

“Are you my friend?”: Negotiating friendship in conversations between network marketers and their prospects

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is studied as a culturally and contextually embedded entity. Focusing on the interactions between network marketers and their prospects, this article proposes four key central elements through which participants make sense of themselves when their identities are in transgression and conflict. Instead of being essentialist, the four elements of friendship – intimacy, control, trust, and positiveness – are highly interactional and dynamic elements that can be negotiated by participants in a conversation. It is argued that Grice’s Cooperative Principle is valid, but this should be enhanced by participants’ specific culture and prior experience. The notion of “face” in politeness models should be expanded in light of its dynamic characteristics in interaction. (Discourse analysis, network marketing, identity, friendship, politeness, culture)*

INTRODUCTION

Recent research has produced a wide consensus that language functions as an important force in constructing social reality; and through conversation, the dynamic negotiation process gives rise to various forms of social identity, such as gender (Goodwin 1995), profession (He 1996, Mandelbaum 1996), and generation (Coupland et al. 1991). However, not much attention has been given to the relatively short-term, intermittent identities that we construct in everyday life. Those who have studied such identities have tended to focus on those with fixed power relationship in highly constrained settings – for example, between salespersons and clients or doctors and patients – with the primary aim of discovering hidden social inequalities as these are reflected in discourse. An important missing element is the analysis of a wider range of social settings and activities, those “in which there is no . . . formal constraint on turn-taking, and therefore in which the distinctiveness of the discourse, as compared to conversation, is not to be found in stylized sequential patterns” (Drew 1990:31). An examination of these seemingly unimportant identities is needed not only to know more about them but

also to understand how we make sense of ourselves in those situations.¹ As Scollon 1997 argues, there must be a “window” for seeing ourselves and constructing our identities, no matter how minor or trivial the event is: “What one does not find is any identity-free instances of public discourse. The ascription of identity is inherent in the activities at the sites of engagement in which this discourse takes place” (59).

Nevertheless, identities are not fixed, preordained entities into which agents slip like overcoats; rather, they are involved in the constant process of negotiation, contest and “co-construction,” which refers to “the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, other culturally meaningful reality . . . however, [co-construction] does not necessarily entail affiliative or supportive interactions” (Jacoby & Ochs 1995:91). Therefore, basically any social interaction (including disagreement) is cooperatively constructed, as are the identities involved. The sense-making process during identity negotiation is best captured by interactions that are short-term and fluid, with which the participants do not have much previous experience. The interactions between network marketers and their prospects (in essence, their friends or acquaintances) are very interesting sites for investigating this issue because in those interactions, the participants have to transform their relationship into a new consensus. In an unfamiliar context such as network marketing interactions, the participants may not have an appropriate script or frame for inferring what is happening. As a result, the construction process will be more subject to ongoing negotiation during the interaction.

This leads to some interesting questions: Will the participants use other proximate models, such as the ordinary transactions between salespersons and clients who do not know each other, as a model for the interaction? Or will they instead negotiate a new appropriate model of interaction that meets the communicative needs of that particular interaction? How do they manage the potential conflicts that arise in the mismatch of their new relationship? Drawing on the theories of pragmatics and Conversation Analysis, this study examines how friendship is interactionally constructed, managed, and opted out of by participants in a context where they have to work out new ground rules.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Network marketing as a crossroads of friendship and business

Duck 1983 points out that friendships meet significant psychological and physiological needs. Researchers agree that individuals who enjoy a network of good friends have fewer medical problems, rely on friends for practical advice when other relationships (such as marriage) are jeopardized, and experience less loneliness and frustration (Roiger 1993). Although it can be argued that some other relationships (such as family) can fulfill some similar roles, friendship may do so more effectively because friends usually have less demanding expectations and

are less subjective than marital partners and family members. However, friendship can be the most fragile of all relationships, as Rawlins comments:

Although cross words and misunderstandings alone cannot dissolve a marriage, a business partnership, or a blood tie, volatile or unfortunate exchanges may be all that is necessary for two people to turn away from each other and no longer be friends. It is therefore a fragile and potentially capricious relationship. (1992:101)

The potential fragility and capriciousness of friendships is heightened by the restricted opportunities for choosing our friends in certain contexts, such as the workplace. In other words, misunderstandings between friends can have fatal results for the relationship. Despite the importance of friendship in our lives, friendship is the least researched of important relationships, with marital and family relationships receiving far more study. The reason could be the difficulty of conducting research in this area, which is especially subject to private negotiation between the participants concerned.

Network marketing, as an enterprise “using” friendship to promote products, has been notorious for its exploitive use of interpersonal meaning (Kong 2001). Here I will outline briefly what network marketing is and how it works. Originally developed in the United States, network marketing (also known as multi-level marketing) is not a business itself but a kind of marketing strategy. The network marketing strategy differs from traditional marketing strategies in that products are sold directly from manufacturers to customers, without involving wholesalers, distributors, and advertisers, which are usually large business enterprises; hence, promotional and distribution costs are purportedly kept to a minimum. Of course, this does not mean that network marketing does not need distributors, but they are the “customers” themselves, who perform all the functions of wholesalers, distributors, and salespersons. The network marketing strategy is also based on the concept of word-of-mouth promotion; customers consume the products, find them satisfactory, and then promote the products to their network, which includes friends, relatives, colleagues, and virtually anyone else they know. Money, in the form of commissions and bonuses, is earned both by successfully selling products and by persuading network members to join the company and become distributors themselves.

Touted as a fairer method of wealth distribution than traditional marketing, network marketing has developed rapidly all over the world (Clothier 1992). According to the World Federation of Direct Selling Associations, in 1990 more than 1,000 network marketing companies worldwide employed more than 9 million salespersons, who reported sales of US \$44 billion to 320 million consumers, and these numbers are still increasing (Clothier 1992). These figures may be exaggerated, but the increasing influence of network marketing has already been felt by many of us in modern society, since through network marketing our per-

sonal lives are penetrated by business activities, whether or not network marketing, as a product of contemporary social change, is an unethical business.

Structure of unsolicited sales interactions

Verbal sales interactions have been researched by linguists; however, most of the work has been done on solicited sales interactions in which both participants are active and willing actors in negotiations through which they will benefit in some way. Focus has been predominantly on the discourse structure and linguistic realizations of sales interactions in shops, companies, or sales organizations with physical settings. For example, Ventola 1987, adopting a systemic-functional approach to language, studies the structure and lexical realizations of a variety of service encounters such as post office and travel agency interactions. In his ethnographic study of sales interactions on the island of St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Simounet's (1987) main goal is to uncover the structural and linguistic differences of those interactions in comparison with American ones, so as to develop a pedagogically relevant program for the local English curriculum. Lack of research into unsolicited sales interactions leaves a gap in our understanding of those interactions, which involve participants who are reluctant players of the game. Although advice and guidelines on "how to sell" permeate textbooks and manuals on selling, they are based only on personal observation and intuition. Studies based on real-life data are scarce. One notable exception is a recent study of unsolicited telephone sales interactions (Clark et al. 1994), examining the interactional features of customers' silence and their significance in determining success in an unsolicited sales interaction.

Common sense tells us that salespeople must be taught some selling skills during their training, and so, as background to the present study, observation was conducted of two training sessions for network marketing distributors. It was found that network marketers are frequently introduced to the four-part selling phases presented in many textbooks on selling (although exactly the same terms may not be used in different training arenas). The same strategies are also adopted by other selling personnel, such as insurance or other door-to-door salespeople. The four phases are Approach, Presentation, Objection, and Conclusion.²

In the Approach phase, the intention of the salesperson is introduced and the negative face of the prospect, i.e., the desire to be unimpeded, is at stake (Brown & Levinson 1987). This is also the phase where the salesperson's ability to attract his or her prospect's attention is tested, and hence his or her own positive face value of being accepted as a competent salesperson is also an issue. The Presentation phase involves introduction of the products; it may highlight flaws the prospect has, such as a weight problem, posing a threat to the prospect's positive face value of being liked and accepted. In contrast, the salesperson's positive face value of being accepted as competent and skillful is threatened by the prospect's objections in the Objection stage. Last, in the Conclusion phase, the positive face of the salesperson is more an issue, because this is the stage where his or her

success in the sales effort will be determined. In consideration of this, the salesperson will try hard to convince the prospect, putting the prospect's negative face in the greatest jeopardy. It is acknowledged that face need – whether positive or negative – could be a concern to both salesperson and prospect throughout the entire sales interaction, regardless of the stages or phases of their negotiation.

What I would like to highlight for analysis is the fact that at different stages, the face burden to participants may not be equally distributed, and this unequal distribution may result in different strategies of the participants in negotiation. In the following, I will try to explain each phase and its corresponding face burdens for salespersons and prospects.

Approaching prospects as an act threatening their negative face. In any unsolicited sales encounter, prospects must be identified and approached before selling takes place. Anderson 1987, in a well-known textbook on selling, identifies the four objectives of this particular selling phase: to gain the prospect's attention; to awaken his or her needs; to qualify a prospect; and to prepare for the next phase, presentation. Apart from the multiple functions of this phase, approach can be done in various ways. The most typical one used by salespeople is to introduce themselves: "Good morning, I'm XXX, from XYX company." Although this method of beginning a sales interaction may be the most daunting to prospects, it is usually regarded as a good starter by many sales textbooks, as well as by some manuals on network marketing, for situations in which the targets are not acquaintances. No matter what approach salespeople adopt with their prospects, it is undoubtedly a very significant step in a sales interaction, since the prospect's likelihood of listening to a salesman in the next few minutes depends on the sales agent's success in arousing the prospect's interest.

However, this is not an easy task: Stopping someone in the street or knocking on someone's door is already an imposition on that person's freedom – in Brown & Levinson's terms, a threat to the negative face value of being unimpeded by others, not to mention the fact that the prospect must spend the next few minutes listening to the sales agent. Hence, approaching prospects is a potentially threatening act to their negative face, but this is not to say that the face of the sales agents is not also at stake. Being refused by prospects is certainly a blow to a sales agent's positive face. But it is the sales agent who initiates this very act of approaching, and the agent must assume beforehand that rejection is a possibility. As a result, in terms of the interactional burden on both parties, the prospect's face wants seem to be a more important concern here; in fact, it is the sales agent's job, in this phase, to arouse the potential prospect's interest without infringing too much on his or her personal territory.

Presenting products to prospects as an act threatening their positive face. After prospects have been identified and approached, the next phase of selling is that of presenting products to the prospects. Depending on the nature of the products,

the sales agent may conduct a demonstration as well. Presenting products serves several aims, according to Anderson 1987: to establish the disadvantages of the prospect's present situation, to be accepted as the salesperson, and to have one's company accepted. However, as will be shown through the analysis of the network marketer-prospect interactions, network marketers make every attempt to "cover up" their identity as salespersons, although they frequently establish the disadvantages of the present situation as well as emphasize the credentials of the company to which they belong. In so doing, they are attempting to construct a single identity that embeds both friendship and the buyer-seller relationship, in order to do the selling more easily. However, their prospects may try to challenge and deconstruct this unified and embedded identity of salesperson-and-friend by emphasizing their friendship identity so as to reject the selling more easily.

In terms of interactional burden, presenting products to prospects may threaten the prospects' positive face. Analyzing people's needs and introducing products to them may jeopardize their positive face value of being liked by someone. For example, when selling health products to prospects, salespeople may emphasize the prospects' overwork and the subsequent fatigue and signs of physical deterioration, like wrinkles and dark under-eye circles. The desire to be liked by others can be an important motivation for keeping oneself in good shape; women are especially vulnerable to such a sales pitch. Consequently, analyzing people's needs and introducing products to them according to these needs carries the risk of being very damaging to prospects' positive face; thus, extra care is usually taken in this regard by sales agents in this phase.

Posing objections as an act threatening sales agents' positive face. If one had to name the single most difficult barrier salespeople must deal with, it would be the objections that prospects may raise. As Anderson points out, any objection to a salesperson's proposition can be perceived as a personal insult, especially by an inexperienced sales agent. The advice given to most sales agents in selling manuals is to not take such objections personally but to treat them as "road signs to success." The practical value of objections, to experienced sales agents, is in the specific information they provide, helping the agents isolate prospects' problems and identify their needs and desires. In other words, in order to be successful, sales agents are taught to have a thick skin and to wear a "professional face" (Charles 1996) – to deal with objections if they arise, so as to reduce the threat to their personal positive face. However, as will be shown in the analyses, one of the most effective strategies adopted by prospects to object to their friend's sales pitches is to make the objection "personal" by challenging the selling friend's personal positive face.

Closing as an embarrassing moment to both sales agents and prospects. Closing is the last phase in a sales interaction, in which a decision will be made by the prospect. To sales agents, it is an all-important phase, determining the success or

TABLE 1. *Relationship between face wants and the four phases of unsolicited selling activities.*

Phases	Network marketer's	Prospect's
<i>Approaching</i>	Positive face	Negative face
<i>Presentation</i>		Positive face
<i>Objection</i>	Positive face	
<i>Conclusion</i>	Positive face	Negative face

failure of their selling and their positive face; the desire to be accepted will be challenged if their prospects refuse to buy the products they are selling. Because this is an important moment to sales agents in terms of both job and face, placing some sort of pressure on their prospects is not uncommon. They may set a deadline for the prospect, or they may exaggerate the seriousness of the situation to increase the prospect's fear. Prospects are urged to make a decision; as a result, their negative face – that is, their desire to be unimpeded – is again at stake. Table 1 summarizes the dominant or major face threats to network marketers and prospects in the four selling phases.

Understanding the structure of ordinary unsolicited sales interactions and their face burdens to participants is important in order to study how network marketers adopt existing selling frameworks in interactions with their friends. Note that the sequence of the four phases is arbitrary; their boundaries are usually changeable, with considerable overlap. Interestingly, the structure of these sales interactions identified in the Western context is also applicable in the Asian context – Hong Kong, in the present study. Of course, participants seldom follow the structure in linear fashion, as the following analysis shows. It may be worthwhile to examine the extent to which the structure is imposed from Western onto Asian culture, or whether the structure itself is a universal entity.

Intentionality in the sense-making process

Intentionality has been a key word in research dealing with human communication across various intellectual disciplines, such as pragmatics (Grice 1975), anthropology (Duranti 1992, Hill 1992), and mass communication (Wartella & Middlestadt 1991). For example, Brown & Levinson's model of politeness, based on the notion that some speech acts are more face-threatening than others, is firmly grounded on the understanding of speaker's intentions, their linguistic realization, and their impact on hearers. Intention is also an important tenet of the Gricean Cooperative Principle (1975), which adheres to the basic assumption that individuals are rational and cooperative in their conversations. These assumptions are classified by Grice into four specific maxims, related to truth

(Maxim of Quality), informativeness (Maxim of Quantity), relevance (Maxim of Relation), and orderliness (Maxim of Manner).

These maxims are not rules that interlocutors must follow, although in Grice's presentation they take the form of imperatives, such as "Be sincere" in the Maxim of Relation. They can be flouted, exploited at the expense of other maxims, violated, infringed, opted out of, or suspended by participants who have absolutely nothing wrong with their speech and hearing.³ In a study in conflict management among friends, Schiffrin 1990 found that the Maxim of Quality is an important element to be negotiated in argument talk, because the truth of the statement and the sincerity of the speaker matter most in arguments.

Reliance on the four maxims may overlook other important sense-making criteria that are relevant only to a particular community or identity. For example, in network marketing interactions, the participants have both business and interpersonal relationships, as shown in ex. (1).

(1) (N=Network Marketer; P=Prospect)

- 1 N: 我老婆幾好, 佢去咗大陸做生意。
'My wife is fine. She's in Mainland doing business.'
- 2 P: 我老細呀都去咗大陸呀, 所以我好忙囉。
'My boss is in Mainland too, that's why I'm so busy.'
- 3 N: 喂, 咁你啱排有無覺得倦呀?
'Then recently do you feel tired?'
- 4 P: 都幾嘍, 但係都攞得掂, 喂, 係嗎, 你老婆而家係邊。
'Yeah, pretty much, but I can still manage. Oh right, where's your wife now?'
- 5 N: 你有無聽過 XXX 呀? 我上緊佢哋 di 健康講座, 佢哋幾好嘍。
'Have you ever heard of XXX? I have been attending their health workshops. XXX are quite good.'
- 6 P: 係, 不過我諗我都唔用嗰di 嘢嘅, 我唔信嘍。
'Yeah, but I think I don't use that kind of products, I don't trust them.'
- 7 N: 唔係呢, 你要試吓呀, 真係好好嘍。
'No, you should try. They are really good.'
- 8 P: um: 我唔需要呀。
'Well: I don't need them.'
- 9 N: um: 我老婆話:
'Well: My wife said:'

In turn 4 above, the prospect asks the network marketer how his wife is doing. To respond, the network marketer violates the Maxim of Relation by asking a seemingly irrelevant question: 'Have you ever heard of XXX (a popular brand name of network marketing products)?'. Knowing about the brand name and its nature, the prospect can infer his friend's intention – to persuade him to buy certain products – and he rejects this selling by denying his need of those products. The rejection is mitigated, though ('I think'). The marketer's continuous selling act results in the prospect's almost "bald-on-record" blunt refusal with minimal mitigation in turn 8, which can be interpreted as a violation of the Maxim of Quantity, or at least as his inconsistency in observing it. The marketer has no choice but resume the previous topic, his wife.

On the surface, the Cooperative Principle is working and suffices to explain the situation, but there are some prior assumptions that must hold true in order for the participants to engage successfully with sense-making. For example, how does the prospect know his friend is selling some products to him when he is violating the Maxim of Relation in turn 5? This could be simply a digression or mishearing of the prospect's question in the previous turn. In other words, why is the prospect definite about the exact intention of his friend? In addition, why does the network marketer stop his selling altogether in turn 8, instead of continuing his attempt, as would be expected in unsolicited sales interactions involving strangers? Obviously, there are other assumptions or criteria for the participants to make sense of what is going on.

Elements of friendship

As (1) shows, the Gricean apparatus cannot capture the complete picture in which participants make sense of each other. In fact, the social context plays an important role in yielding implicature, as expressed by the notion of PARTICULARIZED IMPLICATURE, in which meaning is derived from the context or from knowledge outside the conversation, as opposed to GENERALIZED IMPLICATURE, in which meaning can be deduced entirely within the conversation itself. As Yule notes, "Most of the time, our conversations take place in very specific contexts in which locally recognized inferences are assumed" (Yule 1996:42). Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which identities are negotiated, it is important to delineate what can be important criteria or considerations PRIOR TO the negotiation process. Therefore, I now turn to consider the elements of friendship.⁴

Intimacy can be considered the single most important feature distinguishing friendship from other, less personal relationships. Of course, intimacy is not unique to friendship but also exists in other close personal relationships, such as those of couples and relatives. It plays an important role in the regulation of the identity of friendship: "Intimacy centers on the strength of members' attachments, on the extent to which specific others are built into one's identity and thereby become crucial to the legitimization and enactment of those identities" (Rogers & Miller 1988 [based on McCall & Simmons 1966:295]). Nevertheless, intimacy is an ambiguous notion, since it is more like a feeling or emotion than an entity that can be concrete enough to be measured. For example, Brown & Levinson's (1987) model does not use the term "intimacy" to predict language behavior; instead, social distance, which seems more objective and easier to calculate, is used in predicting politeness behavior even among people who are socially close. According to the model, the level of face threat is determined by three factors – social distance, power, and degree of imposition. The lower the social distance, the lower the face threat will be, and the same relationship applies to other factors. The combination of these factors can predict the level of face threat of a speech act to the hearer. It should be noted, however, that intimacy here is not the

same as social distance. First, intimacy is an entity that is more fluid and subject to negotiation, whereas social distance is relatively more rigid and less easy to change at a given moment. Of course, social distance too can be manipulated (Kong 1998), but the core of a relationship cannot be changed by talking “more like a friend does,” as in sales-prospect interactions.

Second, intimacy can be realized in many different forms, whereas social distance is one of the determining factors. Using Brown & Levinson’s framework, we can see that intimacy can be realized by either positive politeness or zero politeness, i.e. “bald-on-record” acts. A positive politeness strategy highlights involvement, solidarity, and common membership, which are the essence of intimacy. By contrast, the “bald-on-record” act denotes directness and openness, which are also important in a close personal relationship. To some extent, these two forms of realization are ambiguous, since zero politeness is also used among people who have a great power difference.

The second element, control, is important in terms of regulating “definitional rights and constructive efficacy,” and its temporal relevance is the moment when an interaction is taking place (Rogers & Miller 1988). This element is covertly discussed in Brown & Levinson’s model under the guise of “power difference.” Their model does not explicitly consider the significance of control in determining politeness behavior because their focus is mainly on making generalizations about language use. In their framework, control seems unnecessary because some degree of power difference always exists, whether it is legitimate or not. Nevertheless, control enables friends to make sense of each other by regulating their contribution and legitimacy in upholding and suspending conversational maxims. Unlike social distance and power difference as identified by Brown & Levinson, control-like intimacy – can be interactionally negotiated between friends. Because power difference is relatively more rigid, like social distance, control is a more negotiable category that lets friends cooperatively construct meanings in a fair manner. For example, if someone lies to a friend by violating the Maxim of Quality, the friend should be forgiven for doing the same thing in the future. This give-and-take relationship allows friends to uphold, violate, and suspend conversational maxims for interactional purposes.

Another element that binds intimate relationships is mutual trust. Trust allows friends to treat their friendship as a commitment and to project their activity into the future, underscoring what Rogers & Miller consider trust with future relevance: “Trust involves the predictability and obligatory nature of limitations on future choices . . .” It concerns the participants’ attempts to establish boundaries (through commitments, rewards, rules and promises, etc.) that constrain alter’s behaviours” (1988:295). Trust is a social construct and does not have the same status and function as the Maxim of Quality (“Be sincere and be empirically veracious”), as identified by Grice. Because the Maxim of Quality must hold true in any occasion, trust is negotiated by and through interactions among participants who consider themselves to be engaging in a long-term and nonintermittent

relationship. Anyone who denies the existence of trust is denying the very existence of friendship.

Last, the element of positiveness is an assumption that stipulates a more supportive attitude toward each other. Positiveness may not be observed at all in many nonpersonal encounters. In fact, this is even considered as a deviation and should be avoided in some situations – for example, in police interrogation and court trials, where neutrality is a more acceptable norm. Friends have to be positive and supportive to each other, which nevertheless does not mean they have to use “positive politeness strategies.” Whereas positive politeness denotes involvement and common membership, positiveness, like all other elements, can be socially constructed and is more elastic in terms of its meanings and realizations. For example, positiveness can be realized by positive politeness, negative politeness, or even bald-on-record strategies, as long as these give the hearers the impression that the listeners are being positive and supportive. Because positiveness is more an attitude than an expectation or degree of involvement, it has a more elastic time boundary and has both present and future relevance in Roger & Miller’s framework, which also points to its functional significance in regulating conflict and disagreements among friends.

The four elements described above – intimacy, control, mutual trust, and positiveness – are not “rules” for governing interactions among friends, but the societal ideals that frame people’s minds and behaviors. They are expectations and assumptions of what a personal relationship should be, as imposed by a society on its members, rather than rules governing how a person should act in a personal relationship. These elements are, in fact, seldom followed strictly because of their competing nature. This competition is referred to as the “dialectics” of human relationship: dependence in opposition to independence. What interactants do in an instance of interaction is to negotiate these elements with their personal goals in mind. In other words, interactants must deal with at least two goals: the personal goal of getting something done, and the social goal of meeting the norms and expectations of society.

Although the focus of researchers has been on this important area, they have largely focused on the superficial dialectic of personal and societal goals, while ignoring the internal dialectic of societal norms. For instance, Iacobucci 1990 argues that task and relation goals in telephone service encounters are coordinated interactionally and strategically through accounts and formulations. However, studies of this type concern only the conflicts between personal and institutional wants. No comprehensive study has been done on the negotiation of those competing societal ideologies of independence and dependence in a single instance of interaction (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997).

The four elements of friendship engagement are based on the internal dialectic of dependence (intimacy and trust) and independence (control and positiveness). The four elements are a specific set of premises governing sense-making among friends. It is through these relationship-specific premises that identities are ne-

gotiated and constructed. Here, I do not intend to argue for their universality, since “friendship” may be interpreted differently across various societies and cultures and may omit or add various elements. However, these elements, I would say, are the core values or assumptions of a particular relationship known as “friendship” in most societies – including Hong Kong, where my data were collected.

Face as a problematic concept

Most of the elements of friendship proposed above are directly or indirectly related to politeness, or the way in which one expresses oneself tactfully. Hence, politeness is essential to the maintenance of friendship and will depend on how dependence (intimacy and trust) and independence (control and positiveness) are negotiated in intimate conversations.

With an apparently strong interest in “explaining” the politeness phenomenon per se, Brown & Levinson 1987 seriously consider the human needs of dependence and independence in relation to their notions of positive and negative politeness, with the corresponding address to positive and negative face – in simple terms, the desire for approval and the desire to be unimpeded, respectively. Nevertheless, the notion of face is much more complicated in reality. For example, the distinction between positive and negative face ignores the finer distinctions that may occur across situations. The distinction between a person’s professional face and personal face (Charles 1996) is an illustrative example. Professional face is a desire or image of being accepted as a member of one’s chosen profession, whereas personal face is a desire of being liked and accepted in a social relationship. In other words, professional face represents an image a person wants to create for himself or herself as an occupation-holder, or for his or her employer; personal face is a more universal face want regardless of context. These face wants are inseparable and reinforce each other in professional encounters; however, the professional face is usually a more important concern in initial professional interactions because the participants do not have the need or background to take each other’s personal face into full consideration. Thus, in business negotiations involving new relationships, there are many formulaic pleasantries that attend not to the personal face of the participants but to their professional face (Charles 1996). Personal face is negotiated interpersonally between participants and is usually downplayed in non-personal relationships, such as business relationships – although it is always possible for a business-oriented relationship to develop into a more personally oriented one.

Furthermore, Brown & Levinson’s framework is based on the notion of face-threatening acts and on how the message-producers address those acts at the level of the speech act, but this view ignores the interactive nature of conversations, in which negotiation may occur across a number of speech acts. Because their framework focuses largely on the strategic coordination of positive and negative face wants of the message receivers at the speech act level, they fail to consider the

fact that face want is a mutual issue, as Craig et al. maintain: "People are not merely passive recipients of others' face supports, nor do they depend entirely upon reciprocity as a means of soliciting satisfaction of their face wants. Speakers in fact use any number of strategies to mitigate threats to their face, including strategies of self-presentation and self-defense that may or may not also involve either supporting or attacking the hearer's face" (1993:277). It is also likely that one participant's attempt to enhance the other's positive face will challenge his own negative face, and vice versa (Baxter & Montgomery 1996). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how these competing interpersonal goals of participants are interactively coordinated in single instances of interaction. No empirical study can do this satisfactorily unless it looks at the negotiation *in situ*. I will argue that face is not simply a normative issue but also a dynamic process through which participants negotiate their goals and identities.

DATA ⁵

The data for this analysis come from a larger research project investigating the discourse of network marketing in Hong Kong. The total hours of interaction recorded exceed 40. There are three main sets of data: one-way presentations, interactions between uplines and downlines (i.e., supervisors and their subordinates), and interactions between network marketers and their prospects. I was able to record such a large body of data owing to the assistance of my friends, many of whom were network marketers themselves.

The interactions analyzed in this study took place between network marketers and their prospects. A total of six such interactions were studied, involving four network marketers and five prospects. Most of the participants are female; in one interaction, both marketer and prospect are male. The network marketers had experience ranging from three months to five years. Most interactions took place in restaurants or in marketers' or prospects' homes. In addition to audiotaping the interactions, I was able to take field notes of some interactions, concerning such details as gesture and facial expression. Some interactions were followed up by short interviews with the participants. Their approval was sought before recording, and they were aware of it during their interactions; they were told that the recording was for a research project on communication between network marketers and their prospects. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, no personal names are disclosed in the data below. Names mentioned by participants in the conversations have been changed.

ANALYSIS

In the following section, I will discuss how participants, within the configurations of friendship, adapt existing seller-buyer frames to their particular instances of interaction, in which they mutually have to make sense of new and unfamiliar identities.

Approaching prospects and exploiting intimacy

Because there is a lack of common recognition of the ethics and practices of network marketing, its agents are faced with a singular dilemma in selling products or marketing plans to their friends. As Grayson 1998 shows in his detailed analysis of interviews with network marketing agents, they feel that their practice does not have the support of a strong social foundation, and that it infringes on the notion of separation between personal and business domains. Because of the lack of recognition of their practice, network marketers find it easier to adapt their new practice of mixing domains to the existing consensus – that is, the separation between the two domains – instead of the other way around. For this reason, network marketers always initiate their interactions by approaching their prospects within the established and socially recognized buying/selling parameter in order to arouse their interest. Ex. (2) bears a resemblance to the beginning of an unsolicited sales interaction in which the prospect is approached and the agent's intention introduced. However, it is also significantly different in the way that the agent is exploiting her intimacy with her prospect:

- (2) (Network marketer (N) – female, around 30 years old, with around a year's experience in network marketing; Prospect (P) – female, around 30 years old, married housewife, with a four-year-old daughter; location: restaurant)

- 1 N: 喂, 噏咗嘢食未呀你?
'Have you ordered?'
- 2 P: 噏咗㗎啦。
'Yes, already.'
- 3 N: 啲排點呀你?
'How are you doing?'
- 4 P: 吓?
'Pardon?'
- 5 N: 好似咁倦㗎點解你個樣好似?
'Why do you look so tired?'
- 6 P: 吓? 公司多嘢做唉嗎。
'Do I? Oh I have a lot to do at work.'
- 7 N: 做到幾多點吓你平時?
'What time do you usually finish then?'
- 8 P: 平時啊? 呀: 七八點啦。
'Well usually at seven or eight.'
- 9 N: 嘩, 咁夜, 有冇O.T. (overtime pay) 呀?
'This late! You have overtime pay then?'
- 10 P: 噢都係一兩個鐘啫。
'Well it's only one or two hours.'
- 11 N: 有錢㗎嗎?
'You do get pay for this, right?'
- 12 P: 唔係好多啦。
'Oh not really much.'
- 13 N: 唔係好多啊?
'Not much?'
- 14 P: 吓。
'Yes.'
- 15 N: 有三四十蚊一個鐘啊? 唔好話俾我聽無啊。
'So you get thirty or forty dollars per hour? Don't tell me you haven't.'

- 16 P: 咁啊有。
'Yes, I have.'
- 17 N: 吓。
'I see.'
- 18 P: 吓, 不過好辛苦囉做得。
'Yeah, but the job is demanding.'
- 19 N: 一至五啊? 星期六唔駛番啊?
'So it's Monday to Friday? You don't need to work on Saturdays, right?'
- 20 P: 唔駛。
'No, I don't need to.'
- 21 N: 好辛苦啊?
'Hard work, isn't it?'
- 22 P: 係啊。
'Oh yes.'
- 23 N: 搵唔搵到錢先? 做得辛苦搵到錢又無所謂。
'So you make good money from it? Well it doesn't matter
[if it's hard work if it's good money.]'
- 24 P: [嘩搵唔搵到錢謹咗一份人工喇。
[Well the rate is fixed, I can't say it's good money or not.]'
- 25 N: 謹咗... 咁有幾多, 夠唔夠洗先得嘍?
'It's fixed... then how much do you get? Enough for everything?'
- 26 P: 擊擊緊啦。
'Merely okay.'
- 27 N: 開唔開心啊, 咁你做得?
'Then you feel happy about your job?'
- 28 P: 麻麻地嘍, 同埋公司而家好亂啊。聽講好似裁員啊。
'Oh, just so-so. And lately the atmosphere in the company is quite unstable, I heard that there'll be layoffs.'
- 29 N: 係咩? 不過嘩掛好多,
[我識好多朋友呢, 個個都話一定有d人要啊 要走 [嘍。
'Really? Well a lot of companies...
[I know many friends having the same situation in their companies.]'
- 30 P: [咪係囉, 而家又唔知自己有冇份嘍。
[Yeah, and you don't know whether you're in the list.]'
- 31 N: 最慘股票又唔升咁嘍。
'And now that the stock market is in such a bad state.'
- 32 P: 係呀做大閘蟹啊。
'Yes, everyone's become the victims of stock slump.'
- 33 N: 所以一定要有d嘢係身啊, 有d, 突然間突然間俾人炒咗, 都唔知點算。又要供樓, 又要升。
'That's why we have to make hay for the winter. If you got laid off suddenly it could be really frustrating, while you still have to pay the mortgage and all that.'
- 34 P: 咪係囉。
'Definitely.'
- 35 N: 咁其實你自己有冇諗過, 搵 part-time 啊, 做吓咁嘍?
'Then have you ever thought of having a part-time job?'
- 36 P: 吓? 搵乜 part-time 啊? 保險個d我又唔啱做嘍。都有人問過我嘍。
'What? What part-time job could I do? Insurance isn't suitable for me, someone has asked me before about it.'
- 37 N: 保險個d 你無諗過做?
'So you don't think you'll go for the insurance field?'
- 38 P: 係啦。
'No I haven't.'
- 39 N: 例如譬如話傳銷個d呢? [有冇聽過?
'Then how about network marketing? [Have you heard about it?'
- 40 P: [傳銷啊
[Network marketing?'

- 41 N: 唔。
'Yes.'
- 42 P: 都聽過吓嘅, 但係未曾接觸過囉。
'I've heard about it, but haven't really seen what it is.'
- 43 N: 即係無人搵過你?
'That means no one has contacted you?'
- 44 P: 唔。
'No.'
- 45 N: 即係完全唔知乜嘢嚟㗎啦, 傳銷。
'So you don't really know what it is, I mean, network marketing.'

In this excerpt, the element of intimacy is exploited in order to reduce the potential threat to her friend's negative face. On the other hand, the friend of the agent has to be positive and supportive, even when she begins to be aware of her friend's intention. Starting at turn 3, the agent begins to show concern for her friend by asking about her workload and remuneration at her job. N's attempt to provoke P's dissatisfaction about her job is not successful until turn 18, in which P begins to talk about the unpleasantness of her job. When N sees the success of her attempt, she tries to amplify her friend's dissatisfaction by asking her whether she needs to go to work on Saturday. The answer 'No' leads N to revert to the topic of the demands of P's job, about which P complains in turn 18. After identifying the source of P's dislike for her job, N tries to hit the nail on the head by asking whether P has sufficient money to spend. With her understanding of her friend's financial situation, N's question is probably unnecessary, but it can further intensify P's dissatisfaction. All these complaints lead to further discontent. In turn 28, P begins to talk about the layoffs at her company. N's attempt is very successful in evoking P's unpleasant feelings about her job. All these prepare well for N's initial selling move in turn 35, in which she asks her friend if she has ever thought about finding a part-time job.

Beginning with turn 35, P is in fact aware of N's real intention of provoking her dissatisfaction because of the explicitness of N's pre-request, as well as N's overly solicitous concern about her job, which has violated the Gricean maxims of Quantity and Relation (Grice 1975). Therefore, in turn 36, P makes a dispreferred response to N's pre-request, showing "surprise" at N's question by saying *Ha*, an emotional marker of surprise or disbelief. This is followed by her reformulation of N's question: 'What part-time job can I find?' She then points out that insurance is not suitable for her and she has been approached by "someone" before. The indirect refusal of N's request does not lead to the end of the selling phase; instead, it only marks the beginning of the negotiation between N and P. Note the use of a thematized sentence object (*Bo-i*) in turn 36, in which P is attributing her unwillingness to be a part-time sales agent to an external factor, not a personal one. The use of an indefinite pronoun, *yau yan* 'someone', makes her refusal even more ambiguous and indirect. P's reliance on external and ambiguous reasons in the initial phases poses an interesting contrast with the emphasis on personal factors that they tend to use in later

stages of their negotiation; this, I will argue, is an important interactional signal to the network marketer.

This approaching phase of selling deviates from ordinary unsolicited sales encounters in that ordinary sales agents cannot utilize intimacy or personal knowledge about their customers. Instead of approaching their customers as salespeople would usually do in unsolicited sales encounters, network marketers have the advantage of exploiting intimacy with their prospects; hence, the potential threat to the customer's negative face of being approached is reduced.

Another common way that network marketers initiate selling moves is by using personal experience, which involves protagonists the prospects know. Ex. (3) is the beginning of an interaction in which the network marketer is exploiting intimacy through recalling the personal experience of a mutual friend.

- (3) (Network marketer (N) – female, around 30 years old, with around a year's experience in network marketing; Prospect (P) – female, 25 years old, with a full-time job in selling; location: restaurant)

- 1 N: 嘩, 新年我 call 你幾百次啊。
'I called you a hundred times during the New Year!'
- 2 P: 係啊, 唔得閒啊。
'Yes, I was busy.'
- 3 N: 我個 friend 係外國番咗嚟, 呀 Brenda 係外國番咗嚟, 你都無機會見佢啊。
'My friend had come back from overseas, Brenda, she had come back from overseas. You didn't even have the chance to meet her.'
- 4 P: 佢都未見過我。
'She hasn't seen me before.'
- 5 N: 係啊, 點解呢? 你忙乜嘢究竟。
'Yes, why? What are you busy for really?'
- 6 P: 咁佢下次幾時嚟 [噀
'Then, when will she come back [again?'
- 7 N: [嘩, 我諗有掛啊, 啱啱生完個女, 丟低個女。
['Well I think it would be a long time later. She has just given birth to her daughter and left her abroad to come back.'
- 8 P: 佢自己一個嚟嚟咋?
'So she came back alone?'
- 9 N: 係呀, 佢daddy, 生cancer 呢。
'Yes, her daddy has cancer.'
- 10 P: 咁點呀?
'So what will she do?'
- 11 N: 佢 daddy 唔知自己就嚟無啦。
'Her daddy doesn't know he'll die soon.'
- 12 P: 唔知嘍?
'He doesn't know?'
- 13 N: 唔知嘍, 佢, 因為出咗院呢, 佢以為已經好囉。
'No, because he has been discharged from the hospital, he believes that he has recovered.'
- 14 P: 噢:
'I see.'
- 15 N: 真係好難講嘍做人嘍嘢, 嘿。
'You never know what will happen next.'
- 16 P: 咁仲有幾幾耐日子啊?
'Then how much time does he have?'

- 17 N: 點知幾多日子㗎。
'Oh, how does one know?'
- 18 P: 唔知啊?
'You don't know?'
- 19 N: 係啊, 咁佢已經丟低個女啦嗎, 咁唔洗唔洗做啊, 吓? (*Inaudible*) 佢開舖頭
㗎嘛係加拿大個邊。
'Well she left her baby girl there to come back, and she still has to work, doesn't
she? (*inaudible*) She has a shop in Canada to take care of.'
- 20 P: 我知。
'I know that.'
- 21 N: 其實都好窘身㗎。
'Indeed it restricts her time.'
- 22 P: 係啦, 而家搵食艱難啊。
'Yes, it's not easy to earn a living now.'
- 23 N: 係啊, 所以而家要有份工他他條係, 真係容易去邊就去邊, 係好似而家咁樣佢
daddy 係好話唔好聽, 隨時佢都囉唔到嚟, 真係好慘囉。真係, 我覺得吓,
(*inaudible*) 突然之間死咗嘅話, 我囉唔到嚟, 我覺得好遺憾囉。我覺得, 係咪先?
'Yeah, that's why a flexible job is better. You can go wherever you want. Just like
her, if anything happens to her father and she can't come back immediately, then it
would be very sad. I mean, if I were she and couldn't come back when he dies, I
would regret it, don't you think?'
- 24 P: 係囉。
'Yes.'
- 25 N: 咁其實你有無諗住搵份自由 d 嘅工呀你?
'Anyway, have you thought about finding a job with more flexibility?'
- 26 P: 自由 d 啊? 好自由㗎啦嗎。
'Flexible? Oh my job is flexible enough.'

In (3), we can see how the approaching phase is co-constructed by the agent and prospect. Instead of introducing the purpose of the subsequent talk, N justifies her selling with the experience of their mutual friend Brenda beginning in turn 3, in which N initiates this mutually constructed personal experience, which is basically about the fact that Brenda's father has cancer and she cannot take care of him because she has a job. P brings in this personal experience in order to highlight the uncertainty of life and the inflexibility of paid jobs (if Brenda had a more flexible job, she could take care of her father). This prepares N's introduction of her motive in turn 25: *gam kei sat nei yau mo lam jue wan fan ji yau di ge gung a nei?* 'Then, have you thought of finding a job with more flexibility?'

In approaching their prospects, network marketers often exploit intimacy by showing concern about their prospect's job and health, the unpleasant aspects of which justify the need for a change – that is, buying products or becoming members of the selling team. Even if the prospects are not interested in the products or the selling plan, however, they cannot simply say 'no' as they would normally do in unsolicited sales encounters, because a direct rejection of their friend's selling poses a great threat to the friend's positive face want of being accepted and being regarded as competent in selling. In order to reduce this threat to their friend's positive face, the prospects usually reject the offer very indirectly; this can be regarded as the prospects' observing the element of positiveness, since the violation of it is socially undesirable. With this social constraint imposed on prospects, the indirect refusal of their friend's request marks the beginning of a complex negotiation, since

indirect refusal leaves many interactional spaces for the network marketer to reject the prospect's reasons for refusal and to give further reasons for buying or joining the selling team. In ordinary unsolicited sales interactions, if the prospects were not interested, they would simply say 'No, sorry' and turn away. But in network marketing interactions, which involve intimate personal relationships, negotiation of the interactants' competing goals is common, since because of the constraints of intimacy and positiveness, few prospects can directly say 'no' in the initial approaching phase and are thus unwillingly brought into a negotiation with a friend.

Presenting products as an act threatening prospect's positive face

After approaching the prospect, the marketer's second step in selling a product or plan is to present it. The key is to do this skillfully. Is it best done simply by showing the products or plan, or demonstrating it in front of the prospect? While these procedures are involved in selling, the most important preliminary before all these steps is to let the prospect see a reason to buy. For example, if a salesman wants to sell a diet product to a woman, he has to motivate her by showing her that she needs to lose weight. This act will, to a certain extent, threaten the woman's positive face. This is certainly unavoidable, but many strategies can be employed by salespeople to mitigate this face threat. A common strategy would be to soften the message – for example, by telling a prospect how much weight reduction could enhance her already attractive figure. Interestingly, this otherwise common sales strategy is not common at all in my data, which depict a rather direct approach of criticizing the prospect and bluntly pointing out his or her problems, as we see in ex. (4):

(4) (Network marketer N – female, 33 years old, a married housewife with two daughters, with more than three years' experience in direct selling; Prospect P – female, 28 years old, single, with a full-time job in a bank; location: Prospect's home)

- 1 N: 你可能以前有 d 唔好嘅經驗, 但係我哋 d 產品好好㗎。
'You may have some unfavorable experience before, but our products are of good quality.'
- 2 P: 我都唔知㗎, 因為我用過晒所有嘢嘢, 都唔得嘅。
'I am not sure because I have used many of those products. They don't work at all.'
- 3 N: 你用過我哋 d 減肥嘢未先? 佢整到你好瘦㗎。喂, 你而家幾重啊? 你上次話你積極減肥㗎, 你好似無乜點瘦到㗎。
'But have you tried our diet products? They can make you very slim. Now, how much do you weigh? You told me last time you are on a diet but it seems you haven't lost much.'
- 4 P: 我無乜恆心啊, 做完運動食好多嘢啊。
'I wasn't persistent enough. I ate a lot after doing exercise.'
- 5 N: 淨係做運動唔掂㗎。阿 Flora 呢, 你記唔記得啊? 佢以前成口被我哋笑㗎, 而家佢啊, 做緊 XXX 傳銷, 佢啊, 減咗好多磅啊。佢老公話佢不知靚咗幾多啊。係我介紹佢做會員㗎。
'It doesn't work if you only do exercise. You still remember Flora? We used to laugh at her, but now she's become a XXX distributor and she had lost a lot of pounds. Her husband said she's so much prettier than she was. It was me who recommended her as a member.'
- 6 P: 係咩? 我就唔知㗎。
'Really? I didn't know it.'

In (4), the network marketer does not mitigate the potential face threat of presenting the “need” to her customer. Instead of hinting at the overweight of her prospect, N directly criticizes P’s success in weight reduction by saying *nei ho chi mo mat dim sau do who* ‘It seems you don’t lose much [weight]’ (turn 3). She further claims the importance of weight control by citing their mutual friend’s success in weight reduction and the resulting appreciation of her husband (turn 5). Here N is again taking advantage of her intimacy with P. What she is projecting is a unified identity of friend/sales agent, because an abrupt shift to “salesman talk” would only increase P’s awareness of N’s business intention and, consequently, her resentment. In this regard, the “discourse identity”⁶ that N is projecting is unmarked; that is, she is playing all the roles of “animator,” “author,” and “principal,” in contrast to the explicit shift of discourse identities in the interactions among network marketers themselves (Kong 2002). P, in contrast, tries to be positive: She does not object to N’s criticism directly, she simply denies the degree of effort she has made toward weight reduction.

Apart from selling products, selling plans to prospects is also done without much mitigation when marketers point out the reasons to buy. In (5), N and P are talking about the problem of layoffs in P’s husband’s company:

(5) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, with around a year’s experience in network marketing; Prospect P – female, around 30 years old, married housewife, with a four-year-old daughter; location, restaurant)

- 1 P: [係啊, 係啊, 點知佢會唔會除啊?
[‘Yeah, yeah, who knows when he’ll be laid off?’]
- 2 N: 可能去做 boy 好 d 啊?
‘Maybe it’s better to be an office boy (office assistant).’
- 3 P: 做 boy 又養唔起我哋呀咁點啊?
‘But it’s not enough to support us if he’s an office assistant. What could we do?’
- 4 N: 早就叫你唔好咁大洗㗎啦。
‘I’ve told you not to spend too much.’
- 5 P: 係啊, 我又要負擔我家個邊嗰。
‘Yeah, and I have to support my parents as well.’
- 6 N: 唉, 不過好煩㗎而家都。
‘Yeah, it’s really troublesome now.’

N’s direct criticism of P’s spending habits is another example of N’s exploitation of their intimacy. Without redressing P’s positive face of being accepted as a good wife, N challenges P directly by saying *jo jau giu nei ng ho gam daai sai ga la* ‘I have told you not to spend too much’. This kind of bald-on-record advice to a prospect is unimaginable in an ordinary sales talk.

Raising objections to agents

So far, it may seem that prospects are the victims of the business activities of their network-marketing friends, who take advantage of their intimacy in order to approach them as friends and then try to turn them into customers by introducing products or selling plans to them. Because of the legitimate personal relationship of friendship with the agents, prospects seem to be rather passive players who can

only abide by positiveness in order not to threaten their friends' positive face wants of being liked and accepted as competent in selling. However, the prospects in the present study are far from passive and helpless; they are active players of the game and can turn the tables at significant moments. This can be seen in the way they raise objections. Note that prospects' objections can be found at any phase of selling, from the initial approaching stage to the final concluding phase. In (6), the prospect is challenging the integrated identity of friend and sales agent his friend is trying to project:

- (6) (Network marketer N – male, a 36-year-old full-time accounts clerk in bank, with more than four years' experience in network marketing; Prospect P – male, around 34 years old, with a full-time job in bank; location, common room in a bank)

- 1 N: 你去個度搵唔搵到 d 好嘢啊?
'Did you find anything interesting there?'
 - 2 P: 無啊, 我覺得好悶啫, 個度 d 人好鬼商業㗎, 成日掛住搵錢。
'Not really, it's very dull, people there are very business-oriented and only talk about money all the time.'
 - 3 N: 唔係全部都係咁嘅。我哋都有 d 人好鬼關心其他人㗎。好似我上司咪係囉。佢好有錢㗎, 但係佢都好想幫人。傳銷唔係淨係賺錢嘅, 佢都可以幫人同埋改善吓 d 人嘅健康啦。
'Well not everyone's like this. We have people who care about others. My upline distributor is a good example. She's very rich but still wants to help others. Network marketing is not only about making money, it's also about helping others and improving people's health.'
 - 4 P: 我又唔覺得個度 d 人唔係為錢㗎。
'Well I don't think people go there for things other than money.'
 - 5 N: 係, 不過關心其他人嘅健康梗要 d 㗎。
'Yes, but caring about others' health is more important.'
 - 6 P: 咁佢哋又唔去做義工?
'Then why don't they simply become voluntary workers?'
 - 7 N: 我同你做 friend 咁耐, 我唔會介紹 d 衰嘢俾你嘅。
'We have been friends for so long, I wouldn't recommend something bad to you.'
 - 8 P: 不過我又唔覺得你咁做傳銷㗎, 你咁老實。
'But I don't think you are suitable to work in network marketing. You are too honest.'
 - 9 N: 睇吓點啦, 我哋都要份工㗎開飯㗎嘛。
'Depends. We need a job to survive.'
- (laughter)

Before this interaction, P has told N that he has attended some opportunity meetings of the network marketing organization (NMO) N is working for. When N asks P if he finds it interesting (turn 1), P starts a number of "Action-Opposition" sequences (Hutchby 1996). In turn 2, P begins his utterance with a negative answer, criticizing the cynicism of network marketers. This can be interpreted as an indirect criticism of N, because he is already a network marketer. In turn 3, N denies the truth of the statement by pointing out the purported health orientation of the NMO he is working for, a common reconciling strategy of NMOs and their agents. Turns 4–5 are a continuation and elaboration of the same criticism and denial. In turn 6, P makes another criticism of network marketers by asking why they do not become voluntary workers if they are concerned about people's health. Seeing P's persistence, N does not

argue about the truth of P's statement any more. Instead, he highlights their solidarity by saying *ngoh tung nei jo friend gam noi, ngoh ng wooi gaai siu d sui ye bei nei ge* 'We have been friends for a long time. I wouldn't recommend something bad to you' in turn 7. This statement by N, a full-blown exploitation of their intimacy and trust, invokes P to make a direct criticism, in turn 8, of N's suitability to work in network marketing. This step-by-step intensification of criticism reflects his increasing annoyance with his friend's merged identity of friend and sales agent. Interestingly, N responds to this "personal" criticism with a contradictory statement in turn 9, admitting that selling is a job to him, not something he does mainly for the health of others, as he claims in previous turns.⁷

Furthermore, the interaction in (6) shows that intimacy can be exploited by both parties. Owing to the retrospective exploitation of their intimacy by network marketers, prospects have an equal right to exploit this element – to challenge the legitimacy of the commercial identity their friends are projecting. The control element entitles them to do so. No one can monopolize the right to do a certain thing in a personal relationship.

Ex. (7) is another instance of interaction in which a network marketer is negotiating a proposal with her prospect, through the synchronizing and management of friendship elements:

- (7) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, with around a year's experience in network marketing; Prospect P – a 28-year-old female, single, with a full-time job in bank; location, restaurant)
- 1 N: 有聽過 li d 呀吓?
'You have heard about this right?'
- 2 P: 少少啦。
'Just a little bit.'
- 3 N: 有無, 有無用過啊?
'Have you used the products before then?'
- 4 P: 有無用過? 無啫, 但係...
'Have I used them? No, but...'
- 5 N: 你有無睇過我 d 雀斑啊? 以前呢咪好犀利嘅。
'Have you looked at my freckles? They were very serious before.'
- 6 P: 係啫, 但係而家都差唔多。
'Yes, but they're just the same.'
(laughs)
- 7 N: 而家, 唔係啫, 好明顯, 吓, 而家都有, 而家話俾你聽無就嚇死你啦。做手術啦。換皮啦。睇吓仲有好明顯係淺色啫。吓, 無其他嘅 li 樣嘢囉。
'Now? No! They used to be very distinct, they are still there though. But if I said they're all gone, you'll be scared because you might think I had a plastic surgery to change my skin. You can see the color has faded obviously. It's just because of this product, nothing else.'
- 8 P: 係啊? 係啫, 真係你唔講唔覺啫。
'Yes, really. I wouldn't notice if you didn't tell me.'
- 9 N: 係啊? 頭髮呀個 d, 真係易啱, 係易打理 d 囉, 不過而家講就撇開呢 d 先, 係而家搵錢梗要呀嘛。
'Right? And also the hair, it's easier to manage now. But let's put aside these things first, you know, making money is more important.'

Here the prospect is exploiting her intimacy to challenge the “personal” face of the agent. Again, since N has exploited intimacy by approaching P and presenting products to her, the element of control gives P the equal right to harness her intimacy with N to achieve her goal. In turn 5, N claims that the products she is using are very effective in eliminating her freckles. However, in the next turn, P poses an objection to the truth of N’s statement by pointing out that there are still freckles on N’s face. This objection is possible almost as a sequential necessity because, by uttering a bald-on-record statement, the prospect can convey the message “I do not want to buy anything from you,” without making an implicature that they are not good friends, since whatever she says should be positive and constructive, given their intimacy and trust.⁸ The following turns are N’s clarification and P’s further objection turn, followed by her laughter. P’s bald-on-record criticism of N’s products and her appearance is a great threat to N’s positive face, since appearance can be an important element of positive face, especially for women.

However, prospects in network marketing encounters have the advantage of crossing this gap of personal and professional face. Because the agents are their friends, they have a legitimate right to challenge the personal face of their friends – something that customers do not do in an ordinary sales encounter with an unfamiliar sales agent. That is why prospects’ objections can be made very “personally,” targeting the very personal facet of a network marketer’s face. In ordinary sales interactions, a customer’s objections are threatening to the agent’s positive face want of being accepted as competent and capable of performing the role he or she is claiming. However, there are constraints on the degree and type of threat a customer’s objection can pose. For example, even if a customer is so annoyed by an agent that he nearly loses his temper, the most he could do is to tell the agent to go away and stop annoying him because the products are not suitable. It is not socially or personally permissible to pose a threat to the agent’s personal face by saying to him “Idiot, you are bloody poor at selling” or “Look, you are chubby yourself, how can you convince me of the usefulness of your weight-loss product?” The issue at stake is the distinction between a person’s professional face and personal face (Charles 1996). Posing a threat to the personal face of an interactant in initial business interactions seems awkward and is usually avoided. Prospects’ objections can target the motives of network marketers, although they may not do this directly:

(8) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, with around one year of experience in network marketing; Prospect P – female, 28 years old, single, with a full-time job in a bank; location, restaurant)

- 1 P: 我呀唔鍾意做 li d 呢, 又好似 sell 番 d 身邊 d 人啊, 好似唔知點啊, 好煩嘅, 唔考慮住啊。
‘I don’t like to do this job. It sounds like I have to ask people around me to buy the things. It’s strange and troublesome. I don’t consider it now.’
- 2 N: 唔係㗎, 等於你介紹一樣正嘅嘢俾佢用啫, 唔算 sell 㗎。
‘No, it’s the same as you recommend something good to them. It’s not selling.’

- 3 P: 你試過歎 007 呢咁你 sell 都無俾嚟錢 [俾嚟錢你都無。
'You've watched 007, you recommend it to me. I didn't pay you anything. [If I give you back the money, you won't accept.'
- 4 N: [係啊。
[Yes.
- 5 P: 吓, 我無 commission 㗎。
'I don't have commission.'

Here, P is indirectly hinting at the fact that N may earn a commission from selling to her – and possibly implying that their intimacy has been harnessed for N's unethical motive of selling for profit. Although P may not be doing this intentionally to challenge N's morality and their legitimate friendship relationship, (8) shows that the exploitation issue can be brought to surface for negotiation purposes.

As shown above, marketers can use personal experience to exploit intimacy with their prospects when approaching them. Personal experience is an interactional resource that can be employed not just by marketers; prospects can also invoke their own personal experience to challenge their friends:

- (9) (Network marketer N – male, 36-year-old full-time accounts clerk in a bank, with more than four years' experience in network marketing; Prospect P – male, around 34 years old, with a full-time job in bank; location, common room in a bank)

- 1 N: 你唔信傳銷? 等我講個真嘅故仔俾你聽。有個人好似我咁咁先都唔信傳銷㗎。但係, 三個月之後, 佢做傳銷仲賺得多個佢份正職。佢遲咗份工去做全職嘅傳銷㗎, 一年之後, 佢已經升為鑽石經理啦, 而家啊, 佢有三層樓, 一架 Benz 啊, 你妒忌佢㗎?
- 'You don't believe in network marketing! Let me tell you a true story. A guy like most of us didn't believe in network marketing in the first place. After three months, he earned more than what his normal job gave him. He quit the job to become a full-time network marketer. After one year, he has been promoted to Diamond Manager. Now he has three flats and a Mercedes Benz. Aren't you jealous of him?'
- 2 P: 我個 friend 夠叫我去 XXXX 啦, 佢哋哋我買嘢㗎。
'My friend also asked me to go to XXXX. They tricked me into buying things.'
- 3 N: 呢你買嘢?
'Tricked you into buying things?'
- 4 P: 我嗰個星期忙到就嚟病啦, 但係我個 friend 仲哋我啊, 仲話係個好嘅機會去賺錢啊。
'I was so busy that I was almost sick that week. But my friend still cheated me and told me it's a good chance to earn money.'
- 5 N: 咁你有無去啊?
'Did you go then?'
- 6 P: 我有去, 雖然我好忙, 但係佢哋唔可以迫我買成三千蚊嘢㗎嘛, 佢哋哋我囉。
'I did go although I was very busy. But they couldn't force me to buy something that costs \$3000. They cheated me!'
- 7 N: 咁你有無買到啊?
'Did you buy?'
- 8 P: 梗係無啦, 你估我傻㗎。
'Of course not. I'm not silly.'
- 9 N: 好啦, 嗰間公司唔好啱, 但係我哋唔同㗎, 我哋唔會迫你買任何嘢㗎。
'OK but let me tell you that company is not good and we are different. We won't force you to buy anything.'
- 10 P: 真係?
'Really?'

The prospect's personal experience acts as counter-argument to his friend's story related in turn 1. In turn 4, P claims that his other friend cheated him by asking him to go to a network marketing company where he was urged to buy, which is an indirect hint that he is not happy with his friend's action and that it may even be characterized as "cheating." By using personal experience, prospects can highlight their resentment in a rather indirect way, again challenging the seller identity their friends are trying to project.

Conclusion as a critical moment

So far, we have seen how network marketers and their prospects coordinate and synchronize their competing goals through negotiation of the inherently dialectical elements of intimacy, trust, control, and positiveness, within the established selling/buying framework. This leads to several interesting questions. How can they bring all these contradictions and dilemmas to a close in which both parties' face can be saved? What interactional devices do they employ in this closing phase? What signals do network marketers recognize, and at what point in the exchange, as cues that they must stop their selling activities before aggravated confrontation takes place? The following section explores these questions.

First, I will address the strategies that prospects use to signal their intention of ending the selling/buying activity, without which network marketers may continue pursuing their selling goals. As shown earlier, prospects' mode of opposition seems to follow a pattern. At the beginning of negotiations, prospects tend to show opposition to the nature of the marketing business or the suitability of the agents for selling. These reasons, external to the prospect, are commonly used at the beginning or middle of the negotiation. However, careful analysis of the data shows that most selling activities come to an end after the prospects' opposition turns concerning the relevance of the activity to them. The number of prospects' opposition turns targeted at the suitability of the business to themselves also increases toward the end of the negotiation. The following excerpt takes place at the end of a negotiation:

- (10) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, single, with around two and a half years' experience in direct selling; Prospect P – female, around 30 years old, married housewife, with a daughter; location, Prospect's home)

- 1 P: 但係講就咁講咋, 其實做就好難㗎。
'It's easier said than done. It's difficult when it comes to doing it.'
- 2 N: 咪試吓囉! 你知而家香港咁啊, 打份工啊, (inaudible)裁員啊, 所以而家就要穩定, 有個後路, 如果唔係你點為自己將來打算啊?
'Just go ahead! You know the situation in Hong Kong now, (inaudible) as employees, we never know if we'll be laid off. So it's better to grasp every opportunity and prepare ourselves with more alternatives, otherwise how can you plan for the future?'
- 3 P: 我都要問吓[我老公先啦, 你知老公煩, '你做埋d 咁嘅嘢。你攞唔好攞埋 d 親戚朋友' 咁咪死?
'Well I have to ask [my husband. You know he's troublesome. I don't want him to say "you do that kind of thing, don't you try to disturb my relatives and friends."'

- 4 N: [試吓! 你攞掂自己嘅 d 先囉。
[‘Just try! You can approach your people first.’
- 5 P: 哎:
‘Well:’
- 6 N: [其實都唔會嘅, 而家譬如保險都係一個受人抗拒嘅行業啦,
其實而家好多接受咗啦, 咁其實傳銷俾保險更加易,
仲易啦。但係而家個趨勢其實真係, 傳
[‘Actually it won’t be like this. Say for example, insurance was also a field that
people generally refuse. But in recent years people begin to accept it. Not to mention,
network marketing is easier than insurance, and also the trend of network
marketing is getting prominent [
- 7 P: [咁我搵 d 人商量吓先啦。
[‘Let me talk to people and get some advice first.’
(*loud background noise, five seconds*)
- 8 不如我同我老公商量吓先啦, 而家你知咁樣嘅晒交。
‘Maybe I talk to my husband first. We’ve some arguments recently.’
- 9 N: 啊。
‘I see.’
- 10 P: 而家唔係嘍啦。
‘It’s not like that (easy) now.’
- 11 N: 咁你同佢商量吓啦。
‘Then you talk to him first.’
- 12 P: 我要嘍。
‘I have to.’
- 13 N: 你而家好順從啊。
‘You’re really obedient now.’
- 14 P: 係啊。
‘Yes.’
- 15 N: 好啦, 好啦, 你同佢商量吓啦, 咁其實有 d 我哋, 如果有 d 乜 course 咁樣呢,
約你上去聽吓囉。
‘Okay, you talk to him first. And if there’re courses, I’ll tell you to come.’

Ex. (10) shows a change in P’s strategy in opposing N. P’s opposition in turn 1 is oriented to an external factor, the difficulty of doing business: *daan hai gong jau gam gong ja, kei sat jo jau ho naan ga* ‘It’s easier said than done. It is more difficult when it comes to do it in practice’. This reliance on factors external to the prospect is common in the initial stages of interactions, as shown in the preceding excerpts. However, P’s next turn, 3, shows a shift of her strategy: She reverts to the personal factor that makes her unsuitable to work in the network marketing business, namely her husband’s disapproval of her becoming a network marketer. Although it is opposed by N’s next two turns, N gives in when P repeats the same reason for not joining in turn 7, completing the Action-Opposition sequences (Hutchby 1996) as well as the whole selling activity.

Again, after a number of attempts by N to exploit the element of intimacy, P has the equal right (conferred by the element of control) to exploit her intimacy with N. By reverting to the personal factor of her husband’s disapproval of network marketing and its impact on his family, P produces an opposition turn that cannot be disputed because it is the truth of her real personal experience, which cannot be challenged. Truth is an important tenet of the Gricean Maxim of Quality, especially for posing or defending an argument. Trying to

be positive and supportive, N has no choice but to accede to the reason given by P.

This strategic shift in the choice of reasons is far from unique in my data. The following is another example in which personal concern is not insignificant:

- (11) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, with around a year's experience in network marketing; Prospect P – female, around 30 years old, married housewife, with a four-year-old daughter; location, restaurant)

- 1 N: D朋友係你帶嚟就以後都係你嚟啦啫。
'If you're the one who brings them to the company, then they're your prospects, not others.'
- 2 P: 我始終都覺得都係好難做啊。我諗吓先啦。
'Well...I still find it difficult. I think I have to think about it.'
- 3 N: 你可以諗吓, 其實你真係試吓, 如果你而家唔試吓, 第日你後悔嗰陣就太遲啦真係。
'You can think about it. But you really should go for it. If you don't take the chance now, it'd be too late when you regret it.'
- 4 P: 唔: 等我考慮吓先啦, 咁有時間約你啦再。
'Well: Let me think about it. I'll meet you again when I have time.'
- 5 N: 好啦, 或且我我我要過下星期睇吓你, 有d乜適合你嘅堂呀上吓, 或且護膚啦, 係你咁貪靚。[護膚啦, 適合你睇吓你有無抽到時間呢, 好啦好啦。
'All right, maybe I'll see what seminars are suitable for you next week. Maybe seminars about skin care? You care so much about your appearance. [Skin care is suitable for you, see if you have time.'
- 6 P: [哈哈, 你打電話俾我先啦。
[(laughing) 'You call me.'
- 7 N: 好啦 [拜拜。
'Okay [bye bye'
- 8 P: [拜拜。
['Bye-bye.'

By displaying her maximum independence of N in turns 2 and 4, P is successful in signaling to N that the truth of her own personal experience should be respected and that continuing persuasion may lead to an aggravated confrontation. Besides, P is also exploiting the element of trust in turn 5, in which she delays the decision-making until she sees her friend later. Again, this cannot be challenged; N cannot disagree with the propositional content unless she admits that they will not see each other in the future. Friendship is partly based on trust, the mutual expectation that their relationship will continue in the future. To deny this important element of a relationship would be to deny the very existence of the relationship.

Another interesting pattern shown in my data is the interactional use of hesitation markers and minimal utterances (such as *umm*, an English equivalent of 'Well'), which usually precedes the prospect's personal or independence-oriented reasons for refusal, signaling that what follows may be interactionally significant to the hearer. The following is another closing phase of negotiation⁹:

(12) (Network marketer N – female, around 30 years old, with around a year’s experience in network marketing; Prospect P – female, 28 years old, single, with a full-time job in a bank; location, restaurant)

- 1 N: 咁咪俾自己一個試驗囉, 咁你以前係 XXX 你搵到幾多錢先? 辛苦咗幾多?
洗咗幾多年時間係裏面, 搵咗幾多錢啊? 真真正正?
'Just give yourself a chance. How much did you make in XXX? Working hard for so many years, how much did you really get?'
- 2 P: 吓, 無 [幾多啊]。
'Well, I [haven't calculated.]'
- 3 N: [吓, 對自己又無乜益處嗎。有無靚到啊?]
[It didn't give you any benefits. Did you become more beautiful?]
- 4 P: 唔。
'Well.'
- 5 N: 有無健康到啊?
'Did you get healthier?'
- 6 P: 健康啊, 唔知嗎, 啊, 一句講晒就唔諗住啦而家。
'Health? I don't know. To put it simply, I wouldn't think about it (network marketing) for the moment.'
- 7 N: 啊, 唔緊要啦, 我慢慢再同你傾吓啦, 或者譬如話有 d 乜嘢 course 啊,
係適合你嘅先同你聯絡啦, 啊。
'It doesn't matter. I'll contact you later. If there are courses suitable for you, I'll call you then.'
- 8 P: 好啊, 好啊。
'Okay.'
- 9 N: 啊, 食飯先啦。
'Let's enjoy the meal then.'
- 10 P: 食飯啦, d 嘢咁啦。
'Let's dig in. The food has come.'

The element of trust can also be exploited by network marketers to save their own face. Since trust is future-oriented, network marketers can avoid the face loss caused by refusals simply by postponing the selling activity. In (12), N saves her face by telling P that she will talk to her later if there are suitable courses for her. N cooperatively constructs this face-saving sequence by giving a positive answer in turn 8, even though she knows her answer will only be taken at face value.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

From the above analysis of interactions involving network marketers and their prospects, some interesting patterns are discernible. Since network marketing is not based on a solid social foundation and is not socially recognized as decent and acceptable, network marketers must adapt their activities to the existing socially recognized framework for conducting their selling activity. A traditional four-part selling sequence – Approaching, Introducing, Dealing With Objections, and Closing – is followed in most interactions. Of course, there are many deviations within each phase of those interactions, largely because of the relationship orientation of the participants, which is different from that of unsolicited sales interactions between strangers.

In approaching their prospects, network marketers enjoy the privilege of exploiting the element of intimacy by reducing the potential threat to their prospects' negative face. Instead of introducing their selling motives, they can skillfully

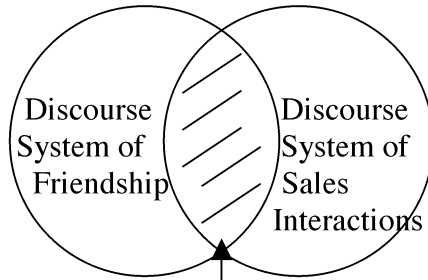
embed this particular selling phase into their phatic interaction. For their own part, the prospects seldom refuse directly in this initial phase, owing to their observance of positiveness. The product/plan introduction phase – with its inherent threat to the prospect's positive face – is also skillfully handled through the careful management of face needs. As they did in the approaching phase, network marketers can exploit intimacy with their friends in order to identify their friends' needs for a particular product or plan. Again, it is at the expense of positiveness that must be observed by the prospects.

In the last two phases, however, the prospects can turn the tables and make their own case. The introspective marketers' exploitation of intimacy gives a full legitimate right (the element of control and fairness) for the prospects to exploit intimacy with the marketers by challenging their "personal" face. In ordinary sales encounters involving people with great social distance, challenge to the other's personal face is socially undesirable. Prospects can pose a threat to the professional face of sales agents, but not to their personal face. The conclusion phase is a critical moment in terms of face wants. Marketers' insistence on selling is a threat to prospects' negative face, and prospects' refusal of marketers' plans is a threat to their positive face as competent in selling. These dilemmas in face concerns are managed by the coordination of the relevant friendship elements through interactive features such as silence and emphatic markers. Personal experience is an interactive resource employed by both marketers and prospects for negotiation in many phases.

Although the network marketers use the pertinent structure of unsolicited sales encounters, they project an integrated identity of sales agent and friend in order to avoid the negative feelings their prospects may have about sales activities. This is consistent with the philosophy of NMOs as found in their promotional discourse: network marketers are socialized into a new identity, blending business and friendship (Kong 2002). That is why no explicit interdiscursivity or changes of "footing" (Goffman 1981) were found in their interactions, in contrast with the constant identity shifts in upline-downline interactions (Kong 2002). Network marketers find it easier to embed their illegitimate sales-agent identity in a legitimate friendship identity, but not the other way around. By contrast, the upline-downline relationship is ambiguous and does not have the same socially recognized foundation as friendship. As a result, uplines and downlines must shift their identities, especially those of friendship and institutional control, to achieve their various interactional goals. As for the prospects, they are also projecting an integrated identity; they seldom behave like customers in the interactions. They are tactful and attend to the face wants of their friends and themselves.

CONCLUSION

Because identity is a "concept in which personal, social, and institutional dimensions intertwine" (Paoletti 1998:9), network marketing – an enterprise explicitly



Intersection: Discourse System of Network Marketing

FIGURE 1: Discourse system of network marketing.

cutting across those dimensions – has offered us an interesting pool of data for investigating the dynamic ways in which our identities are crafted in real-life interactions. By showing the predominance of friendship as a set of binding premises regulating the participants’ behavior, this study may seem to suggest uniformity in the notion of “friendship” or “closeness”; however, the opposite is true. Friendship is not a preordained or fixed identity that predetermines people’s behavior; it can be negotiated and contested for interactional purposes. Like other identities, it is constructed along the boundaries of many other discourse systems.¹⁰ As we cross and close these boundaries, our identities are negotiated, molded, and constructed. It is rarely, if ever, possible to have our identities constructed out of one single discourse system.

Although the concept of identity as an interactional achievement of participants has already been established in the literature, there is yet very little work on how identity is constructed *in situ* from the perspective of overlapping discourse systems. Short-term and intermittent identities are most interesting to study because it is easier to pin down the process through which new consensus is created. There are in fact many discourse systems overlapping and transgressing one another to create our identities. The discourse systems can lie across personal, interpersonal, and institutional domains. If these domains are compatible, participants will have less difficulty in adjusting to crossing the boundaries of those discourse systems. However, problems arise when the discourse systems contain incompatible or conflicting components. The present study has exemplified this identity negotiation and construction along the boundaries of friendship and business, two systems with conflicting ideologies and participants’ expectations (see Fig. 1).

Participants make sense of the boundary fuzziness and uncertainties with the aid of the societal norms of a particular relationship – here, friendship and the salesperson-prospect relationship. These norms are both enabling and constrain-

ing. They enable participants to make sense, create meanings, and achieve interactional purposes; at the same time, they constrain participants from achieving these purposes. The nature of friendship – both enabling and constraining – maintains the equilibrium of the participants' relationships. The structure of ordinary sales interactions between salespersons and prospects provides a frame for the participants to negotiate their goals.

As mentioned in passing, the view that our identities are products of interactional achievements is far from new. Ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts have argued that social reality is constructed turn by turn during talk-in-interaction, and the social context is endogenous to the interaction in which participants display their understanding of it in the course of ongoing interaction (Atkinson & Heritage 1984, Schegloff 1987). Nevertheless, until we understand the ideologies of “doing friendship,” it will be impossible to know how participants, in their interactions, negotiate their face needs and goals dynamically by observing and exploiting the ideological ideals; these cannot be displayed by the participants' turn-taking alone, without factoring in their prior talk or previous experience. Identity should not only be seen as the snapshot of turn-by-turn negotiation between participants at certain moment, but should also be examined as the product of participants' accumulated experience and memory. Missing either element will prevent our complete understanding of the dynamic and accumulative nature of identities. This underscores what Lotman 1990 considers to be the two main functions of language (“text” in Lotman's terminology): Language can create new information and ideas, but at the same time, it has the capacity to preserve and reproduce information.

Face is an important concern of all participants reported in these data, as they constantly attend to their own face needs as well as those of their conversational partners by adjusting both their messages and the strategies they adopt. However, as the above analyses clearly demonstrate, face needs are not realized solely at the speech act level, nor are they solely the concern of the recipients of messages. An utterance that supports the positive face of a recipient may threaten the negative face of the speaker, and vice versa. It is through the dynamic negotiation, over a stretch of utterances, of both producers' and recipients' face needs that their interactional goals are achieved. The concept of politeness, both as a linguistic phenomenon and as a powerful tool for identity negotiation, should be expanded along this line. Brown & Levinson themselves are aware of the pitfall of analytic focus on the single speech act in realizing politeness:

FTAs (face-threatening acts) do not necessarily inhere in single acts (and hence the concept might be better labelled ‘face-threatening intention’ . . . The point is that a higher level intention to issue a criticism may be conveyed by a series of acts (and responses) that are not themselves FTAs. (1987:233)

Despite their reservations, their model and most of its adherents have based their analysis on single speech acts, ignoring the dynamics of face needs.

The static view of face want realization at the speech act level is not adequate to address the issue, nor is the distinction between positive and negative face adequate to understanding the complexity of face wants in institutional settings. This has been addressed by Charles 1996 in her study of business interactions, in which she argues that professional face and personal face are distributed in interactions, with variations at different stages in the development of business relationship, with much more emphasis on the former in initial interactions and the latter when a firmer relationship has been built. Tracy & Carjuzaa 1993 argue for a finer distinction of face in their study of intellectual discussion seminars, in which participants' institutional face may come into conflict with their own intellectual face.

As the analysis of the marketer-prospect interactions has demonstrated, face in network marketing operates at a minimum of two levels – personal and institutional. Although network marketers attempt to construct an integrated identity of sales agent and friend, their prospects or friends who are unwilling to comply with them have to deconstruct this identity by challenging their personal face – an illegitimate act in ordinary unsolicited sales interactions. Here, face is not only a normative entity that should be respected by participants, but also a strategic tool deployed by them for achieving their goals and constructing their desirable identities. Perhaps we should consider what Watts 1989 calls the “politic behavior” of discourse, in which we have to promote our positive image and power while at the same time avoiding serious threats to the relationship. The face approach is valid for better understanding our politeness behavior; however, it should not be limited to single speech act sequences and the single dimensions of positive and negative face, but rather geared toward the dynamic view of politeness as a “politic behavior” and face as a multidimensional entity.

Another conclusion I would like to draw from this data analysis relates to a concern about the “commodification” (Fairclough 1992, 1995) of personal relationships by network marketing activities. It might be claimed that NMOs take advantage of the intersection of friendship and business by exploiting the meanings inherent in these two systems. Nevertheless, the prospects are themselves powerful resistance agents and can turn the meanings exploited by marketers to their own advantage. Business discourse does not intrude upon friendship, or vice versa; instead, they are interacting with each other to accomplish some old tasks in new ways. The notions of interpersonal relationships and friendships are changing; the distinction between the public and the private has become blurred. I recorded no instances of interactions in which the prospects are simply recipients of exploitation; they all take a proactive stance. Of course, there are cases in which they finally give in to marketers. Some of these prospects told me they complied because of the extreme closeness they feel with their friends. The rest of them did not surrender to the exploitation of meanings but to their interest in the products or their own desire to engage in this exploitation game.

A final note concerns the cultural variability of the phenomenon. Because this research focuses on identity construction at the boundary of friendship and business relationship, there is an equally important area left unexplored: To what extent are the findings here culture-specific? Since this research is based on data collected in Hong Kong, a predominantly Chinese society, a legitimate question followed would be: Can the patterns identified in this study be applied equally to interactions that involve participants from another ethnic background? Another cultural variability is in gender. Most of the participants in the present study are females, and to what extent can the findings be valid for male network marketers' interactions? If there are any discrepancies, to what extent are these due to the gender factor? These are certainly some meaningful questions to ask in future research.

NOTES

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¹ This is consistent with Hamilton's (1996) study of patients with Alzheimer's disease, in which she argues that an "intertextual" approach across previous and current conversations is important to understanding establishment and maintenance of stable social identities.

² It should be noted that the approaching phase may also have the elements of product/plan introduction. The important criterion for identification of an approaching phase is the introduction of the motive of selling and the preparations for it.

³ The maxims have been questioned on their validity and transferability across cultures (Ochs 1984). Nevertheless, the most interesting and insightful tenet of Grice's four maxims is exactly their "invalidity" in certain contexts and intended meanings (or "implicature," in Grice's terms). In my opinion, many of Grice's critics have overlooked his theory and argued along a wrong direction. Similar to Grice's four maxims under the Cooperative Principle, these four maxims of friendship engagement (trust, intimacy, control, and positiveness) are "invalid" sometimes because they can be exploited at the expense of others, opted out, suspended, and so on, and based on these assumptions, friends may draw inferences of what has been said in their conversations. They are not only the assumptions shared by friends in their interactions, but also the important criteria of friendship by which our relationships are subject to negotiation and renegotiation in our conversations.

⁴ The elements are named following the work of Rogers & Miller 1988 and Montgomery 1988.

⁵ The transcription system is adopted from *Mandarin and Cantonese Pronunciation Dictionary* (Chung Hwa Bok Company, 1987). Transcription conventions: Interruptions are represented by the bracket ([), prolongation of the immediately prior sound by colons (:), and noticeable pauses by ellipsis (...).

⁶ Discourse identity (Scollon & Scollon 1995) is based on Goffman's concept of participation framework (1981). A participation framework is made up of "a set of positions which individuals within perceptual range of an utterance may take in relation to what is said" (Schiffrin 1990:242). Both producer and recipient can occupy a certain position, as shown below, although the reception end of a discourse is seldom made explicit in literature (Scollon & Scollon 1995):

<i>Productive</i>		<i>Receptive</i>
1. animator	mechanical	receptor
2. author	rhetorical	interpreter
3. principal	responsible	judge

An animator is basically an aspect of a producer involved in the actual physical production of talk; an author is an aspect creating talk; and a principal is an aspect responsible for the content of the talk. These roles may or may not be performed by the same person even if they are all activated in an

utterance. Similarly, from the reception side, a receptor is an aspect of recipient who is only technically receiving what is said. An interpreter may need to interpret what is said, while a judge is responsible for the quality of an utterance in terms of truth, validity, and so forth. Again, a single person may or may not perform all these receptive roles during interaction.

⁷ As my other study shows (Kong 2002), uplines and downlines (the supervisors and subordinates in network marketing firms) do not have a legitimate collegial relationship. However, in order to achieve and coordinate some institutional goals, they must change an illegitimate relationship into a legitimate one by resorting to institutional talk and friendship talk very frequently, resulting in the occurrence of shifting talk categories. Nevertheless, the network marketers must deal with an opposite relationship with their prospects, who are usually their friends or relatives. They already have a legitimate relationship, but the network marketers attempt to negotiate a new one – an illegitimate business relationship. As shown in the above excerpt, N does not resort to the salesman talk for negotiating with P. Marked shifts in language and discourse identities are very rare, a strategy intended to prevent invoking prospects' unfavorable impressions of sales agents. In other words, network marketers must "cover up" their new identity in a sophisticated manner; that is why there is usually no marked distinction between different categories of talk in the interactions between network marketers and their friends, as is commonly found in the interactions among network marketers themselves. In their interactions with their prospects, the "voices" of network marketers themselves, of the company they represent, of their friends, or of the values of various relationships are blended in a complex way and are difficult to distinguish, in contrast with the clear distinctions found in conversations among network marketers themselves (Kong 2002). However, this blending of identities could cause prospects to feel more resentment. As the excerpt shows, P's criticism tends to be aimed indirectly at the companies or "those network marketers." Only after N's statement in turn 7, his full-blown exploitation of intimacy, does P challenge N directly about his suitability for working in network marketing – and implicitly about the immorality of what he is doing. The tension between network marketers and their prospects is clearly shown here. Network marketers attempt to create a unified identity, but their prospects must deconstruct this identity by challenging the legitimacy of this identity blending.

⁸ I thank Jane Hill for suggesting the idea.

⁹ Here, P's nonacceptance of N's proposal is preceded by her minimal utterance 'um' in turn 4. In (11), the final opposition turn in turn 7 relating to personal reasons for refusal is also positioned after her minimal utterance turn, turn 5, whereas in (12), N's final opposition turn begins with a long hesitation marker 'ummm'. All these excerpts show a pattern of Hesitation/Minimal Utterance + Final Refusal, either within the same turn or in two sequential turns. It is likely that – coupled with the stepwise progression from external justification to personal justification – hesitation or minimal utterance signals to network marketers the strong reluctance of the prospect to continue the existing selling/buying frame; if it persists, an aggravated argument will take place and their relationship may be in jeopardy.

¹⁰ Discourse system (Scollon & Scollon 1995) is defined as self-contained system of communication with particular ideological positions, specific forms of discourse, interpersonal relationships, and socialization practice. These elements are mutually dependent and combine to form a particular discourse system. The example cited in Scollon & Scollon 1995 to illustrate this idea is the utilitarian discourse system, prevalent in North American communication.

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