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Characteristics of Politeness Expressions in Chinese Business Negotiation Dialogues and Pedagogical Implications for Vietnamese Students

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Abstract: This article investigates the characteristics of politeness expressions in Chinese business negotiation dialogues and proposes pedagogical implications for Vietnamese students. Drawing on pragmatics, politeness theory, and discourse analysis, the study examines linguistic devices used to express politeness, including formal address terms, indirect interrogative structures, mitigation expressions, politeness expressions in complaint handling, and the discourse structure of business negotiation dialogues. The research data consist of model dialogues and representative examples related to quotations, delivery arrangements, payment terms, packaging, contract signing, and complaint handling. The article also uses survey results from students currently learning Business Chinese to provide practical evidence for the proposed teaching implications. The findings show that politeness expressions do not merely convey information but also help reduce imposition, maintain face, mitigate conflict, and sustain cooperative relationships. Based on these findings, the article suggests teaching expressions according to communicative functions, analyzing model dialogues, comparing direct and indirect expressions, organizing role-play activities following negotiation procedures, and emphasizing pragmatic error correction in spoken Business Chinese practice.

Keywords: politeness expressions, business Chinese, negotiation dialogue, pragmatics, Chinese language teaching

1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of economic and trade exchanges between China and neighboring countries, the practical need for Chinese language competence in professional business environments has increased notably. For learners specializing in Chinese language studies, proficiency in Business Chinese involves not only foundational linguistic knowledge—including lexical accuracy and grammatical correctness—but also the capacity to adapt language use flexibly according to situational variables such as purpose, role relationships, and communicative setting. Within commercial negotiation contexts, speech acts including price inquiries, offer presentations, concession proposals, polite rejections, and constructive responses to feedback serve pivotal functions in sustaining mutual respect and collaborative engagement. Linguistic strategies that emphasize courtesy, circumlocution, and softening devices contribute significantly to harmonious interaction, facilitating smoother consensus-building and long-term partnership development. This study systematically investigates the structural and functional features of politeness-oriented expressions observed in authentic Business Chinese negotiation discourse. Drawing on discourse analysis and pragmatic frameworks, it identifies recurrent patterns in mitigation, hedging, and face-attentive phrasing [1, 2]. Furthermore, the research explores how these linguistic resources can be effectively integrated into pedagogical design for Chinese language instruction targeting

Received: 25 May 2026

Revised: 10 July 2026

Accepted: 24 July 2026

Published: 29 July 2026



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international students engaged in cross-border business education. The findings aim to support curriculum refinement and teaching methodology enhancement in higher education institutions.

2. Research Content

This section establishes the foundational theoretical constructs underpinning the study and conducts a comprehensive, critical synthesis of existing scholarly work relevant to the research domain, emphasizing conceptual evolution, methodological trends, key empirical findings, persistent knowledge gaps, and emerging interdisciplinary connections that inform the current investigation's design, scope, and analytical framework [3, 4].

2.1. *Speech Acts in Business Negotiation Discourse*

Speech act theory offers a foundational framework for interpreting how language operates functionally within business negotiation discourse. Rather than treating utterances solely as grammatical constructions, this perspective emphasizes their performative dimension—language is understood as a tool for accomplishing concrete communicative goals in real-world interaction. Utterances can assert facts, issue instructions, make commitments, express attitudes, or enact institutional changes, depending on context, speaker intention, and conventional uptake by interlocutors. Such functional differentiation allows analysts to move beyond surface-level syntax and semantics to examine how participants co-construct meaning, manage relational dynamics, and advance strategic objectives during negotiations. The theory underscores that every spoken or written contribution in a negotiation setting carries pragmatic force, shaping power distribution, signaling cooperation or resistance, and facilitating or hindering agreement formation. Consequently, speech acts serve not merely as linguistic units but as operational instruments embedded in the procedural logic of commercial dialogue.

Business negotiation discourse is inherently action-oriented, with participants routinely deploying utterances designed to elicit responses, modify positions, signal flexibility, or reinforce constraints. For instance, the question 'QingWenGuiGongSiDeBaoJiaShiDuoShao?' functions not merely as an information request but as a formalized speech act initiating a pricing protocol, invoking shared expectations about transparency and reciprocity in commercial exchange. Similarly, the statement

'ZheGeJiaGeBiWoMenDeYuQiLveGao, BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFouZaiKaoLvYiXia?' performs multiple layered functions: it registers dissatisfaction, frames the current offer as negotiable rather than final, invites collaborative problem-solving, and preserves face for both parties through mitigated phrasing. These utterances are systematically organized—not randomly generated—but aligned with negotiation phases such as agenda-setting, proposal exchange, concession management, and consensus-building [5]. Their effectiveness depends on contextual appropriateness, adherence to professional norms, and sensitivity to cultural and institutional conventions governing business communication.

2.2. *Politeness, Face, and Mitigation Strategies in Communication*

The concept of face, originally articulated in sociolinguistic and interactional research, refers to the public self-image that individuals seek to maintain during social interaction. This construct plays a central role in shaping how language is deployed to sustain mutual respect and relational harmony. Many routine communicative actions—particularly those involving disagreement, imposition, or evaluation—carry inherent risks of threatening either the speaker's or the listener's sense of dignity, autonomy, or social standing. As a result, speakers routinely deploy a range of linguistic mitigation strategies to soften potential face threats. In professional business contexts, such as cross-organizational negotiations, acts like proposing price adjustments, declining proposed contractual conditions, requesting accelerated timelines, or raising concerns about product specifications can inadvertently challenge the counterpart's competence, authority, or

goodwill. To safeguard collaborative intent and long-term partnership viability, interlocutors often prefer indirect formulations, hedging devices (e.g., modal verbs, approximators, and tentative phrasing), interrogative constructions over declarative directives, and optative expressions—such as 'we would appreciate' or 'it might be possible'—rather than unqualified imperatives. These strategic choices reflect an underlying orientation toward relational continuity, mutual face preservation, and cooperative discourse management.

2.3. Politeness in Chinese and Intercultural Business Communication

Politeness in Chinese business communication is deeply rooted in traditional cultural values, particularly those emphasizing mutual respect, humility, courteous conduct, and the preservation of interpersonal face [5]. These principles are systematically encoded in linguistic choices that reflect hierarchical awareness, relational sensitivity, and situational appropriateness. Honorific address terms—such as *GuiGongSi* ('your esteemed company'), *GuiFang* ('your side'), *WoFang* ('our side'), and *Nin* (a formal second-person pronoun)—serve not merely as grammatical markers but as strategic resources for affirming status alignment and fostering cooperative rapport. Similarly, indirect question forms—including *QingWen* ('may I ask'), *NengFou* ('is it possible'), *ShiFouKeYi* ('would it be permissible'), and *BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFou* ('I am not sure whether your side could')—function to attenuate directive force and signal deference. Mitigating expressions like *LveGao* ('slightly high'), *YouDianEr* ('a bit'), *ZaiKaoLvYiXia* ('under consideration'), and *JinYiBuTaoLun* ('it may be inappropriate to discuss further') further contribute to pragmatic softening, reducing perceived imposition while reinforcing relational harmony and professional decorum in cross-functional and cross-organizational interactions.

Effective intercultural business communication demands more than lexical or syntactic competence; it requires nuanced sociopragmatic awareness grounded in contextual intelligence. Learners must develop the ability to calibrate linguistic formality dynamically—adjusting register, honorific density, and syntactic complexity according to variables such as institutional hierarchy, negotiation phase (e.g., initial inquiry versus final agreement), medium of interaction (face-to-face, video conference, written correspondence), and the perceived cultural orientation of interlocutors. Equally important is the capacity to interpret and enact face-saving strategies—such as strategic self-downgrading, third-party reference, hedging, and topic avoidance—not as signs of weakness but as culturally embedded mechanisms for sustaining trust, minimizing conflict, and preserving long-term collaborative relationships. Mastery of these dimensions enables communicators to navigate divergent expectations regarding directness, responsibility attribution, and decision-making authority without compromising professionalism or relational integrity.

2.4. Business Chinese Teaching Practices and Emerging Issues

Business Chinese textbooks commonly prioritize the cultivation of communicative competence across core business contexts, such as product presentation, price negotiation, logistics coordination, payment terms clarification, packaging specifications, contractual formalities, and post-transaction dispute resolution. Nevertheless, empirical classroom observations indicate a persistent pedagogical gap: learners frequently concentrate on lexical memorization and syntactic accuracy while underemphasizing the sociopragmatic dimensions of language use—particularly the strategic deployment of politeness markers in professional discourse. Expressions like '*GuiGongSi*' (Your esteemed company), '*GuiFang*' (Your side), '*BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFou...*' (We are unsure whether your side could...), and '*WoMenXiWangGuiFangNengTIChuHeLiDeJieJueFangAn*' (We hope your side can propose a reasonable solution) serve not only as formulaic utterances but also as vital interactional resources for relationship maintenance, conflict mitigation, and face preservation in cross-cultural business negotiations. Their appropriate selection and contextual adaptation reflect deep sociolinguistic awareness rather than rote learning. Consequently, systematic investigation into the functional distribution, pragmatic constraints, and pedagogical integration of such expressions holds substantial theoretical

relevance for applied linguistics and direct instructional utility for curriculum design, teacher training, and learner assessment in Business Chinese education.

3. Research Methodology and Data

3.1. Research Data

The data for this study comprise systematically selected dialogue samples and illustrative linguistic examples extracted from widely used Business Chinese textbooks published in mainland China, focusing specifically on authentic business negotiation contexts [6]. These contexts include price inquiries, price quotations, price bargaining, discussions concerning delivery timelines, payment terms and conditions, product packaging specifications, contract signing procedures, and complaint resolution protocols. Each scenario reflects recurrent communicative challenges encountered in real-world commercial interactions, where interlocutors must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while maintaining professional rapport and mutual respect. The selection prioritizes situations requiring nuanced pragmatic competence—particularly the strategic deployment of politeness markers, hedging devices, indirect speech acts, and mitigation strategies—to sustain cooperative discourse and minimize face-threatening potential. Special attention is given to how linguistic choices reflect culturally embedded norms of relational harmony, hierarchical awareness, and contextual appropriateness in Chinese business communication. This corpus-based approach ensures empirical grounding while supporting rigorous qualitative analysis of discourse patterns and pragmatic functions (As shown in Table 1).

Table 1. Categories of Business Negotiation Scenarios Selected for Data Analysis

Scenario Category	Primary Communicative Content	Key Politeness Expressions
Price inquiry and quotation	Requesting price information and providing quotations	<i>qingwen</i> ("may I ask"), <i>gui gongsi</i> ("your esteemed company"), <i>baojia</i> ("price offer")
Price negotiation	Requesting discounts and negotiating price adjustments	<i>nengfou</i> ("whether it is possible"), <i>shifou keyi</i> ("can or cannot"), <i>luegao</i> ("slightly high")
Delivery and payment	Discussing delivery schedules and payment methods	<i>anpai fahuo</i> ("arrange shipment"), <i>fukuan fangshi</i> ("payment method"), <i>wofang xiwang</i> ("our side hopes")
Packaging and contract	Discussing packaging and confirming contract terms	<i>baozhuang fangshi</i> ("packaging method"), <i>hetong xijie</i> ("contract details"), <i>jinyibu taolun</i> ("further discussion")
Complaints and compensation	Raising quality issues and proposing solutions	<i>guanyu... wenti</i> ("regarding the issue of..."), <i>xiwang guifang</i> ("hope your side"), <i>jiejue fangan</i> ("solution")

3.2. Research Methods

This study adopts a dual-methodological framework integrating pragmatic analysis and discourse analysis to systematically investigate the functional deployment of politeness expressions in authentic business Chinese negotiation contexts. Pragmatic analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting the communicative intentions, illocutionary force, and contextual appropriateness of key lexical and phrasal units—including GuiGongSi, GuiFang, QingWen, NengFou, ShiFouKeYi, XiWangGuiFang, LveGao, and ZaiKaoLvYiXia—across diverse situational parameters such as interlocutor hierarchy, topic sensitivity, and phase-specific interactional goals. Concurrently, discourse analysis examines how these expressions are strategically positioned within the macro-structure of negotiation sequences, mapping their roles in opening rapport-building, framing problems collaboratively, advancing proposals, verifying mutual

understanding through confirmation checks, and concluding agreements with face-preserving closure. To complement this qualitative investigation, the research incorporates systematic classification to categorize expression types by syntactic form and pragmatic function, descriptive analysis to articulate usage patterns and contextual constraints, and descriptive statistical methods to quantify frequency distributions, co-occurrence tendencies, and variation across respondent demographics in the student survey dataset [2, 7] (As shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Analytical Framework for Politeness Expressions in Business Chinese Negotiation Discourse

Expression Category	Identification Criteria	Pragmatic Function
Honorific forms of address	<i>gui gongsi</i> ("your esteemed company"), <i>gui fang</i> ("your side"), <i>wo fang</i> ("our side"), <i>nin</i> ("you (polite)")	Expressing respect and establishing participant roles
Indirect interrogative structures	<i>nengfou</i> ("whether it is possible"), <i>shifou keyi</i> ("can or cannot"), <i>bu zhidao... nengfou</i> ("not sure if... is possible")	Reducing the imposition of requests or proposals
Mitigating expressions	<i>luegao</i> ("slightly high"), <i>youdianr</i> ("a bit"), <i>zai kaolu yixia</i> ("reconsider again")	Softening evaluations or requests
Polite complaint expressions	<i>guanyu... wenti</i> ("regarding the issue of..."), <i>xiwang guifang</i> ("hope your side")	Avoiding direct attribution of responsibility and maintaining cooperation
Discourse structure	Opening, stating the purpose, negotiation, confirmation, closing	Organizing negotiation discourse coherently

3.3. Student Survey

In addition to the analysis of negotiation dialogue data, this study incorporated a structured questionnaire survey targeting 60 undergraduate students enrolled in or having completed Business Chinese-related courses at Hanoi University of Industry. The instrument comprised ten carefully calibrated items, each assessed using a five-point Likert scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" to ensure consistent interpretation across respondents. The survey design was grounded in pedagogical principles of language pragmatics and intercultural communication, with items systematically organized to explore three interrelated dimensions: first, learners' metapragmatic awareness regarding the functional significance of politeness expressions in professional Chinese discourse; second, perceived challenges—including lexical selection, register appropriateness, contextual adaptation, and sociocultural alignment—encountered when deploying such expressions during simulated or authentic business interactions; and third, learners' self-reported readiness and expressed demand for targeted instructional scaffolding, including role-play simulations, genre-based analysis of authentic business texts, and explicit pragmatic instruction [8, 9]. Descriptive statistical analysis—including frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, and item-level consistency checks—was applied to the collected responses. These findings were integrated with qualitative dialogue analysis to strengthen the validity and contextual grounding of the pedagogical recommendations proposed in this study.

4. Characteristics of Politeness Expressions in Business Chinese Negotiation Discourse

4.1. Honorific Forms of Address

A prominent characteristic of Business Chinese negotiation discourse is the systematic use of honorific forms of address—including *GuiGongSi* ('your esteemed company'), *GuiFang* ('your side'), *WoFang* ('our side'), *Nin* (honorific 'you'), and *ShuangFang* ('both parties')—which serve dual pragmatic functions: identifying

participant roles and reinforcing relational hierarchy through lexical deference. These terms are not merely stylistic alternatives but constitute conventionalized politeness strategies deeply embedded in Chinese business culture, where face preservation and mutual respect are foundational to successful interlocation. For instance, the interrogative *QingWenGuiGongSiDeBaoJiaShiDuoShao?* ('May we ask what your company's quotation is?') exemplifies layered politeness: *GuiGongSi* replaces the neutral *NiMenGongSi*, thereby elevating the addressee's institutional status, while *QingWen* operates as a mitigating epistemic hedge that reduces the directive force of the question. Likewise, in conditional constructions such as *RuGuoGuiFangTongYiZheGeJiaGe, WoFangKeYiJinKuaiAnPaiHeTong* ('If your side agrees to this price, our side can promptly arrange the contract'), the reciprocal use of *GuiFang* and *WoFang* establishes balanced yet respectful role differentiation—contrasting sharply with colloquial *NiMen* and *WoMen*, which lack institutional gravitas and may inadvertently signal informality or diminished professional regard [5].

4.2. Indirect Interrogative Structures for Reducing Imposition

In business negotiations conducted in Mandarin Chinese, speakers routinely adopt indirect interrogative structures to formulate requests or proposals with heightened politeness and strategic deference. Such constructions—including *NengFou* ('whether it is possible'), *ShiFouKeYi* ('whether it would be permissible'), and *BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFou* ('I wonder whether your side might be able to')—function pragmatically to soften illocutionary force, mitigate face-threatening potential, and afford interlocutors greater discursive autonomy in formulating responses. For example, the utterance *BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFouZaiJiaGeFangMianZaiKaoLvYiXia ?* explicitly frames price reconsideration as a collaborative, open-ended inquiry rather than a unilateral demand, thereby preserving mutual respect and sustaining rapport. Similarly, *QingWenGuiFangShiFouKeYiTiqianAnPaiFaHuo ?* integrates the formal address marker *QingWen* ('may I respectfully ask') with the epistemically tentative *ShiFouKeYi*, reinforcing institutional courtesy and acknowledging the counterpart's agency in scheduling decisions. These syntactic and pragmatic features collectively support cooperative negotiation dynamics, aligning linguistic form with relational goals in professional discourse [10].

4.3. Mitigating Expressions in Price Negotiation and Transaction Terms

Price negotiation constitutes a high-stakes communicative context where divergent expectations regarding value, fairness, and feasibility frequently emerge. To preserve relational harmony while advancing substantive interests, interlocutors routinely deploy linguistic mitigation strategies that soften evaluative force, defer definitive judgment, and signal openness to collaborative problem-solving [11]. Expressions such as '*LveGao*' (slightly high), '*YouDianEr*' (a bit), '*ZaiKaoLvYiXia*' (please consider), '*YouHuiDeKongJian*' (room for adjustment), and '*JinYiBuTaoLun*' (let us discuss further) function not merely as politeness markers but as pragmatic resources for managing face-threatening acts. For instance, in the utterance '*ZheGeJiaGeBiWoMenDeYuQiLveGao, BuZhiDaoGuiFangNengFouZaiKaoLvYiXia?*', the adverbial modifier '*LveGao*' attenuates the negative evaluation relative to the more absolute '*TaiGaoLe*', thereby reducing potential offense; simultaneously, '*ZaiKaoLvYiXia*' frames the request as a joint deliberative process rather than a unilateral demand. Likewise, phrasing such as '*QingWenJiaGeFangMianHaiYouMeiYouYouHuiDeKongJian?*' strategically positions price flexibility as a contingent, negotiable possibility—emphasizing mutual exploration over imposition—thus reinforcing cooperative intent and sustaining long-term business rapport.

4.4. Politeness Expressions in Complaints and Compensation Requests

Complaints and requests for compensation constitute high-stakes communicative acts in business contexts, as they inherently engage questions of accountability, contractual obligations, and mutual trust. In Business Chinese discourse, pragmatic

strategies prioritize relational maintenance over adversarial positioning; speakers routinely employ hedging devices, impersonal constructions, and collaborative framing to mitigate face threat. Rather than attributing fault explicitly—such as stating 'your product has defects'—practitioners commonly introduce concerns through nominalized, issue-oriented phrases like 'regarding the quality issue of the purchased product', thereby depersonalizing responsibility and foregrounding the problem itself. Similarly, proposals for resolution are phrased cooperatively: 'we hope the supplier can propose a reasonable solution' conveys expectation without imposition, contrasts sharply with directive forms like 'you must compensate us', and reinforces shared commitment to continuity and goodwill [12]. This linguistic orientation reflects broader cultural norms valuing harmony, indirectness, and collective problem-solving in professional interactions.

4.5. Polite Discourse Structure in Business Negotiation

Beyond the lexical and sentence levels, Business Chinese negotiation discourse exhibits a relatively clear and functionally organized discourse structure, comprising six interrelated phases: opening, statement of purpose, information exchange, bargaining or proposal exchange, mutual confirmation of agreements, and formal closing. This sequential framework reflects deeply ingrained conventions of professional communication in Chinese commercial contexts, where relational harmony, mutual respect, and procedural clarity are prioritized alongside substantive outcomes. Each phase serves a distinct pragmatic function and is realized through conventionalized linguistic formulas that signal role alignment, intention transparency, and cooperative orientation [5].

Greeting: *HenGaoXingJianDaoNin* — a standard, face-saving opening that expresses sincere pleasure at meeting the counterpart, thereby establishing initial rapport and signaling goodwill before substantive discussion begins.

Stating the purpose: *JinTianWoMenXiangJiuBaoJiaWenTiJinXingJinYiBuGouTong* — this utterance explicitly frames the agenda with polite hedging ('jin yi bu', meaning 'a further'), indicating collaborative intent rather than unilateral imposition, and reinforcing shared responsibility for progress.

Negotiation: *QingWenJiaGeFangMianHaiYouMeiYouYouHuiDeKongJian ?* — phrased as a deferential inquiry rather than a direct demand, this question preserves the interlocutor's autonomy while inviting concession, embodying the principle of indirectness as a marker of politeness and strategic restraint [13].

Confirmation: *YeJiuShiShuo, GuiFangKeYiZaiXiaZhouAnPaiFaHuo, DuiMa ?* — this step consolidates consensus through paraphrased restatement followed by a soft yes/no check ('Dui Ma?'), ensuring mutual understanding without imposing finality, thus maintaining flexibility and saving face for both parties [3].

Closing: *GanXieGuiFangDePeiHe, XiWangWoMenHeZuoShunLi* — the concluding expression combines gratitude with forward-looking optimism, reinforcing relational continuity beyond the immediate transaction and affirming long-term partnership expectations in accordance with prevailing norms of *guanxi*-based business culture.

This discourse structure demonstrates that business negotiation constitutes a coherent, goal-oriented communicative process in which each stage requires contextually appropriate linguistic expressions, systematically calibrated to manage interpersonal dynamics, uphold institutional expectations, and facilitate efficient decision-making while sustaining trust and professional dignity throughout the interaction.

5. Pedagogical Implications for Teaching Business Chinese Negotiation to Vietnamese Students

5.1. Student Survey Results and Pedagogical Implications

The survey findings from the 60 participating learners indicate that most have developed a clear understanding of the functional significance of politeness expressions within Business Chinese negotiation discourse. Specifically, 88.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that such expressions serve a vital function in facilitating

smooth and respectful business communication; 86.7% reported being able to differentiate between neutral and contextually appropriate polite forms; and 83.3% expressed confidence in deploying honorific terms—including formal address markers such as *GuiGongSi* (Your Company), *GuiFang* (Your Side), *WoFang* (Our Side), and the respectful second-person pronoun *Nin*—in appropriately structured interactions. These results suggest a foundational level of metapragmatic awareness among learners, reflecting successful exposure to core sociolinguistic norms in prior instruction.

Nevertheless, substantial pragmatic challenges persist in real-time application. A majority—70.0%—reported uncertainty when formulating requests related to commercial adjustments, such as proposing revised pricing, renegotiating delivery timelines, or modifying payment arrangements. Similarly, 65.0% indicated limited confidence in articulating concerns or seeking constructive resolutions in a manner consistent with Chinese business etiquette. Moreover, 73.3% acknowledged a persistent reliance on literal translation strategies from their first language into Chinese, a pattern that frequently yields grammatically well-formed utterances lacking contextual appropriateness, register alignment, or relational sensitivity. This phenomenon underscores a critical gap between declarative knowledge and procedural competence, highlighting the need for pedagogical interventions that prioritize pragmatic fluency over syntactic accuracy alone.

In addition, learners consistently emphasized the value of experiential learning modalities. Approximately 75% indicated that side-by-side comparison of direct versus indirect phrasings significantly enhanced their ability to discern subtle pragmatic distinctions in tone, deference, and interpersonal positioning; 75% rated scenario-based role-playing exercises—particularly those simulating supplier-client dialogues, contract review discussions, or post-delivery coordination—as highly effective for internalizing appropriate linguistic choices; and 76.7% explicitly requested expanded instructional time dedicated to guided practice, feedback-rich drills, and reflective analysis of authentic negotiation excerpts. These preferences collectively point toward a strong learner orientation toward situated, interactionally grounded skill development, reinforcing the necessity of designing curricular components that mirror real-world communicative demands while scaffolding gradual autonomy in pragmatic decision-making (As shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of Student Survey Results on Politeness Expressions

Survey Item	Agree/Strongly Agree (%)	Pedagogical Implication
Politeness expressions play an important role in Business Chinese negotiation discourse.	88.4	Reinforce students' awareness of the pragmatic value of politeness strategies in business communication.
I can distinguish between ordinary expressions and polite expressions in Business Chinese.	86.7	Strengthen learners' ability to recognize contextually appropriate language use.
I can appropriately use honorific expressions such as <i>gui gongsi</i> ("your esteemed company"), <i>gui fang</i> ("your side"), <i>wo fang</i> ("our side"), and <i>nin</i> ("you").	83.3	Continue systematic instruction on honorific forms and their communicative functions.
I find it difficult to choose appropriate expressions when requesting price reductions, modifying delivery conditions, or negotiating payment methods.	70.0	Provide more practice in negotiation scenarios involving requests and proposals.

I find it difficult to express complaints or request solutions politely.	65.0	Increase training on complaint management and conflict-mitigating communication.
I tend to translate directly from Vietnamese into Chinese during business communication.	73.3	Emphasize pragmatic competence rather than literal translation in classroom instruction.
Comparing direct and indirect (polite) expressions helps me better understand Business Chinese.	75.0	Incorporate contrastive analysis activities into Business Chinese instruction.
Scenario-based role-playing activities help me use politeness expressions more effectively.	75.0	Increase the use of role-playing and simulation activities in negotiation courses.
I would like to receive more instruction and practice on politeness expressions in Business Chinese.	76.7	Develop additional instructional materials and practice-oriented classroom activities.

The survey findings reveal a notable discrepancy between students' conceptual awareness and their operational proficiency in using politeness resources. Although most respondents recognized the importance of such expressions in Business Chinese negotiation discourse, many lacked confidence in applying them accurately and flexibly during dynamic, goal-oriented exchanges. The relatively high percentages of reported difficulties in negotiating transactional parameters and addressing service-related concerns indicate that instructional attention should be deliberately directed toward communicative situations requiring careful management of relational harmony, mutual face preservation, and cooperative problem resolution. Therefore, teaching should move beyond the presentation of isolated sentence patterns and instead situate linguistic expressions within authentic communicative contexts, clearly defined participant roles, and specific negotiation objectives—emphasizing how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce professional identity, institutional affiliation, and shared commitment to collaborative outcomes.

5.2. Teaching Politeness Expressions According to Communicative Functions

Drawing upon empirical findings from discourse analysis of authentic business negotiation interactions and comprehensive student survey data, it is evident that politeness expressions in Business Chinese should be systematically taught according to their communicative functions rather than as isolated lexical items. Terms such as BaoJia (quotation), JiaoHuoQi (delivery date), FuKuanFangShi (payment method), HeTong (contract), and SuoPei (compensation) carry distinct pragmatic weight depending on their situational deployment; therefore, presenting them in decontextualized vocabulary lists undermines learners' ability to deploy them appropriately [14, 15]. Instead, instructional design should foreground task-based, function-driven units—such as requesting quotations, presenting counter-offers, negotiating price adjustments, confirming logistics timelines, articulating dissatisfaction with service or product quality, and collaboratively proposing remedial measures. This pedagogical orientation strengthens learners' awareness of how linguistic form maps onto interactional goals across negotiation phases—from initial inquiry to final agreement—and cultivates both pragmatic sensitivity and strategic communicative competence essential for professional success in Chinese-speaking business environments (As shown in Table 4).

Table 4. Function-Oriented Teaching Framework for Politeness Expressions in Business Chinese Negotiation

Communicative Function	Representative Expressions	Teaching Focus	Suggested Classroom Activities
Requesting quotations	<i>qingwen...</i> ("may I ask..."), <i>baojia</i> ("quote"), <i>gui gongsi</i> ("your esteemed company")	Using honorific forms and polite requests when initiating negotiations	Quotation inquiry role-play; dialogue completion
Providing quotations	<i>women de baojia shi...</i> ("our price offer is..."), <i>genju guifang de yaoqiu...</i> ("according to your side's request...")	Presenting prices clearly and professionally	Price quotation simulations; pair-work dialogues
Negotiating price reductions	<i>nengfou...</i> ("whether it is possible..."), <i>zai kaolu yixia</i> ("reconsider"), <i>youhui de kongjian</i> ("room for discounts"), <i>luegao</i> ("slightly high")	Employing mitigating expressions to reduce imposition during bargaining	Price negotiation simulations; expression substitution exercises
Confirming delivery and payment terms	<i>shifou keyi...</i> ("can or cannot..."), <i>jiaohuoqi</i> ("delivery date"), <i>fukuan fangshi</i> ("payment method"), <i>hetong</i> ("contract")	Confirming transaction details through indirect and polite questioning	Contract negotiation tasks; information-gap activities
Making complaints	<i>guanyu... wenti</i> ("regarding the issue of..."), <i>women xiwang guifang...</i> ("we hope your side..."), <i>jinyibu goutong yixia</i> ("communicate further")	Expressing dissatisfaction objectively while maintaining cooperative relationships	Complaint-response role-play; pragmatic revision exercises
Proposing solutions	<i>tichu heli de jie jue fangan</i> ("propose a reasonable solution"), <i>jinyibu taolun</i> ("further discussion"), <i>shuangfang hezuo</i> ("mutual cooperation")	Reaching mutually acceptable solutions through cooperative language	Group negotiations; case-based discussions

5.3. Comparing Direct and Indirect Expressions

Learners from certain linguistic backgrounds often exhibit a strong tendency to rely on literal translation strategies when acquiring Business Chinese, which may lead to pragmatic inappropriateness in professional communication contexts. Instructors are therefore advised to systematically integrate contrastive pragmatic analysis into curriculum design, guiding learners to critically examine functional differences between semantically equivalent expressions—particularly those differing in directness, modality, and interpersonal sensitivity. Such pedagogical scaffolding supports the development of sociopragmatic competence, enabling learners to navigate hierarchical, relational, and face-sensitive dimensions inherent in Chinese business discourse [16].

For instance, the straightforward statement *NiMenDeJiaGeTaiGao* can be rendered more appropriately as *ZheGeJiaGeBiWoMenDeYuQiLveGao* to convey comparative evaluation without imposing judgment; *NiMenBiXuJiangJia* may be softened into *QingWenJiaGeFangMianHaiYouMeiYouYouHuiDeKongJian?* to invite collaborative problem-solving rather than issuing directives; *NiMenMaShangFaHuo* can be rephrased as *QingWenGuiFangNengFouJinKuaiAnPaiFaHuo?* to express urgency while preserving mutual respect; and *NiMenDeChanPinYouWenTi* can be reframed as *GuanYuChanPinZhiLiangWenTi*, *WoMenXiangJinYiBuGouTongYiXia* to introduce

concerns cooperatively rather than attributing fault. These carefully calibrated substitutions illustrate how syntactic restructuring, modal particle insertion, and question-formulation serve as key pragmatic resources for maintaining harmony and professionalism in negotiation settings (As shown in Table 5).

Table 5. Comparison of Direct and Indirect Expressions in Business Chinese Negotiation

Direct Expression	Polite/Indirect Expression	Pragmatic Effect
<i>nimen de jiage tai gao</i> ("your price is too high")	<i>zhege jiage bi women de yuqi luegao</i> ("this price is slightly higher than our expectations")	Softens negative evaluation and reduces face-threatening effects.
<i>nimen bixu jiangjia</i> ("you must lower the price")	<i>qingwen jiage fangmian hai you meiyou youhui de kongjian?</i> ("may I ask if there is still room for discounts regarding the price?")	Frames the request as a negotiation rather than a demand.
<i>nimen mashang fahuo</i> ("you ship immediately")	<i>qingwen guifang nengfou jinkuai anpai fahuo?</i> ("may I ask if your side could arrange shipment as soon as possible?")	Demonstrates respect and minimizes imposition.
<i>nimen de chanpin you wenti</i> ("your product has problems")	<i>guanyu chanpin zhiliang wenti, women xiang jinyibu goutong yixia</i> ("regarding the product quality issue, we would like to communicate further")	Presents the issue objectively and promotes cooperative problem-solving.

5.4. Role-Playing Activities and Pragmatic Error Correction

Role-playing constitutes a pedagogically robust instructional approach for cultivating pragmatic competence in Business Chinese negotiation contexts. Its efficacy stems from its capacity to simulate authentic, goal-oriented professional interactions, thereby bridging the gap between linguistic knowledge and real-world communicative application. To maximize learning outcomes, such activities must be systematically scaffolded within a coherent instructional framework that explicitly delineates participants' communicative roles (e.g., procurement manager, sales representative, legal advisor), specifies concrete negotiation objectives (such as securing favorable pricing terms or resolving delivery discrepancies), and prescribes targeted language functions (including hedging, face-saving formulations, and contractual terminology). A comprehensive training sequence typically unfolds across multiple interdependent phases: initial company and product introductions grounded in corporate identity and market positioning; structured exchange of quotations with attention to unit pricing, bulk discounts, and validity periods; iterative price negotiation incorporating concession strategies and justification frameworks; collaborative discussion of logistics—including lead times, shipping modalities, and Incoterms compliance; mutual agreement on secure, internationally recognized payment mechanisms (e.g., letters of credit or escrow arrangements); formal confirmation of contract clauses covering liability, intellectual property, and force majeure provisions; and finally, constructive resolution of post-contractual complaints through empathetic framing and solution-oriented discourse.

Prior to engaging in role-play, instructors must equip learners with clearly articulated communicative tasks aligned with industry standards, explicitly model and practice context-appropriate politeness markers—including honorific titles, deferential verb forms, and formulaic expressions of respect—and articulate transparent, criterion-referenced assessment rubrics. Post-activity feedback should adopt a holistic, pragmatically oriented lens, moving beyond surface-level accuracy in vocabulary, grammar, and phonology to critically evaluate sociolinguistic appropriateness: this includes the strategic deployment of honorific address forms reflecting hierarchical and relational nuances, the skillful use of indirectness to soften requests or criticisms, the consistent application of mitigation devices (e.g., epistemic modals, conditional constructions, and parenthetical softeners) during contentious exchanges, the

maintenance of cooperative rapport when managing service failures or disputes, and the coherent structuring of negotiations through purposeful openings, logically sequenced developments, and professionally appropriate closings [17]. This integrative assessment paradigm reinforces the understanding that advanced Business Chinese proficiency is inherently situated within professional communicative competence—encompassing strategic, cultural, and interactional dimensions—not merely syntactic or lexical accuracy.

6. Conclusion

This study has systematically investigated the linguistic realization of politeness in Business Chinese negotiation discourse, drawing upon integrated frameworks from pragmatics and discourse analysis. The empirical findings reveal that politeness is not merely conveyed through isolated lexical choices but is deeply embedded in syntactic patterning, interactional sequencing, and functional discourse organization. Specifically, honorific address forms serve as foundational markers of relational positioning; indirect interrogative constructions—such as modalized questions and conditional phrasings—soften propositional force while preserving face autonomy; mitigating expressions (e.g., hedging adverbs, epistemic modals, and tentative verbs) attenuate assertiveness without compromising clarity; complaint strategies are consistently framed with prefatory acknowledgments and solution-oriented formulations; and the overall discourse architecture follows a predictable, stage-governed progression—from initial rapport-building and agenda setting, through proposal exchange and adjustment, to consensus formulation and closing formalities. Collectively, these features operate synergistically to foster mutual understanding, sustain collaborative momentum, uphold professional decorum, and reinforce shared commitment to constructive dialogue throughout the negotiation process.

Pedagogical implications emerge clearly from learner-centered survey data, which highlight persistent challenges in pragmatic competence development among learners engaged in Business Chinese instruction. While awareness of politeness norms is generally present, application remains inconsistent across high-stakes communicative tasks—including price discussion, contractual term revision, service-related concern articulation, and collaborative problem resolution. A recurring pattern involves reliance on literal translation strategies, which often transfer structural and pragmatic conventions from learners' first language into Chinese, resulting in unintended directness, inappropriate register selection, or misaligned interpersonal framing. To address these gaps, instructional design should prioritize function-driven learning pathways: authentic negotiation transcripts must be deconstructed for pragmatic intent and discourse function; contrastive analysis between explicit and implicit expression types should be scaffolded with guided noticing tasks; role-play activities need to be tightly aligned with real-world procedural stages—such as opening protocols, concession framing, and agreement ratification—and supported by structured feedback loops; and error correction must be embedded iteratively within communicative practice, focusing not only on form but also on strategic appropriateness, contextual fit, and relational impact.

The principal scholarly contribution of this work resides in its dual-method synthesis: it advances theoretical understanding of politeness as a dynamic, discourse-embedded resource in professional Chinese communication, while simultaneously grounding pedagogical recommendations in empirically observed learner needs and performance patterns. By bridging descriptive discourse analysis with applied language learning insights, the study offers a replicable model for context-sensitive curriculum development in business language education. However, certain methodological constraints warrant acknowledgment: the participant pool consisted of 60 learners enrolled at a single higher education institution, limiting generalizability across broader demographic, institutional, or proficiency-level spectra. Future investigations could significantly strengthen validity and applicability by extending data collection to multi-institutional, cross-regional cohorts; conducting fine-grained comparative discourse studies across parallel negotiation genres in multiple languages; designing longitudinal intervention studies to

assess the sustained impact of targeted pragmatic instruction; and incorporating multimodal data—such as prosodic features, turn-taking patterns, and nonverbal coordination—to enrich the understanding of politeness as an embodied, interactional phenomenon.

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