

Disalignment as a Practice of Sequence Management in Catering Business Investment Consultation

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Abstract

As science and technology continue to advance, telemarketing has become increasingly prevalent. Observations reveal that clients regularly produce sequentially disjunctive turns that generally deviate from the salesperson's promotional agenda during telephone consultations. This clearly affects the normal interaction between the salesperson and the client, potentially reducing the likelihood of collaboration. Based on corpus data, we first present the overall sequential structure of business consultation calls, which helps salespeople clarify their interactive tasks. Additionally, this paper summarizes the interactional functions of disaligning responses, such as skipping particular phases of interaction, controlling the topic of interaction, and doing disaffiliation. This study aims to help salespeople better understand client needs, take control of the conversation, foster harmonious interactions, and ultimately achieve business cooperation.

Keywords: disalignment, conversation analysis, sequence management, interactional functions

1. Introduction

Bound by preceding actions, aligning responses are the premise and foundation for the harmonious development of a conversation. They ensure that communicators achieve intersubjectivity and fulfill communicative tasks. In contrast, disaligning responses deviate from the constraints of preceding actions, interrupting the current behavior and impeding the progression of the conversation, which is detrimental to its development. However, in the process of telemarketing, customers frequently seize the floor from the salesperson, interrupting their narrative sequence or responding irrelevantly. This phenomenon has undoubtedly caught our attention. As illustrated in this example:

Extract 1 [Liu Zhe -- Wang Juan]

- 01 Salesperson: So, what kind of work are you doing now?
02 Customer: Uh, not much recently, I've been a bit free.
03 Salesperson: Oh, so you have some free time now?
04 So are you looking for a project,
05 or just free for a while?
06 Customer: Um, just looking around,
07 if I find something suitable, I might switch industries.
08 Something like that.
09 Salesperson: What kind of work are you doing now?
10 Customer: Can we not talk about that?

You go ahead first, okay?

11 Salesperson: Uh, sure,

12 because this is related to our promotional store policy.

13 We're offering zero-cost franchising in untapped markets now.

14 Salesperson: (0.4)

15 Customer: Zero-cost franchising in untapped markets, really?

16 Salesperson: Yes.

17 Customer: Is Fujian considered an untapped market?

18 Salesperson: Yes, which part of Fujian are you in?

19 Customer: Zhangzhou, Fujian.

This segment of dialogue falls under the stage where the salesperson inquires about the customer's business history, preparing for the project introduction. In line 9, the salesperson asks about the customer's occupation, but the client's subsequent response demonstrates the noncooperation. Rather than providing an answer, she requests the salesperson to introduce the project, steering the conversation onto a different track. In lines 11 to 14, faced with the customer's non-cooperation, the salesperson legitimizes the inquiry and attempts to attract the customer's attention by highlighting the benefits of the promotional policy.

Through detailed analysis of the data, we found that customers use disalignment to break the rigid conversational sequence, thereby manipulating the conversation's trajectory and achieving their communicative goals.

2. Literature Review

Research on telephone sales is primarily categorized into three major paths: the marketing approach, the psychological approach, and the conversation analysis (CA) approach. The first two paths primarily focus on tele-prospecting mechanisms, the evolution of salespeople's roles (Bolton & Houlihan, 2005), and how salespeople overcome client resistance (Humă & Stokoe, 2019). Most existing literature is based on theoretical assumptions and hypothetical scenarios rather than real-time and natural interactions or the common reasoning shared by all participants. Furthermore, research in conversation analysis has predominantly concentrated on singular actions (Rossi, 2015), with limited exploration of the overall sequence structure of conversations. While Humă and

Stokoe (2020) address B2B commercial calls, this paper shifts its focus to B2C field, aiming to uncover the underlying conversational regularities within this context.

In addition, with the continuous development of the CA field, the definition of disaligning responses has also been progressively refined. In story telling activities, Stivers (2008) defines "alignment" as the support of the structural asymmetry until story completion. In disaligning response, the recipient grasps the floor and ignores the asymmetry. Subsequently, aligning responses push forward ongoing sequential development, accept the prepositions entailed in the first pair part and match turn design preference in formal level (Stivers, Mondada & Steensig, 2011). After that, aligning with the prior speaker represents participants go in the same track without any evaluation or assessment (Drew & Walker, 2009). In "question — answer" sequences, challenging the presupposition of the FPP (Stivers & Hayashi, 2010) or marking the question as inappropriate (Heritage, 1998) also belong to the disaligning responses. Clayman (2010) divides the disalignment into three categories: (1) topical agenda departures, (2) action agenda departures, (3) disagreements.

3. Research Method and Data

This study collected 150 telephone sales recordings from four salesmen, among which 90 instances of disaligning responses were identified. These recordings share the same contextual background where customers expressed interest in the "Durian Stinky Tofu" project and left messages online to request further information. Salesperson then followed up with these customers, persuading them to affiliate. The recordings were strictly transcribed according to the Jefferson (2004) transcription system. To protect personal privacy, both the identities of the sales representatives and the customers have been anonymized.

4. The Overall Sequential Organization of Catering Business Investment Consultation

Each conversation exhibits a specific sequence structure, particularly in institutional conversations. Institutional conversations are task-driven, so mastering the overall framework of the conversation can help communicators achieve their conversational goals more efficiently. Accordingly, by analyzing the collected data, we categorize the telemarketing

calls for the catering industry into three main segments: opening, promotion, and closing. Undoubtedly, the promotional activity is the focal point of this study. It is important to note that these three segments are comprised of specific activities. While conversational regularities pervade various aspects of life, contingencies of interaction add to its allure. Consequently, not every conversation includes all interaction stages, because salesmen and customers may skip particular stages or address emergent issues triggered by the immediate context.

Through data analysis, we have identified that the promotional sequence in telemarketing calls primarily comprises the following stages: (1) Probing Business History; (2) Introducing Program; (3) Probing Operation Plan; (4) Suggesting Affiliation; (5) Suggesting On-the-Spot Investigation; and (6) Arranging On-the-Spot Investigation. Notably, there is no intrinsic connection between the first three stages, allowing for flexibility in their sequence. In contrast, the latter three stages are sequentially dependent, which means the completion of preceding activities determines the initiation of subsequent ones. We present the most representative data for each sales stage to assist salesperson in clarifying the core tasks of each stage and the intrinsic logic connecting these stages.

In the initial stage of a consultation, salesman utilizes the company and project names to clearly establish their organizational identity, which helps customers quickly recognize them and understand the business of the call. This method prevents the call from being perceived as a nuisance and avoids missing the opportunity to introduce the project. Following this, salesman inquires about the customer's business history, including their current occupation and the operating status of their business. By understanding the customer's professional background and franchise experience, salesperson can gauge the customer's willingness to invest in the project.

Based on this assessment, salesman tailors the project introduction, which includes information about the company's location, developing history, product range, product features, and target audience, providing the customer with a comprehensive understanding of the project and laying the groundwork for a potential investment plan. Subsequently, salesman further

assesses the customer's investment potential by inquiring about their time management, site selection, and investment plans.

After that, salesperson suggest that the customer affiliating by offering a range of incentives, such as discounts on renovation materials, store equipment, and online media promotion. In this stage, the objective is to maximize the benefits for the customer while minimizing their costs, thereby persuading them to agree to the investment. Once the customer shows interest in the program, the salesman moves to the next stage: recommending an investigation to the company headquarters for a face-to-face negotiation. To facilitate this, the salesman promptly inquires about the customer's availability and travel arrangements, thereby increasing the likelihood of the meeting.

As the conversation nears its conclusion, the salesman proactively offers to send relevant materials and exchange contact information. This not only addresses the hesitation from the customer but also facilitates future communication, serving as a transitional phase for continued dialogue.

4.1 Opening

A. Summon-Answer

B. Greetings

C. Self-identification + the reason for the call

Extract 2 [Happy lemon Sun Peng]

- 01 Customer: Hello, hi.
 02 Salesperson: Uh, hello, hi.
 03 (0.6)
 04 Customer: Hey, hi.
 05 Salesperson: Hey, hi. This is the CoCo Tea Drink Project Consulting Center.
 06 Did you just leave a message about our project on our website?
 07 Customer: Oh, yes, yes. That's right, that's right.

Lines 01 to 07 conform to the conventional sequence structure of telephone conversations, including summon-answer, greeting-greeting, and identification-recognition. Line 01 represents the customer's response to the phone ring, followed by the salesman's greeting. After a 0.6-second silence, the customer greets again, indicating that has not yet recognized the caller's identity. Notably, in Line 05, the salesman introduces the institutional identity, distinguishing it from the typical personal identification in everyday conversations, which

often involves first or last names. Subsequently, the salesperson takes control of the conversation again by seeking confirmation to clarify the purpose of the call. From a turn-taking perspective, the salesman employs the tag question “isn’t it” to downplay their own epistemic status. The customer’s confirmation in line 07 is a type-conforming response.

D. Availability Checking

Extract 3 [Happy lemon Sun Peng]

- 01 Salesman: Yes, I’m Mr. Sun, Sun Peng.
 02 Yes, alright. Is this a good time to talk? Are you free ((laughter))?
 03 Customer: Uh::, yes, yes.

In Extract 3, after concluding the greeting sequence, the salesman inquires whether it is convenient for the customer to take the call, thereby removing any potential obstacles to the smooth progression of the interaction. As for the turn design, the salesperson emphasizes the customer’s current availability by adding an increment and uses laughter to ease awkwardness, projecting the delicacy of the forthcoming discussion. The customer’s “go ahead” response promotes the promotional sequence.

E. Appreciation

Extract 4 [Peng Fei]

- 01 Salesman: Ah, thank you for your interest in our project.
 02 How long have you been interested in our project?
 03 Customer: Hmm, I saw it yesterday; I didn’t really know about it before.
 04 Salesman: Ah::, so do you already know about the features of our project?
 05 Customer: Hmm::, not really.
 06 Salesman: Ah::, let me give you a brief introduction then, okay?
 07 Customer: Hmm.

In line 11, the salesperson expresses gratitude for the customer’s interest and shifts the conversation towards the pre-program introduction phase. The salesperson asks about the customer’s familiarity with the project, setting the stage for the subsequent project introduction, which helps tailor the promotion of the company and its products effectively.

F. Apology

Extract 5 [Happy lemon Sun Peng]

- 01 Salesperson: Yes, excuse me, my last name

is Sun, and my name is Sun Peng.

- 02 Yes. Is this convenient to talk, are you free now ((laughter))?
 03 Customer: Um, yeah, it’s fine, it’s fine.
 04 Salesperson: Fine, right, okay.
 05 I was saying we have a lot of customers today.
 06 ¥ Sorry about that ¥.
 07 (0.4)
 08 Customer: No problem, no problem, no problem.

In addition to expressing gratitude, salesman also apologizes for not following up with clients in a timely manner. The salesperson explains the delay in service by using the term “just now” which helps to construct responsible image. The customer displays understanding finally.

4.2 Probing Business History

Extract 6 [Li Yingchun]

- 01 Salesperson: Um, are you interested in franchising or technology?
 02 (0.6)
 03 Customer: We’re setting up a stall at night market, no need for franchising.
 04 Salesperson: Um, that’s fine. Do you currently have a stall?
 05 (0.6)
 06 Customer: No, finding a stall is okay,
 07 but right now, I’m just trying to decide on a product,
 08 because there are so many products at the night market.
 09 Salesperson: Hmm, hmm, hmm,
 10 Customer: It’s hard to choose.
 11 Salesperson: ¥ Oh, I see. ¥
 12 (0.2)
 13 Salesperson: Hmm, okay. Are you working, or just looking for a product?
 14 (0.4)
 15 Customer: We’re currently in the construction business.
 16 (0.4)

In the realm of sales, the practice of gathering information about a client’s business history to assess their current profession and employment status parallels the initial consultation phase in a

medical context, where a doctor meticulously collects a patient's medical history. This critical phase, steered by the salesperson, is executed through a structured sequence of inquiries, designed to gradually piece together a comprehensive understanding of the client's experience and qualifications in business operations.

4.3 Introducing Program

Extract 7 [Li Yingchun]

01 Salesperson: Um, yes,
 02 so let me give you a brief
 introduction to the product, okay, bro?
 03 Customer: Uh, okay.
 04 So besides franchising,
 05 if I just want to learn, is it
 only about making stinky tofu?
 06 Salesperson: No, not at all.
 07 Our company mainly focuses
 on snack projects.
 08 We were established in 2018,
 09 and it's been almost six years now.
 10 We have six product series
 with over 100 individual items.
 11 Stinky tofu is just one of our
 product lines,
 12 and we have ten different
 flavors for it.
 13 Our products are quite
 unique.
 14 Customer: So do I have to get the
 supplies from your company,
 15 or can I source them
 elsewhere?
 16 Salesperson: Let me explain.
 17 After we teach you,
 18 you can purchase supplies
 from the market or directly from us.
 19 For example, for making
 stinky tofu, you'll need tofu bases,
 20 which you can't produce on
 your own.
 21 Additionally, we teach you
 how to prepare the seasoning.
 22 You can buy the main
 ingredients from the market.
 23 but it's quite troublesome.

24 Most franchisees buy the
 ready-made seasoning packets.
 25 They are cheaper than those
 sold on the market.
 26 Customer: I see.
 27 Salesperson: Regarding our products,
 28 we have a variety of flavors
 for the stinky tofu series.
 29 For example, we have durian,
 sweet durian cheese.
 30 Besides these, we have
 savory and spicy flavors like kimchi,
 31 soup-filled, chili oil,
 five-spice chili oil, fermented bean curd,
 32 and grilled cold noodles with
 stinky tofu.
 33 The fillings are quite diverse.
 34 Customer: So...
 35 Salesperson: As you mentioned,
 36 there are many stalls selling
 all kinds of things at night markets.
 37 Since we are selling products,
 38 not just food, but also in the
 catering industry.
 39 We need to have an
 advantage in our products.
 40 This way, when customers
 want to buy this item,
 41 they can only get it from you,
 nowhere else.
 42 This gives us a competitive
 advantage.
 43 So, our products are rich and
 unique.
 44 Besides stinky tofu...
 45 Customer: One more thing, you don't
 have any stores in our area, right?
 46 Salesperson: Where are you located?
 47 We don't have a store in
 Qingdao.
 48 Customer: Oh, I see.

After understanding the customer's initial franchising plan, the salesperson proceeds to introduce the basic aspects of the project. This stage involves detailing the company's business scope, product range, unique features, supply sources and production processes. It is crucial as

it determines whether the customer will develop a strong interest in the product and smoothly join the project. Therefore, this phase is particularly critical. Line 48 serves as a clear dividing line, separating the inquiry into the business history from the introduction of the project.

4.4 Probing Operation Plan

Extract 8 [Zhang Na]

- 49 Salesperson: Excuse me for a moment.
 50 Let me ask you something first.
 51 You're in Baotou, Inner Mongolia, right?
 52 When do you plan to start?
 53 If you start soon, you can take advantage of our current policy.
 54 If you can't start soon, you might miss it.
 55 So, what's your timeline?
 56 Customer: Ah, I'm planning to start next year.
 57 This winter, with the New Year coming up, I won't be doing it.
 58 Salesperson: What month next year?
 59 Customer: Around summer, after May Day.

After provides basic information about the product, salesman sets off for the next stage: probing operation plan, which paves the way for the suggestion. Obviously, salesman controls the conversational trajectory. Thus, he grasps the chance to inquire the actual investment time and time arrangement. Meanwhile, he uses the conditional offer to make the inquiry legitimate. It is not only an account for question, but also urges the recipient to take action immediately. To begin with, customer provides the investment time, then refuses the urge and provides the account. Salespeople asks the specific investment time to find out his operation plan.

4.5 Suggesting Affiliation

Extract 9 [Liu Zhe—Chen Hao]

- 60 Customer: So, how do we join the franchise?
 61 Salesperson: For franchising, until the end of the year,
 62 we have a zero-cost franchise

support [policy for new markets.

- 63 Customer: [Hmm, Hmm.
 64 Salesperson: Normally, our single-store franchise fee is 28,800.
 65 (0.4)
 66 Salesperson: So, for 28,800, what's included is:
 67 first, the core equipment for making the products,
 68 you won't need to buy those.
 69 And also, the decoration materials.
 70 Customer: Hmm,
 71 Salesperson: You'll need to do some simple interior decoration,
 72 and the soft decor materials in your store.
 73 Customer: Hmm, right.
 74 Salesperson: All of these are provided by the company,
 75 so you won't need to spend extra.
 76 And another thing is the promotion on TikTok,
 77 especially if you do it near schools.
 78 Customer: Hmm.
 79 Salesperson: The TikTok promotion works very well.
 80 Like influencers visiting your store,
 81 and if you plan to do delivery later.
 82 Customer: Hmm.
 83 Salesperson: All the platform operation are covered by the company.
 84 Customer: Hmm.

Following the operation plan exploration, prospect displays the interest in affiliation in line 60. Salespeople utilizes a range of conditional offers to tempt the prospect. If the customer agrees to join the project, the salesman promises to provide different benefits to the customer in different ways at the corresponding time. He informs client about the supportive policy in lines 61 and 62. The first "Yeah" represents continuer, which allows recipient to

continue the informing, while the second one is recipient tokens. After the elaboration of the benefit, salesman informs the affiliation fee in line 64. What deserves our attention is that essential marketing principle, which the benefit first, the cost second in the unfolding of the whole sequence. Nevertheless, the silence in line 65 may project a dispreferred response. Subsequently, salesman self-selects as the next speaker and provides an array of conditional offers in order to avoid dispreferred response. He highlights the benefits of investment, what you can obtain through affiliation, such as equipment, finishing material, publicity.

4.6 Suggesting on-the-spot Investigation

Extract 10 [Zhang Na]

85 Salesperson: Which district in Baotou are you in, ma'am?
 86 Customer: In Qingshan.
 87 Salesperson: Qingshan, right?
 88 Customer: Yes.
 89 Salesperson: Alright.
 90 I think, well, you could do this:
 91 Because we're currently promoting this store,
 92 We're offering a special discount.
 93 If you come for an inspection,
 94 and if you're not satisfied with the taste of the product,
 95 we will reimburse your round-trip expenses,
 96 so it's quite worthwhile.
 97 So I suggest you [come over].
 98 Customer: [Do you- do you have cheese stinky tofu there,
 99 and what else do you have?
 100 (0.6)
 101 Salesperson: Ah, stinky tofu, and also snacks and drinks.
 102 Ah, there should be stinky tofu,
 103 snacks, grilled cold noodles, and buns,
 104 and also, um, marinated dishes.

105 We have quite a lot of products,
 106 six series in total, over 100 individual items.
 107 (0.3)
 108 Customer: Okay, then I'll take a look, check it out and then decide.
 109 Salesperson: Ma'am, when do you think you can come over?
 110 Whether you want to learn the skills or join the franchise,
 111 when you come, we can discuss it on the spot,
 112 and see what works best for you.

From line 85 to 88, salesman inquires the whereabouts of the client then confirms the location. Interestingly, he assesses positively about the place in the beginning, which means the on-the-spot investigation is suitable. From line 89 to 97, he explains why it is suitable through the conditional offer. More importantly, he constructs the "suggestion" with meta language. However, before the salesman completes the turn, client interrupts then holds the floor in line 98. The suggestion is interrupted by the recipient's disaligning response, which inquires types of products that should belong to the third stage. Notably, the relevance with its first pair part is absent. The response of suggestion should be the acceptance or refusal. However, client takes initiative and change the trajectory of the sequence. Accordingly, salesman offers information about the product, which is forced to follow the new conversational path. After 0.3 second silence, prospect hesitates to accept the suggestion of investigation, as the second pair part of line 97, but isn't so committed.

Salesman begins with the schedule of the meeting to push forward the conversational progress and mitigate the uncertainty. That's because he recognizes the hesitation and ambiguity of recipient displayed in line 108.

4.7 Arranging on-the-spot Investigation

Extract 11 [Zhang Na]

113 Customer: Okay, then I'll take a look elsewhere,
 114 check it out and then decide.
 115 Salesperson: Ma'am, when do you think

you can come over?

116 Whether you want to learn
the skills or join the franchise,

117 when you come, we can
discuss it on the spot,

118 and see what works best for
you.

119 Customer: Alright, (.) sure, sure.

120 And if I do go, it'll be after
the New Year.

121 Salesperson: Oh::, [then after the New
Year.

122 Customer: [I don't have time to go
now.

123 Salesperson: I'm afraid the promotional
policy won't be available then.

124 Customer: Oh well, [we'll talk about it
later.

125 Salesperson: [Can't you come
before the New Year?

126 You can try it [and see if it
suits you before the New Year.

127 Customer: [I can't make
it,

128 I'm too busy to go right now.

129 Salesperson: Oh::, well, if it's after the New
Year, here's the thing,

130 I think before the New Year is
the peak consumption period.

131 It's easier to do business
before the New Year,

132 you can add more products,

133 You'll make more money,
right?

134 Come over this time.

135 Customer: Because in summer, over here
in summer.

136 It's busier.

137 Salesperson: Oh, okay. No problem.

138 Customer: Hmm.

Sales calls are inherently goal-oriented activities. Evidently, compared with suggestion of on-the-spot investigation, this stage is closer to the success of cold call. In line 133, client accepts the advice of on-the-spot-investigation, but not so committed. Moreover, he is still ambiguous to whether affiliate the program displayed in line

134. Salespeople's inquiry about specific time increases the possibility of investigation and pushes recipient to make decisions of investigation as soon as possible. From 115 to 118, he persuades prospect to talk face to face and withdraws from the affiliation sequence. Prospect redoes the acceptance of the persuasion, then clarifies the arrangement. Following the change of state token "oh", salesman's further persuasion clashes with client's account, then salesman abandons the turn and allows the recipient continue the explanation. He repairs his persuasion considering the recipient's benefit in line 123. However, prospect shows ambiguity towards the push. Facing the situation, salesman conducts the request of meeting before the New Year, which is refused directly and repeatedly accompanied with accounts. Salesman receives the information and persuades to investigate before the New Year again with another account, which obtain more profit compared with more benefit in line 123. Nevertheless, client constructs the K+ state concerning the marketing situation and refutes salesman's account, thus insists on personal plan. Finally, salesman compromises and accepts the arrangement, so the negotiation is towards the end.

4.8 Closing

A. Contact information Adding

B. Information Offering

Extract 12 [Zhang Na]

139 Salesperson: So, I added you on WeChat,
please accept it.

140 Then I'll send you some
product information,

141 you can take a look first.

142 Customer: [Oh, alright, alright.

143 Salesperson: [If there's anything you don't
understand,

144 just ask me, okay, ma'am?

145 Customer: Yeah, alright, alright.

146 Salesperson: Great, great,

147 okay, bye.

148 Customer: Yeah, yeah, bye.

Generally, the closing of the first sales call shares some similarities. From line 139 to 141, salesman requests the recipient's contact information masked with offering more product information. Meanwhile, he shows the willingness to solve the puzzles and concerns, thus keeps in touch

with prospect.

Combing through the basic sequential structure of the first call, we can understand how salesman promote the program, persuades the client and schedule the meeting step by step. Besides, it is amazing to see the micro-structure of the business interaction under the view of CA. Certainly, not every sales call follows the procedure step by step, which depends on the participants' cooperation and endeavor. The overall sequential structure of the first call helps us to better understand commercial interaction.

5. The Interactional Functions of Disalignment in Catering Business Investment Telephone Consultation

In telemarketing, salespersons typically dominate the conversation. However, customers employ disaligning responses to break free from the salesperson's control, voicing their own demands and steering the salesperson towards addressing the immediate issue rather than rigidly following the scripted conversation flow. Based on the analyzed discourse, this study identifies three major interactive functions of customers' disaligning responses: (1) Skipping particular phases of interaction, (2) Controlling the topic of interaction and (3) Doing disaffiliation.

A. Skipping particular phases of interaction.

Extract 13 [Zhang Na]

145 Salesperson: ((laughs)) You just called, right?

146 Customer: [Yes, yes.

147 Salesperson: [((laughs)) Sorry,

148 I was on the phone with a client from Yulin, Shaanxi.

149 Mr. Ren is planning to become a light cable distributor.

150 He just sent me the train ticket.

151 I was discussing it with him.

152 So, which website did you see our project on?

153 (0.2)

154 Customer: I saw it on Baidu.

155 Salesperson: Oh, really?

156 Okay, [great.

157 Customer: [Ah, your- your side,

158 Salesperson: ang.

159 Customer: How do I join the franchise?

160 Salesperson: Ah, we are a franchise chain.

161 Our specials are colorful vegetable and fruit nutritious noodles.

162 Customer: [Hmm.

163 Salesperson: [All our fresh ingredients are from fresh vegetables and fruits.

164 Not only are they colorful, but they are also more nutritious.

165 [Ah, you are in Shandong, right?

166 Customer: [I've seen all of this.

167 Yes, in Shandong.

In lines 149 to 150, the salesperson confirms the customer's identity. From lines 151 to 155, the salesperson apologizes for not following up in a timely manner. Subsequently, in lines 156 to 160, the salesperson regains control of the conversation and begins to inquire about the customer's business history. However, in line 163, the customer interrupts, skipping three intermediate stages: inquiring about business history, introducing the project, and asking about business plans. Instead, the customer directly asks how to join the franchise, shifting the dynamic from the salesperson suggesting the franchise to the customer taking the initiative.

Interestingly, in lines 164 to 168, the salesperson returns to introducing the project, continuing with the original script. Then, in line 169, the salesperson again inquires about the business history, attempting to regain control by asking questions. Nevertheless, the customer interrupts once more to explain the disalignment: they have already researched the project and do not need an introduction, thereby justifying their decision to skip the intermediate steps.

B. Controlling topic of interaction.

Extract 14 [Cao Yang]

168 Salesperson: Ah, Shandong Weifang?

169 I see your phone signal shows Weifang.

170 Customer: [Zibo.

171 Salesperson: [Ah, Zibo, right?

172 [Oh, Zibo.

173 Customer: [Where is your headquarters located?

174 Salesperson: The headquarters is in

Qinhuangdao, Hebei.

175 Customer: <Qinhuangdao, Hebei>,

176 Salesperson: Yes,

177 Customer: Oh, which places in Shandong have your stores now?

178 Salesperson: In Shandong, we just started recruiting,

179 its been less than half a month.

In conversational dynamics, the party who initiates questions typically steers the direction of the interaction. In lines 172 to 173, the salesperson inquires about the customer's business plans. However, in line 177, the customer provides a disaligning response. Instead of confirming, the customer proactively asks questions, thereby taking control and directing the conversation. What was initially the salesperson suggesting an inspection turns into the customer inquiring about the possibility of an inspection. Moreover, in line 181, the customer continues to control the conversation by asking if they can inspect a local store.

C. Doing disaffiliation

Extract 15 [Cao Yang]

180 Salesperson: So, if the project is suitable, when are you considering starting?

181 (0.5)

182 Customer: Well, I need to consider whether I can implement it.

183 First, introduce your products,

184 and let me understand, what are your advantages?

185 What are the product advantages?

186 And what are the main features?

187 Salesperson: The features are our product, because the market offers not traditional Changsha stinky tofu,

189 but durian stinky tofu,

190 as you know, is relatively rare in your area,

191 and nationwide, we are the only ones offering it.

192 (0.6)

193 Customer: Yes, I want to hear your

introduction.

194 I've seen durian stinky tofu before.

195 Since you're promoting durian stinky tofu,

196 the price shouldn't be very low, right?

197 If it's not low,

198 how will customers accept it if it's much higher?

199 For example, costing tens of bucks?

200 Salesperson: That's a good question,

201 and we've already considered it.

202 I wouldn't sell a portion of stinky tofu for tens of bucks.

203 No matter how good it tastes, no one would buy it, right?

In line 184, the salesperson inquires about the business strategy. The customer's disaligning response appears in lines 186 to 190, where instead of answering the salesperson's question, the customer directs the conversation, requesting the salesperson to introduce the project. Following the customer's direction, the salesperson introduces the project, allowing the customer to successfully steer the conversation.

Furthermore, in lines 198 to 202, the customer negatively evaluates the product price, posing a disaligning response that questions the project's feasibility. The salesperson rationalizes the product pricing, effectively mitigating the customer's concerns.

6. Conclusion

This example demonstrates that every instance of disalignment in conversation carries its own significance or value. Such responses should not be merely seen as disruptions in the conversational flow. Instead, uncovering the underlying mechanisms of these disalignment is a crucial task for CA research. For instance, clients may skip certain stages with disaligning responses to focus on their primary concerns. Institutional talk is goal-driven from beginning to the end. Clients seek effective solutions or schemes rather than meaningless and tedious promotions. This insight provides valuable implications for marketing training, emphasizing the importance of addressing

clients' concerns directly and efficiently.

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