

Interpersonal Meaning in Sales Letters on Internet Business

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ABSTRACT

Social relationships and roles between participants in a persuasive text such as sales letters are interesting to analyze. The writer chose sales letters collected from internet forum Warrior Forum as the research materials. The focus of the article is how the sales letter writers influence the potential customers and what social role is played among the participants in sales letter. The author uses interpersonal meaning theory in systemic functional linguistics. The writer restricts the issue only on an analysis of the mood types, social relationships between the participants and text type.

The purpose of this paper is to find the structure and interpersonal meaning of the sales letters existed in the Warrior Forum. The analysis show that the interpersonal meaning in sales letter is to persuade potential buyers to purchase the product seller. Sales letter writers also use informal language and show a friendly and credible impression to the prospective buyers even though they are not familiar with each other. The analysis also show that sales letter is a spoken text.

Keyword: sales letters, interpersonal meaning, text type, mood types, social relationship.

1. Introduction

Sales letter is a letter written for a purpose of promoting and selling a product or a service to the customers. It is a type of business letter which is used to generate business and function as an announcement letter.¹ Sales letter generally has similar functions to that of advertisements, which are very common to use to promote the entrepreneur's products.

As a persuasive text, sales letter carries distinctive interpersonal meaning, which relates to the social relationship between the sales letter writer and the potential customers. On the other hand, sales letter owns a lot of spoken text features although it has a written form. Thus, the writer is also encouraged to observe the interpersonal meaning and type of language contained in a sales letter.

Since there have already been plenty research projects that address mood-residue structure and other type of metafunction, the writer decides to conduct a research project regarding to interpersonal meaning in sales letter as a different research object. The writer limits her focus on the typical mood types being used, social relationship between participants, and text type of sales letter. The research has several purposes as follows: 1) identifying the mood types used and their functions in the sales letters, 2) discovering the role and social relationship between the sales letter writers and the prospective buyers, and 3) determining whether a sales letter is a spoken or written text.

2. Literary Review

According to the introduction above, the writer applies interpersonal meaning (which includes mood types and social relationship) and text type theoretical frameworks to analyze the sales letters. The interpersonal metafunction relates to a text's aspects of tenor or interactivity (O'Halloran, 2006:15). Tenor comprises three component areas: the speaker/writer persona, social distance, and relative

¹ Cited from <http://letters.targetstudy.com/sales-letter>

social status (Coffin, 2006:11). Butt et al (2003:182) explains that tenor of discourse represents the social relation between the producer of utterance and the receiver. Interpersonal meanings are meanings which express a speaker's attitudes and judgements for acting upon and with others (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:13).

In English, mood is actualized by the position of subject and finite in the clause (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:38). These two elements move around depending upon the types of the mood. The first one to be discussed is indicative mood. It is realised by unmarked subject and finite. The sequence of subject and finite attains declarative and interrogative. Declaratives are realised through subject and finite structure, while interrogatives are realised through finite and subject structure. In the declaratives, the information is provided from the speaker to the hearer; the former is an a provider of information and the latter is the recipient of information. Meanwhile, the speaker expects to receive an answer from the hearer. The former is the recipient of information, while the latter is the provider of information.

The WH-interrogatives are drawn as a distinct element in the interpersonal structure of the clause. It determines the object that the questioner asks for. These kind of clauses can be conflated with a complement or adjunct, but never a predicator. On the other hand, exclamatives have the WH-element what or how, in nominal or an adverbial group (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:137). The question of 'what' associates with a complement, the questions of 'who' associates with a subject, whereas 'how' and 'when' associate with adjuncts.

The very last mood type is imperative. Imperatives may consist of Subject and Finite, Subject only, Finite only, or they may have no mood element (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:41). Yet, there will always be Predicator. In imperatives, the speaker acts as the recipient of information/goods/services, while the hearer acts as the provider of information/goods/services.

Modalization allows subtlety in expression of judgement about certainty and usuality. The stronger the usage of modality, the more tentative an expression is. Modalizations are realised through certain ways: 'internally' through choosing a

finite modal operator and one or more mood adjuncts; and ‘externally’ by adding a pseudo-clause which can be phrased objectively or subjectively (Eggins, 1994:183).

Modulations complete modalizations in terms of propositions. Modalization expresses degree of possibility in modulation. A speaker adds his judgement and attitude toward action and events through modulation (Eggins, 1994:189). For instance, degree of modulation may vary from high (*must/required to*) to low (*may/allowed to*). Modulation is commonly used in proposals (offers).

Social relationship refers to social roles played by the participants (Eggins, 1994: 63) that can affect how people use language. According to Poynton in Eggins (1994:64), social relationship can be identified through three different aspects: power, affective involvement, and contact. A situation of whether the participants roles have equal authority or not is put in power. Contact puts situation in terms whether the role which the participant plays brings frequent or infrequent contact. Affective involvement concerns with the range of our involvement emotionally in a situation.

Social relationship is also divided into two situations: informal and formal. Informal situation generally involves participants who have equal power, frequent contact to each other, and high affective involvement. Meanwhile, a formal situation will occur when the participants have unequal power, low contact happenings (or a one way communication), and low affective involvement.

The relationship between language and context of conversation are the keys of differences between spoken and written language (Gerot and Wignell, 1994:158). Spoken language is dependent on the context, whereas written language is more independent over the context.

Most spoken	Most written
Context dependent	Context independent
Language in action	Language as reflection
Language as process (dynamic)	Language as product (synoptic)

Spoken and written language are complex in different circumstances. Written language tends to be grammatically complex while spoken language tends to be lexically complex. In addition, spoken language is grammatically crinkled, whereas written language is lexically dense. These features of spoken and written language are introduced in terms of grammatical intricacy and lexical density.

3. Research Method

Data are taken from an internet marketing forum called Warrior Forum, which self-proclaims as the biggest internet marketing forum in the world. The population includes every sales letter existed in the forum within April-May 2014. The writer only takes few sales letters by using all clauses as research objects.

To collect the data required, the writer uses Simak Bebas Libat Cakap (SBLC) technique. SBLC technique only requires the researcher to observe the dialogue going on without getting involved directly to affect the participants' actions (Sudaryanto, 1993:134). The writer also applies cluster sampling by taking data from a large single source, i. e. Warrior Forum, and picking the data randomly from there.

The writer also utilizes distributional method, i.e. immediate constituent (IC) analysis, in analyzing the data. Segmenting immediate constituents technique divides the lingual data units into several parts or elements; and these related elements are assumed to be the part which composes the said lingual units (Sudaryanto, 1993:31). In analyzing sales letter's structure, every clause is divided into smaller parts in order to label every component, whether it is Subject, Finite or such.

4. Discussions

There are 15 stages in sales letters, namely: Drawing Customers' Attention; Greeting Customers; Explaining Current Situation; Recognizing Customers' Problem; Finding Solution; Giving Self-Testimonials; Introducing Product; Convincing Customers; Explaining Details of the Product; Introducing Samples; Giving Additional Information; Closing to Action; Giving Testimonials from Others; Answering Questions; and Delivering Epilogue. Each stage has its own prominent mood types and features which result in various social relationship interpretations.

4.1. Mood Types and Social Relationship

The use of declaratives is eminent within a sales letter. It is used as a medium for the sales letter writers to give information to the prospective buyers about the subject being talked about. The use of declaratives is also mainly followed by modalizations, which mainly functions to enhance possibilities on both the products and the prospective buyers. There are also several uses of imperatives which is used by the sales letter writers to demand an action regarding to making money via online (i.e. telling people to buy the products).

Sales letter most likely show unequal power, low affective involvement, and infrequent contact between the seller and the customers. The seller's position is lower than the customers, which is implied through the use of formal lexis and the formal occasion a sales letter is imposed to. Infrequent contact and low affective involvement show the distance between the participants. Sales letter writers also often use "you" to call the customers, which implies lack of vocatives, thus it can be concluded that a sales letter is directed to the buyers whom the seller never met before.

4.2. Formal and Informal Language in Sales Letters

Sales letter writers in general use formal language in sales letters to persuade potential buyers to purchase their products. In addition, the sales letter writers also

make use of informal language to convince the potential buyers. It is shown through the patterns of formal and informal language in sales letters.

Sales letters typically use neutral words. There are some attitudinal lexis follow to attach strong emotions of the speaker, i.e. the seller, to convince people to buy the products being offered. The attitudinal lexis appear frequently in some stages in sales letters, e.g. convincing customer's stage. The speaker commonly uses words like *exactly*, *absolutely*, *huge* or *PROFIT!* to strengthen their judgment on something being talked about.

Sales letters mainly use formal lexis without slang. The speaker seems conscious about the fact that both speaker and hearer probably have never met before. Thus, formal lexis are used to show politeness. The speaker also uses abbreviated forms like *I'll*, *You'll*, *You'd* which are not appropriate to use in a written form of text. The use of abbreviated forms indicates that sales letter is grouped in a spoken text, which normally uses abbreviated forms.

The speaker does not use any names to call the readers. There is no vocative found in the text. The speaker always uses "you" to mention the readers, with the only exception of warriors and mobile marketers in the stage of greeting customers. It actually implies that sales letter is meant to use in a formal occasion.

Sales letter writers use a lot of modalizations to get their point across. There is a modalization to show deference, which is implied through modulation in the stage of giving self testimonials. The speaker also uses modalizations as suggestion to the readers which can be seen in convincing customers stage. The function of giving opinion in modalizations also appears in convincing customers and testimonial from others stage (which also occurs in several other stages). The function of probability in modalizations most likely occurs in the stage of drawing customers' attention and convincing customers. The findings imply that sales letter is used in a formal occasion.

The utilization of both formal and informal language in sales letters leads to several conclusions. First, sales letter is used in a formal transaction between

the seller and the potential buyer. It is marked in the lack of vocative and the dominant use of formal lexis. Second, there is a possibility that the seller is showing the impression of being friendly although both seller and potential customer probably have never met before.

4.3. Sales Letter as Spoken Text

The analysis show that sales letter has the features of spoken language. First of all, a sales letter is very context dependent. The premise is proven through the dominant use of pronouns and articles in a sales letter. It is very apparent in the stages which are closely related, for instance recognizing customers' problem and giving self-testimonials.

Second, sales letter has language in action. Language in action is related to the function of the text and the interactivity between participants in text. Sales letter in internet business functions as a medium to promote the seller's products and persuade the potential buyers. A text with language in action serves the purpose of demanding interlocutors to do something told by the speaker, and so does a sales letter.

Third, sales letter as a spoken text also shows the characteristic of using language as process. There is a dynamic process within a text which has language as process, in which a text is delivered through phases to reach the speaker's goal. Sales letter has stages which reflect language as process in a spoken text. A seller in sales letter does not directly command the potential buyers to buy his products, but asks them to buy the products through several phases which can be concluded from the first section of data analysis.

Continuing on the grammatical intricacy and lexical density aspects of a sales letter, it can be concluded that 3 out of 5 sales letters available show characteristics of spoken language, which is marked through a higher amount of grammatical words than content words. Also, although the other two sales letters are claimed to have more content words than grammatical words, the overall low marks in lexical density aspect in sales letter show that a sales letter is a spoken

text. It means that sales letter is grammatically intricate and lexically not dense in general. In summary, sales letter can be categorized as a spoken text even though it has a written form.

5. Conclusion

Sales letter as in internet business has a purpose to inform and persuade the prospective buyers. The purpose of getting the customers to buy the product sold by the writer of the sales letter is realized through several stages. Required stages of a sales letter include: *Drawing Customers' Attention*, *Giving Self-Testimony*, *Convincing Customers*, *Explaining Details of the Product* and *Closing to Action*.

Declaratives dominate almost all stages of the sales letter. It indicates that the speaker would like to inform people about the product he/she sells. There are also several modalizations in action to convince hearer to buy the products. Imperatives also appear to enjoin the action of buying product by the readers and draw people's attention to the products.

The overall sales letters show the role relationship of the seller and the customers. Speaker and hearer have unequal power, low affective involvement and infrequent contact toward each other. Communication between the participants works one-way with speaker as the active interactant. Sales letter is also found to use both informal and formal language, with the notion that the text happens in a formal occasion but the tension is lowered through informal language. Sales letter is a form of spoken text, which its characteristics are context dependent, grammatically intricate and not lexically dense.

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