL was used for turn-holding more than for any other three types, and was least used for turn-opening. The factor of distance had an impact on all four turn types. Particularly, it appears that in Chinese business negotiations, VL for turn-holding is not only frequently used by the negotiators who are friends, but also by those who do not know each other. The use of such VEs plays a dominant role in facilitating negotiators to hold their turns during negotiating process, which is conducive to the smooth progress and continuity of negotiations. In the order of most to least, VL for turn-opening and turn-holding was utilized between the negotiators who were friends, strangers and acquaintances; VL for turn-taking and turn-yielding was employed between the negotiators who were strangers, friends and acquaintances. Prominently, the negotiators who were acquaintances least used VL for all four turn types, which implies that in Chinese business negotiations, negotiators who know each other as acquaintances might feel no need to make much effort to open and hold turns using VL because they are neither friends (informal) nor strangers (polite); while negotiators who do not know each other would be more cautious and polite in taking and yielding their turns through VL.

Similarly, both age and gender factors had an influence on the choice of VL for almost all of the four turn types discussed above. The older negotiators employed VL more than the younger ones for turn-opening and turn-holding, while the younger

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negotiators used more VL for turn-yielding than the older ones. The only exception is that both age groups used a similar rate of VL for turn-taking, although there is a very small difference there. The female negotiators utilized VL more than the males for all four turn types. This indicates that older negotiators and female negotiators are more skilled and confident in applying VL as a vehicle in sequential organization in Chinese business negotiations.

It has also been reflected in Extracts (8.9) to (8.14) that VL could be employed as strategies of turn change, turn resumption, topic shift and topic drift. Particularly, in this data it was used more and served better as a strategy of turn change, being used 227 times.
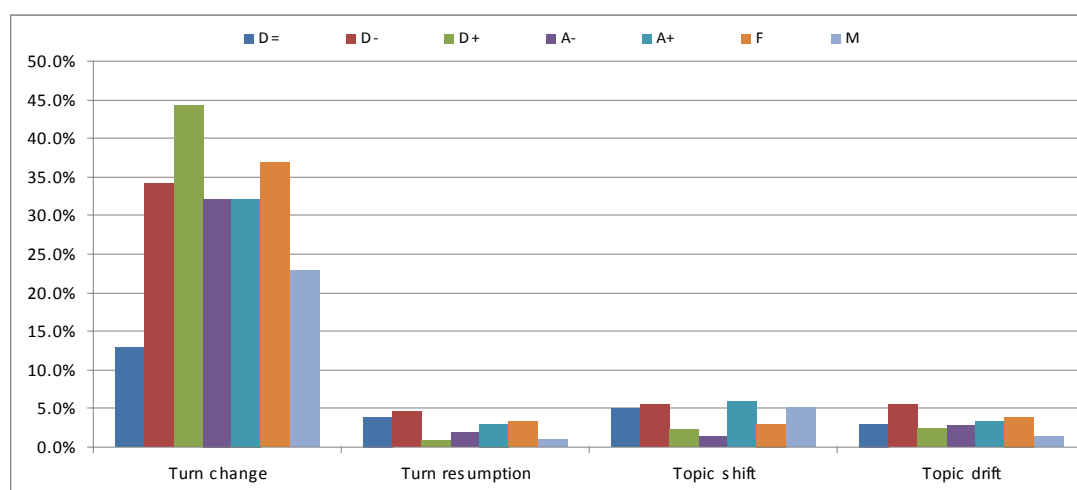

Figure 8.10: Three factors' influence on VL as sequential strategies

As demonstrated in Figure 8.10, the negotiators employed more VL for turn-change than for all the other three categories, illustrating that when one does turn changes, VL is popular to carry out the task appropriately. Distance factor had an influence on the choice of VL for all four types of sequential strategies. In the order of most to least, VL for turn-resumption, topic shift and topic drift was employed between the friends, the acquaintances and the strangers; and VL for turn change was used between the strangers, the friends and the acquaintances. VL for turn change was popular with both the strangers and the friends.

While the factor of age did not have an impact on the use of VL for turn change, it did make a difference on the rest of three strategies. The older negotiators utilized more VL for turn resumption, topic shift and topic drift than the younger ones. The factor of gender made an impact to all four strategies. The females generally used more VL than their counterparts, such as in turn change, turn resumption and topic drift.

The above findings suggest that in Chinese business negotiations, VL, as a sequential strategy, is often employed by negotiators. VL strategies depend on their social distance, age (although to a lesser extent) and gender. Noticeably as well, all three factors had a prominent impact on the choice of VL for turn change, which suggests VL for this purpose would be the most dynamic one among these four strategies in Chinese business negotiations.

As evidence shows, the interactional nature of VL is salient, and the sequential flow can be maintained through using VL in interaction. It also shows that VL does have an essential function of regulating the interaction flow. Vagueness has traditionally been seen as a negative phenomenon, but it should be reconsidered as common and necessary in the natural language use, especially as an interactional strategy. Even though VL could be at times 'sloppy', and reflects unclear thinking, this and other studies on VL (Channell 1994; Overstreet and Yule 1997a; Cutting 1999, 2000) demonstrate that VL is actually used as an effective tool in talk-in-interactions.

Chapter 9 Conclusions and implications

Limited research have been conducted concerning VL as a communicative strategy in real-life Chinese business negotiations. Based on natural business negotiation data with distinct vague characteristics, rather than questionnaires or surveys, this research into the use of VL as a communicative strategy is one of the first attempts to fill in the gap. This research explores the contexts and meanings of vagueness in a type of discourse in which vagueness plays an important role, i.e. Chinese business negotiations, and attempts to promote an interactional approach in the study of vagueness and to add a new dimension by investigating sequential flows, which distinguishes this study from previous studies on vagueness.

The findings of this research contribute significantly to the study of VL by employing the CA conceptual framework into the analysis of interactive aspects of vagueness. The findings also offer new insights into linguistic behaviours and socio-cultural linkage from the perspective of VL use, thus improving the understanding of the Chinese business culture.

Through the comprehensive analyses of real-life Chinese business negotiation data, the most important conclusion is that while VL is used for a combination of practical and interpersonal purposes, the priority is the practical functions. It is also concluded that VL is frequently used at all levels as an effective and strategic tool, including lexical, syntactic, pragmatic and sequential levels in Chinese business negotiations; and the ways in which it is mobilised are, in different shapes and forms and to lesser or greater degree, influenced by the social factors of social distance, age and gender. VL is not a 'misused language'; on the contrary, it is an integral part of language and indispensable in communication.

Chinese has long been perceived as being an inscrutable language with its renowned indirect ways in communication. The use of VL is one of the important means used by the Chinese to realize their indirectness in communication, and is particularly often used as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations, where vagueness has a vital role in getting the message across as evidenced in the previous discussions.

9.1 Lexical patterns of VL

The most favoured and pervasive VEs in the Chinese business negotiations were vague pronouns, and vague adjectives were the second most commonly used; while the least preferred VEs were vague nouns. This suggests that vague pronouns and adjectives tend to play a greater role in Chinese business negotiations than vague nouns do, to perform a function of hedging and to help negotiators to reach an agreement.

The data shows that the older negotiators preferred vague pronouns, while the younger ones more favoured towards vague adjectives and adverbs; most of the male negotiators disfavoured numerals, while most of the female negotiators and the negotiators who did not know each other disliked vague nouns. It appears that in Chinese business negotiations, younger negotiators might be too impatient to use many vague pronouns (as discourse markers) largely due to their young age, but they purposefully show their politeness and respect for their counterparts through the frequent use of vague adverbs or adjectives, in order to overcome their potential problem of a lack of experience. As for negotiators who do not know each other, they tend to be more cautious in order to guarantee a smooth and successful negotiation.

The analysis of combinational lexical patterns reveals that among all five negotiations, VEs were employed the most, and pre-vaguefiers the second most,

suggesting that VEs play a vital role in Chinese business negotiations. The data confirm that adverb, pronoun and auxiliary word were the most preferred parts of speech used for pre-vaguefiers, VEs and post-vaguefiers respectively. The most frequently-used combinations were pre-vaguefier + adjective and verb + post-vaguefier respectively. It shows that through pre-vague and post-vague combinations, vagueness of core items can be increased (vague item more vague) or non-vague core items can be changed to vague items, which may serve as a communicative strategy to help negotiators achieve their goals more effectively. It also seems that VEs and post-vaguefiers perform more pragmatic functions than pre-vaguefiers. Compared with pre-vaguefiers, post-vaguefiers tend to make non-vague meanings vague more than to make vague meanings more vague. The fact that the pre-vaguefiers were used more than the post-vaguefiers implies that one may prefer left-branching more than right-branching in the use of VL.

Often expressions can be used as pre-vaguefiers, VEs or post-vaguefiers in different contexts, where they may generate different meanings and functions accordingly; and some of the VEs and post-vaguefires may no longer be vague when they have explicit meanings and serve different functions. The above two findings indicate that there is a dynamic in terms of vague and non-vague items in the data. This feature of VL in Chinese serves as a driving force for the pervasive use of VL as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations; thereby, negotiators have to remain sharp in order to communicate better and achieve expected results.

9.2 Syntactic Forms of VL

This research attempted to explore the effective vague syntactic forms in Chinese business negotiations. It is found that conditionals were the most favoured and widely-employed vague syntactic form, and the next most commonly used were indirect constructions and interrogatives; passives were the least utilized vague

syntactic form. This shows that the Chinese negotiators in this data were indirect because the syntactic forms of conditionals, indirect constructions and interrogatives are relatively more indirect than passives.

It appears that in the data, the older males preferred interrogatives; almost all the females and the negotiators who were friends and some of whom were strangers favoured conditionals. The negotiators who were acquaintances and some of whom were strangers preferred both conditionals and interrogatives; and nearly all negotiators least utilized passives. This implies that although distance, age and gender factors had little impact on the least used vague syntactic forms, they did have an influence on other categories. It could be that the older male negotiators and the negotiators who were acquaintances and strangers tended to be more polite and indirect by using both conditionals and interrogatives. As for the reasons the participants used passives the least, one possibility might be that, quite differently from English, passives in the Chinese language are used primarily with an unfortunate tone, so they are not normally used unless they are needed.

9.3 Pragmatic functions of VL

Analyses of the pragmatic functions of VL in this research reveal that VL was mostly utilized for the purpose of filling in lexical gaps, with informality, politeness and giving the right amount of information used in descending order of importance. It seems to confirm that VL is mostly used to help negotiators' thoughts and negotiations flow more smoothly and naturally, and to create an informal, friendly and relaxing atmosphere to ensure success of negotiations. It could be concluded here that VL tends to be mostly ultilised to meet practical needs, with the task of servicing interpersonal relationships taking a secondary place.

It was found that social distance, age and gender factors did impact on all six pragmatic functions of VL, to a greater or lesser extent. VL for informality and filling in lexical gaps was not only popular with the negotiators who were friends, but also with those who did not know each other, and in particular was preferred by the older negotiators. In the order of least to most, VL for self-protection was utilized between the negotiators who were friends, acquaintances and strangers, and VL for giving the right amount of information was employed between the negotiators who were acquaintances, friends and strangers. The younger negotiators and the female negotiators used VL more than the older ones and the males for self-protection, deliberately withholding information, politeness and for giving the right amount of information. It shows that the negotiators who are strangers, younger negotiators and female negotiators are more prudent and protective towards themselves than the negotiators who are friends, older negotiators and male negotiators respectively.

Another important finding in this study is that the negotiators who did not know each other employed VL for politeness more than those who were friends and acquaintances, which argues that strangers tend to adopt more polite language so as to establish a closer new business relationship. This conclusion appears to contradict the traditional perception that the Chinese are not as polite to strangers as they are to friends.

On the one hand, the above findings reflect the role 'face' plays in Chinese social and cultural life. Even in business negotiations, Chinese negotiators fight to save their 'face' while safeguarding their own benefits and interests. On the other hand, the findings suggest that in Chinese business negotiations, VL is mainly used for more practical purposes, such as to fill in the lexical gaps for a smoother flow of thoughts and natural running of negotiations. The interpersonal relationship (eg. 'politeness') is not as prominent as the practical needs.

9.4 Interaction using VL

VEs *zhè/zhègè* (这/这个 'well/then'), *nà/nàgè* (那/那个 'well/then'), *en* (嗯 'well'), *ne*(呢 'well'), *a* (啊 'well') and *shénme/de* (什么/的 'whatisit/whatever') were the most used VEs in sequential flow and turn management. This shows that negotiators can effectively negotiate their common ground and manage their speaking turns by employing VL. Hence, VL also plays a vital role in unfolding negotiations and organizing sequences in Chinese business negotiations.

VL was used for turn-holding more than for turn-opening, turn-taking and turn-yielding, implying that the use of such VEs plays a dominant role in facilitating negotiators to hold their turn during the negotiating process, which is conducive to the smooth progress and continuity of negotiations. The negotiators employed more VL for turn-change than for turn resumption, topic shift and topic drift, illustrating that when one makes a turn change, VL is popular to carry out the task appropriately.

VL for turn-holding was not only frequently used by the negotiators who were friends, but also by those who did not know each other. In the order of most to least, VL for turn-opening and turn-holding was utilized between the negotiators who were friends, strangers and acquaintances; VL for turn-taking and turn-yielding was employed between the negotiators who were strangers, friends and acquaintances. Prominently, the negotiators who were acquaintances least used VL for all four turn types, which suggests acquaintances might feel no need to make much effort to open and hold turns using VL because they are neither friends (informal) nor strangers (polite). Negotiators who are strangers would make more effort in taking and yielding their turns through VL.

The older negotiators employed VL more than the younger ones for turn-opening and turn-holding, while the younger negotiators used more VL for turn-yielding than the

older ones and both age groups used a similar rate of VL for turn-taking. The female negotiators utilized VL more than the males for all four turn types. These findings imply that older negotiators and female negotiators are more skilled and confident in utilizing VL as a vehicle in sequential organization in Chinese business negotiations.

Furthermore, it is observed that in the order of most to least, the VL for turn-resumption, topic shift and topic drift was employed between the friends, the acquaintances and the strangers; and the VL for turn change was used between the strangers, the friends and the acquaintances. While the factor of age did not have an impact on the use of VL for turn change, it did make a difference on the rest of the three strategies. The older negotiators utilized more VL for turn resumption, topic shift and topic drift than the younger ones. The factor of gender made an impact on all four strategies. The females generally used more VL than their counterparts, such as in turn change, turn resumption and topic drift.

The above findings suggest that in Chinese business negotiations, VL as sequential strategies is often carefully selected by negotiators, depending on their social distance, age (although to a lesser extent) and gender. Noticeably, all three factors had a prominent impact on the choice of VL for turn change, which suggests VL for this purpose would be the most dynamic among the four strategies in Chinese business negotiations.

The sequential analysis sets this study apart from the rest of the VL studies, being one of the few attempts to investigate VL in terms of turn takings. Most studies on VL did not explore the aspect of sequences of VL, which makes this study important in that it provides an innovative aspect to the field of VL research.

9.5. The influence of social factors

This study explores three social factors: social distance, age and gender. There are few studies which investigated the influence of all three factors on the use of VL in business negotiations. The present research is one of the first attempts to fill in the gap.

This study finds that in Chinese business negotiations, social distance, age and gender factors do have an influence at all levels, particularly on the choice of parts of speech of VEs, vague syntactic forms, pragmatic functions of VL, all four turn types and sequential strategies through VL. In general, the influence of the three factors is quite overt and dynamic. As evidenced by the findings, acquaintances, friends and strangers, older negotiators and younger negotiators, female negotiators and male negotiators sometimes had similar preferences for the choice of the above categories and sometimes exhibited major differences when using them.

An interesting and intriguing phenomenon that emerged from the data is that the selling parties appeared to have a tendency to employ more VL for strategies of self-protection, deliberately withholding information and giving the right amount of information than the purchasing parties did. It shows as well that the purchasers employed more VL for politeness and informality than the sellers did, except in case N5. Based on these two findings a conclusion could be reached that in Chinese business negotiations, sellers are more likely to cover themselves and guard their commercial interests through the use of VL in order to make a sale, while purchasers tend to be more polite and create a more informal atmosphere by utilizing VL to achieve their goals of obtaining a good deal.

In summary, as evidenced by the analyses of this study, VL is not just a poor substitute for precise language. Rather, it is often strategically chosen by negotiators

to convey meaning that serves the negotiators' best interests in order to guarantee a successful negotiation result with the least negotiating effort. Obviously, interactive aspects of vagueness in Chinese business negotiations are also another key role VL plays as part of normal everyday language.

9.6 Implications

The present research contributes to the development of VL by filling a gap in business language study, and provides new data to enrich the existing literature on VL, as well as a practical guidance for intercultural communication, especially business communities. The findings in this study have implications in a number of fields, as discussed below.

9.6.1 Chinese business communication

This study shows that Chinese business negotiations, which are an information-oriented discourse, are not short of VL. When referring to facts and information, vague items are used for a number of reasons: (1) They have a cohesive function, where the referent is specified in the context. (2) The exact information may not be known. It may not be necessary to be more explicit because an implicit reference may convey sufficient information, provided that the knowledge is shared by the discourse participants. In addition, Chinese business negotiations are a very complicated process. When Chinese negotiators reply to some questions that are beyond their authority or when it is inconvenient to give a reply on some issues, VL could be used to deal with, or to avoid face-to-face conflict.

The preference for employing VL in Chinese business negotiations lies in promotion of business relations and the realization of commercial goals. As exemplified in this study, the merits of VL help to eliminate absoluteness and directness. With possibly

fewer mistakes, Chinese negotiators can take the initiative firmly in their hands. They may use VL to describe, to suggest, to complain, to praise, to refuse, to cover, to concede, to inquire, etc. VL can function as a weapon, a lubricant, and a disguise. The high frequency of VL's adoption in Chinese business negotiations shows that VL is preferred by Chinese negotiators, who cannot afford to ignore the effects of VL.

9.6.2 Chinese language training

The findings of this study have shown the dynamic nature of Chinese VL in use. This implies that the language users have to be competent in using VL in order to be a good Chinese speaker. The interchange between VL and non-VL contributes to the intricacies of the Chinese language, and this richness is also the impetus behind the use of VL. Consequently, VL skill is part of Chinese language competence and an important communicative tool.

A limited number of studies have begun to contain a discussion of possible teaching techniques to raise students' awareness of VL. Therefore, the present research is conducive for pedagogical purposes, promoting awareness of VL in Chinese language teaching and learning, and assisting learners of Chinese or trainees for Chinese business negotiations to use Chinese VL in a more effective and strategic manner. The findings of the typical use of vague pronouns (e.g. as discourse markers or gap-fillers), adjectives, adverbs, numerals (as mitigators or softeners), etc., the most frequently used combinations of pre-vaguefiers and post-vaguefiers, the most commonly used vague syntactic forms, pragmatic functions of VL, and sequential organization and strategies through the use of VL, could be incorporated into coursebooks for Chinese language training. Learners would benefit from being able to learn authentic VL patterns and pragmatic functions observed in real-life data.

9.6.3 Intercultural communication

The importance of this research has practical relevance to both Chinese and non-Chinese communities by providing effective patterns, forms, and strategies in the use of VL in Chinese business negotiations.

With the rapid development of the globalized economy, if one wants to communicate successfully with the Chinese, one should be well aware of how the Chinese communicate. VL is a natural part of knowledge about the Chinese language. It is vital to know how Chinese VL operates at different linguistic levels (lexical, syntactical and sequential, etc.) and how different patterns and ways of operating interrelate in order to develop effective strategies ensuring smooth and successful intercultural communication.

Cutting (2007, p. 229) claims that 'it is evident that social studies of VL are in their infancy'. The present research uses spontaneous language data to provide a more natural account of VL use. The finding that Chinese negotiators prefer to use vague pronouns and conditionals, and employ VL for the purpose of filling in lexical gaps and informality implies that Chinese negotiators utilize VL for practical purposes rather than primarily for the expected politeness strategies. This has implications for smooth and effective cross-linguistic and cross-cultural business communication.

9.6.4 Professional training

Any professionals, including businessmen and healthcare workers, would benefit from knowing how to manipulate VL in Chinese, identifying the Chinese ways of communicating (face-saving, evading etc.), and recognising the indirect ways of the Chinese. Thus, armed with this knowledge one can do his or her job more confidently and with appropriate sensitivity.

The findings in this study could be applied to the workplace, public language and education in general. The research outcomes here could be used to demonstrate to professionals or trainees for Chinese business negotiations how negotiators use VL, and to help train them in interaction management. It is recommended that the use of language samples from routine business encounters, with the contextual, institutional tensions and complexities inherent in real-life business negotiations should be adopted, and trainees be taught to look at how participants respond to each other's VL use.

It should be pointed out that whilst the data in this research is not exhaustive, it is typical. More efforts could be made to obtain greater quantities of data, and the models of analysis of VL could be extended to other businesses and other languages. Further research can be carried out to explore issues like power relations of participants and more diverse functions of VL.

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Appendices

Appendix I Participant information sheet (English version)

Title: Investigating the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in
Chinese business negotiations

Research on the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in Chinese business negotiations is being carried out in Department of Languages and Intercultural Education, Division of Humanities, Curtin University of Technology, for which the recording of naturally occurring business negotiations is essential. The present research has been conducted by Mr. Xiaohua Zhao, a PhD student, and supervised by Dr. Grace Zhang, a Senior Lecturer and Convener for Chinese Programme, Department of Languages and Intercultural Education, Curtin University of Technology.

This study has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained.

To obtain the desired data, tape or video tape recording will be performed at your company. This has been permitted by your Manager. The recording will be undertaken for about one hour. If you don't agree to sign Consent Form to be recorded, the researcher will not go back to your manager for his order, but give up recording you and approach other companies instead. The transcription and translation of recorded negotiations will be conducted by the researcher.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you agree to be taped, you may choose to have the recorder turned off at any time. You may listen to the recordings after they are made, and you are free to delete all or parts of your

recording as you wish without prejudice or negative consequences. You can withdraw all the information you give at any time up to publication without giving a reason. If there is an interest, research results will be made available to relevant participants via email. Information that you provide in this research is confidential and your identity will be protected at all times. The data will be stored in a locked cupboard within a secured postgraduate office at Curtin to safeguard confidentiality. Access to the data will be strictly restricted to the researcher and the supervisor. As the data obtained in this project is extremely valuable for conversational analysis and is difficult to collect, it will be stored for future research.

I would be extremely grateful if you would participate in this project, as your input would contribute greatly to my research. You reserve all rights to question the researchers should there be any doubt about the recording process.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me, my supervisor and/or Human Research Ethics Committee of Curtin University of Technology.

Contact details

Researcher: Xiaohua ZHAO

Email address: xiaohua.zhao@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Contact in Australia: ++ 61-413-177 613

Supervisor: Dr Grace ZHANG, Convener for Chinese Programme

Department of Languages and Intercultural Education

Curtin University of Technology

GPO Box 1987

Perth, Western Australia 6845

Australia

Tel: +61 8 9266 3478

Fax: +61 8 9266 4133

Email: Grace.Zhang@exchange.curtin.edu.au

The Secretary, HREC

Office of Research and Development

Curtin University of Technology

GPO Box U1987

Perth, WA 6845

Australia

Tel: +61 8 9266 2784

Email: hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Appendix II Participant information sheet (Chinese version)

<div align="center">参与者通知书（商务谈判）</div>

题目：中文商务谈判中策略性模糊语言使用的探究

敬启者

本课题所研究的是中文商务谈判中作为交流策略所使用的模糊语言，该研究将在科廷科技大学人文学院语言与跨文化教育系进行。为了做好此研究，需要对商务谈判进行现场录音。此研究由科廷科技大学语言与跨文化教育系博士研究生赵晓华负责， 由科廷科技大学语言与跨文化教育系高级讲师、中文部主任张乔博士指导。

此研究已获得科廷科技大学伦理委员会批准。如有需要，可通过写信或打电话的方式予以确认。

为了获得研究的语言资料，需在贵公司里进行磁带录音或录像。经贵公司经理的同意（贵公司经理的同意书请详见附录），录音或录像将进行大约一小时左右。如果您不同意签署同意书来允许研究者录音或录像，研究者将不会请求贵公司经理来强迫您同意，却会选择放弃对贵公司谈判的录制，转而接洽其它公司。完成一切录音或录像之后，本人将独立完成所有的将录下的语音资料转为文字资料以及将其翻译为英文的工作。

参与此研究是完全自愿的。虽然同意参加此录音，但您可以随时关掉录音机或录像机。您也可以回听录音，删除部分或者全部的您认为不妥当的录音内容，而这都不会给您带来任何损害或者负面影响。直至出版任何研究结果之前，无论什么原因，您都可以随时收回您已提供的所有信息。有兴趣者，请准确填写电子邮箱地址，届时相关研究结果将会按要求通过电子邮件寄给您。在此研究中您所提供的信息均绝对保密，并保持匿名。为确保隐私权，本人会将所有资料都贮藏在安全的科廷科技大学研究生办公室，并锁在档案柜中。所有数据和资料都仅限于研究者和导师才可以接触。鉴于此研究项目中所获得的资料对于话语分析非常有价值且极难搜集，为了将来的深入研究，所有数据和资料都将予以保留。

对于您能参与此项研究，本人表示衷心的感谢。您的参与和支持将对本人的研究给予很大的帮助。如对录制过程有任何疑问，请随时向研究者提出。

如果您还有什么问题，请随时与本人、导师或科廷科技大学伦理委员会联系。

联系方式

研究者: 赵晓华

Email address: xiaohua.zhao@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Contact in Australia: ++ 61-413-177 613

导师: Dr Grace Zhang

Department of Languages and Intercultural Education

Curtin University of Technology

GPO Box 1987

Perth, Western Australia 6845

Australia

Tel: +61 8 9266 3478

Fax: +61 8 9266 4133

Email: Grace.Zhang@exchange.curtin.edu.au

科廷科技大学伦理委员会

The Secretary, HREC

Office of Research and Development

Curtin University of Technology

GPO Box U1987

Perth, WA 6845

Australia

Tel: +61 8 9266 2784

Email: hrec@curtin.edu.au.

经科廷科技大学伦理委员会批准，自 2007 年 7 月 3 日起，有效期一年

批准信查询号：HR 78 2007

Appendix III Consent form (English version)

Title: Investigating the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in
Chinese business negotiations

- I agree to take part in this research and to be audio or video taped.
- I acknowledge that the nature of the study and the recording procedure has been explained to my satisfaction by the researcher and my consent is given voluntarily. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.
- I am aware that all the information I provide for this research project is confidential and my identity will be protected at all times.
- I give permission to record about one hour.
- I understand that I can choose to have the recorder turned off at any time and I am free to delete all or parts of my recording as I wish. I can withdraw all the information I give at any time up to publication without giving a reason.
- I understand that the data will be stored in a locked cupboard within a secured postgraduate office at Curtin to safeguard confidentiality.
- I understand that the data will be stored for any possible future research.
- I clearly know that if I don't agree to sign Consent Form to be recorded, the researcher will not go back to my manager for his order, but give up recording me and approach other companies instead.

Signature:_____

Name:_____ (Please print clearly)

Date: _____

Contact number / E-mail:_____

同意书

题目：中文商务谈判中策略性模糊语言使用的探究

敬启者

- 本人同意参加此研究和被录音或录像。

- 听到研究者的详细说明之后，本人明白了此次研究的特点和录音或录像程序，而且本人的同意是完全志愿的。本人有机会就该研究进行提问，并得到了相应答复。

- 在此研究中，本人所提供的信息都是保密的，而且个人身份也都是保持匿名的。

- 本人允许研究者可以进行大约一个小时左右的录音或录像。

- 本人知道可随时关掉录音或录像，且可以删除部分或者全部的录音或录像内容。直至出版任何研究结果之前，无论什么原因，本人都可以随时收回已提供的所有信息。

- 本人知道为确保隐私权，所有资料都将贮藏在安全的科廷科技大学研究生办公室，并锁在档案柜中。

- 本人知道为了将来的深入研究，所有数据和资料都将予以保留。

- 本人清楚如果本人不同意签署同意书来允许研究者录音或录像，研究者将不会请求本公司经理来强迫本人同意，却会选择放弃对本公司谈判的录制，转而接洽其它公司。

签名：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

姓名（工整书写）：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

日期：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

电话/电子邮件：＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

Appendix V Consent form for managers (English version)

Title: Investigating the use of vague language as a communicative strategy in
Chinese business negotiations

Researcher: Xiaohua ZHAO

- I agree to give access to the above researcher for talking to the employees of my company.

- Employees may participate in the above study if they so wish to. If they don't agree to sign Consent Form to be recorded, the researcher will not come back to me for my order to make them participate, but give up recording them and approach other companies instead.

- I acknowledge that the nature of the study and the recording procedure has been explained to my satisfaction by the researcher and my consent is given voluntarily. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

- I understand that the data will be stored in a locked cupboard within a secured postgraduate office at Curtin to safeguard confidentiality.

- I understand that the data will be stored for any possible future research.

Signature:_____

Name:_____ (Please print clearly)

Date: _____

Contact number / E-mail:_____

Appendix VI Consent form for managers (Chinese version)

经理同意书

题目：中文商务谈判中策略性模糊语言使用的探究

研究者：赵晓华

- 本人同意研究者在研究期间可出入本公司和联系本公司的职员
- 本公司的职员可以自愿参与研究者的研究工作。如果员工不同意签署同意书来允许研究者录音或录像，研究者将不会请求本人来强迫员工同意，却会选择放弃对本公司谈判的录制，转而接洽其它公司。
- 听到研究者的详细说明之后，本人明白了此次研究的特点和录音或录像程序，而且本人的同意是完全志愿的。本人有机会就该研究进行提问，并得到了相应答复。
- 本人知道为确保隐私权，所有资料都将贮藏在安全的科廷科技大学研究生办公室，并锁在档案柜中。
- 本人知道为了将来的深入研究，所有数据和资料都将予以保留。

签名：_____

姓名（工整书写）：_____

日期：_____

电话/电子邮件：_____