

FACE THREATENING ACTS EMPLOYED IN MIRAA BUSINESS DISCOURSE BY TRADERS OF IGEMBE AND SOMALI ORIGIN

By

John M. Kobia,

Department of Arts and Humanities, Chuka University, Kenya

&

Miriti Gervasio,

Njia Boys Secondary School, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The prime concern of this study was to analyse the Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) employed by miraa traders, from Igembe and Somali origin, in their discourse. The researches were given the impetus to undertake this study because of the uniqueness exhibited in miraa traders' discourse. The study aimed at establishing the FTAs depicted in their discourse and was guided by the Politeness Theory by Levinson and Brown (1987) to form the basis of its theoretical framework. The study was carried out at Muringene Market and in Maua town. It employed the social networks approach to identify participants. The purposive sampling procedure was used. Data was collected by tape-recording negotiations as miraa traders went on with their businesses and through non-participants observation. Data analysis was largely Qualitative but summarized using descriptive statistics and presented using a table. The study found out that miraa traders make use of several FTAs but with significant variation in relation to their frequency of occurrence. The most occurring FTA was that of insults leading to the conclusion that miraa traders are abusive.

Keywords: Face Threatening Acts, Politeness Theory, Miraa traders and Miraa Business Discourse

1.1 Introduction

This paper is geared towards shedding light on the use of face threatening acts (FTAs) by miraa traders who hail from divergent cultural and linguistic backgrounds- Igembe and Somali. Despite such divergent backgrounds, miraa traders exhibit similar conversation style. Gumperz (1982) agrees that conversation is a cooperative venture in which speakers collaborate in constructing and interpreting what is going on as the discourse unfolds. To realize this, speakers depend on contextual social cultural knowledge, which according to Gumperz (Ibid), must be shared if a conversation is to be effective. Communication is said to be effective when the intended effect by the sender of the message is achieved. This article explores a number of FTAs employed by miraa traders and how they meaningfully interact among themselves in business discourse.

Miraa is a crop that is grown in large scale mainly in Igembe region in Meru County in Kenya. Meru County has nine sub-counties namely Imenti North, Imenti South, Imenti Central, Tigania East, Tigania West, Igembe South, Igembe central, Buuri and Igembe North. Although miraa is grown in most parts of Meru, it is grown largely in Igembe North, Igembe central and Igembe South sub-counties region. This has made Igembe to be the centre of miraa business where most of the negotiations are carried out. From here, miraa is transported to various parts of Kenya and abroad

hence bringing a lot of income to the area. In Kenya, miraa is transported to different parts such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Isiolo, Mandera, Nanyuki, Wajir among other parts of the country.

Being a booming business with high economic value, miraa business has attracted many traders of Somali origin to do business with traders of Meru origin where miraa is produced hence making the two groups to be the key players in the business. Therefore, miraa trade is mainly carried out by traders who hail from the two communities: Meru and Somali. The negotiations take place in several markets in Igembe region particularly in Maua town.

It is worth noting that miraa business, in Maua Town, is carried out by either Igembe traders themselves or between Igembe and the Somali people. When it is between Igembe people, the language of interaction is Kiigembe dialect of Kimeru language but when the negotiations are between the Igembe and Somali people, the language of interaction becomes Kiswahili.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Scholars have made a number of attempts to analyse business discourses using different participants in different contexts and backgrounds. Despite their concerted effort, none of the scholars has carried out a study involving miraa traders who hail from divergent cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Igembe and Somali). This study therefore aims at analysing the Face Threatening Acts employed by miraa traders in their discourse

1.3 Research objective.

This study was guided by the following objective:

To establish the Face Threatening Acts employed by miraa traders from Somali and Igembe origin.

1.4 Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

Which are the Face Threatening Acts employed by miraa traders of Igembe and Somali origin?

1.5 Literature Review

Most of the politeness studies in business discourse have employed Brown and Levinson's (1978) perspective. Using French and Dutch, Starppers (1995) compares the realization of the potentially, face-threatening act of disagreement and its mitigation in intercultural negotiations between French and Dutch participants. The findings reveal that disagreements in negotiations are generally mitigated; albeit not as much as in everyday conversation, thus suggesting that clarity overrides politeness in business interactions. These findings, though analyzed from the face –saving perspective, seem to provide implicit support for Lakoff's (1973) conversation maxim view of politeness and suggest that business negotiations may exhibit particular idiosyncratic discourse features. The current study also took place in a business context and aimed at establishing whether such idiosyncratic discourse features in relation to FTAs were evident in the negotiations between miraa traders who hail from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It was established that miraa business has such idiosyncratic features such as use of offensive language, being rude to one another and use of very high intonation in their speech.

Charles (1996) examines the production of face saving hedging device in authentic English business negotiations and concludes that their performance is bound by the role of the buyer and seller while Fant (1992) investigates simulated negotiations between Spanish and Swedish professional negotiators. The current study was also carried out in a business environment and used Politeness

theory in its investigations and was particularly concerned with the Face Threatening Acts among the miraa traders.

Smith (1987) observes that in communication, the place of silence, appropriate topics of conversation, forms of address and expressions of speech acts (for example apologies, requests, agreements, disagreements and so on) are usually not the same across cultures and these are more important for effective intercultural communication than grammatical competence. The current study emphasized on the FTAs such as requests, orders, dismissals, insults, reminders and accusations.

Bilbow (1997) focuses on cross- cultural examination in respect to promises and expression of commitment which is also potentially an FTA according to Brown and Levinson (1987). He uses intercultural business meetings at a multinational airline company based in Hong Kong. The author finds similarities in the frequency with which both the Chinese and Western participants employed the speech acts and differences in terms of their linguistic realization and in the circumstances under which the acts were performed.

Moreover, in Spencer –Oatey’s (2000) Rapport Management Perspective, politeness is understood as one of the resources which are available to participants for managing relationships. Participants are concerned about managing face and managing sociality rights. Face has two interrelated aspects; quality face and ‘social identity face’ and is thus related to Brown and Levinson positive face in that it refers to the desire of individuals to be evaluated positively. ‘Quality face’ is the desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities and ‘social identity face’ is the desire to be acknowledged in our social identity roles, (for example, as a teacher, wife and son) thus accounting for the public element neglected in Brown and Levinson interpretation of the face.

Planken (2005), on the other hand, examines the manifestation of face – in work simulated intercultural sales negotiations in English as a lingua franca by professional negotiators and students of international business management. The study reveals differences in the way professionals and students build rapport in negotiation settings. Unlike, professional negotiators, the students did not engage in safe talk in categories of business environment. This research, just like ones mentioned, examined the Face Threatening Acts in a business scenario and involved participants that were doing miraa business.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This discussion is based on Politeness theory and more particularly on one of its tenets-FTAs which has two related faces that are discussed in this paper. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline an idea of universality of face and rationality in their intrinsic face. Their argument being that there are certain kinds of acts that intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/ or of the speaker. By acts, they meant what is intended to be done by verbal or non-verbal communication, just as one or more ‘speech acts’ can be assigned to an utterance. They argued that there are two types of face that can be threatened; negative and positive faces. They made a distinction between those acts that threaten the negative face and those that do the same to the positive one.

There are those acts that primarily threaten the addressee’s ((hearer,s) negative- face want by indicating (potentially)/ that the speaker (S) does not intend to avoid hearer’s freedom of action.

Examples of such acts include orders and requests, suggestions, advice, reminding, promises and offers.

On the other hand, those acts that threaten the positive- face want, by indicating (potentially) that the speaker does not care about the addressee's feelings, and wants include acts of contempt, expressions of disapproval, criticism, ridicule, contradictions, disagreement, challenges etc. This study analysis six Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) employed by miraa traders in their discourse. Some of these threaten the negative face while others the positive one.

1.7 Methodology

The study was conducted in Maua Town and at Muringene Market. Maua was used because it is a big town that has many miraa traders from both communities – Somali and Igembe. This ensured that the sample was balanced in terms of ethnic representation. The study was also conducted at Muringene market which is near Maua town.

Ten negotiations recorded from Maua town and ten negotiations recorded from Muringene market were used. This implies that twenty negotiations were recorded from both places. Ten negotiations involved negotiations between Igembe and Somali traders while other ten were between Igembe traders themselves.

It employed purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is non probability sampling that is done with purpose in mind. It is through this technique that the researchers got samples from the two categories- negotiations between traders from Somali origin and Igembe and between traders from Igembe origin themselves. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher identify the right samples from the two categories.

Data was collected by use of a powerful small tape recorder. This means that the researcher used audio recording to obtain the verbal data. Through observation, the researcher was able to account for such things as tone and intonation, gestures and facial expressions among other non verbal and paralinguistic features. In addition, the researchers used note books to note down anything observed that was related to the study.

To ensure that the data obtained through recording was free from biases, the researchers employed the social network approach so as to create confidence between the researchers and the informants. The informants were approached in the capacity of a friend of a friend. This minimized the observer's paradox because it built trust with the respondents. It also increased the chances of observing in a prolonged informal interaction without suspicion (Milroy 1987).

The data was analyzed using qualitative approach to data analysis. The first step was to transcribe the tape recorded data on paper. The tape recorded data was then summarized and described using descriptive statistics to identify the Face Threatening Acts.

The notes made by the researchers from the observation were availed at this stage to supplement the recorded data. The qualitative approach was then used to describe the Face Threatening Acts used. The analysed data on the FTAs was presented using a table to provide answers for the research question. It was particularly used to present the data on the occurrences of FTAs used by miraa traders.

1.8 Data Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

This paper critically analysis and discusses the findings with reference to the research carried out in Muringene market and Maua town. It focuses on the Face Threatening Acts namely insults, order, reminders, request, dismissals and accusations. In this study, S stands for seller while B and T stand for buyer and turn respectively.

1.8.1 Use of insults in miraa business discourse.

The business negotiations between miraa traders were characterized by the immense use of insults. There was frequent use of taboo words which are mostly associated with bodily parts. From their facial expressions and other paralinguistic features, it was noted that the traders were at ease with the use of abusive language. The following is an example. It is a conversation that involved two traders of Igembe community.

Example 1

B: T1 Jukia mbia unekere miraa iu yonthe bwana. (Take the money and give me that entire miraa sir.)

S: T2 Imaana yana ngucokia. Reka umpilima rii ntina mbia utimburaira. Imaana yana ngucokia. (I will give a balance of four hundred shillings. Stop nagging me. You do not buy from me when I do not have money. I will give a balance of four hundred shillings)

B:T 3 Kairi, ingiri ithatu na maana yatathatu. (Kairi, it is three thousand six hundred.)

S: T4 Ndikuthania mana yana niyo ngucokia. (I will give you four hundred shillings as the balance.)

B:T5 Ita kamoo. (Go away kamoo) Kamoo is an insult referring to female reproductive organ.)

S: T6 Ii ndiko. (Yes I am.)

B: T7 Reka kuringa ituma bwana we. (Sir, stop making noise.)

S T8 Imana yana ngucokia. Wina iyana kunenkere yatano? (I will give a balance of four hundred shillings. Do you have one hundred I give you a five hundred shillings note?)

B:T 9 Sawasawa. (It is okay.)

In this negotiation, the buyer insults the seller in T5 but he (the seller) does not take the insult seriously because they continue with their negotiation and reach a compromise price. The insult is as a result of the seller's demand to sell at a high price as witnessed in T4.

Below is another example.

Example 2

B: Lakini bwana miraa ii inya ni iminene muno bwana. Uga mauri yangi. (But sir this miraa is even overgrown. Suggest another price.)

S: Reka **nkai** we kambite na miraa yekwa wone anga itiurwa bwega (You testes leave me alone and let me go and I will sell it at a better price to somebody else.)

The seller insults the buyer and threatens to leave him because of the fact that the buyer has downgraded his miraa and therefore the chances of buying from him were minimal. He is however optimistic that he will get somebody else to buy at a better price.

Below is another example.

Example 3

B:T1 Ako wapi Julius? (Where is Julius?)

- S: T2 Julius ameenda. Unataka Julius ama unataka miraa mukuli wewe? (Julius has gone. You want Julius or miraa anus? B:T3 Leo bwana siendi choo. (Today sir I have a problem when I go to the toilet.)
- S:T4 Wewe Waria shinda ni miraa au ni choo? (You Waria (Waria is a word that is used to refer to person of Somali origin) is the miraa the problem or the toilet?)
- B: T5 Miraa mbaya hii. (This miraa is bad.)
- S: T6 Mkundu wewe usinisumbue (You anus don't disturb me.)
- B: T7 Miraa hii ndio pesa ngapi? (How much is this miraa going at?)
- S:T8 Elfu moja mia tano. (One thousand and five hundred.)
- B: T10 Kumaamako. (Insult referring to ones mother's reproductive organ.)
- S: T11 Nunua wewe Waria uende niendelea na kazi ya duka langu. (You Waria buy miraa and leave me I continue with my shop business.)
- B: T12 Hiyo pesa aistahili hiyo miraa. (That miraa is not supposed to be bought with that amount of money)
- S: T13 Mwisho ni elfu moja mia nne. (One thousand and four hundred is the final price.)
- B: T14 Hapana. (No.)
- S: T15 Fanya hivi, bei ya mwisho ni elfu moja mia tatu. (Do this, the final price is one thousand and three hundred.)
- B:T16 Wewe kamukora leta miraa.(You thug bring miraa.)
- S:17 Mambo ya kazi Waria.(This is the nature of business Waria.)

It is evident that the traders in this transaction were abusive. Consider T2, 6, 10 and 16. The traders take the insults lightly and their negotiation bears fruit. It is also clear even from the other examples provided that miraa traders exhibit some degree of uniqueness on account that it contradicts our perception that customers should be treated nicely so as to transact meaningfully. However, these findings can be supported by Lakoff's (1973) conversation maxim view of politeness that suggests that business negotiations may exhibit particular idiosyncratic discourse features.

1.8.2 Accusations

Miraa traders have a tendency of threatening the face of one another through accusations. They accuse one another of doing something unpleasant to them. The following example can clearly justify the above assertion.

Example 4

- B:T 1 Jukia mbia unenkere miraa iu yonthe bwana. (Take the money and give me all that miraa.)
- S: T2 I maana yana ngucokia (I am giving you four hundred shillings as the balance.)
- S: T3 Reka umpilima rii ntina mbia utinguraira. (Stop nagging me. You do not buy from me when I don't have money.)

Here, the seller is accusing the buyer of nagging him so much despite the fact that he does not buy from him when he is broke. This means that their relationship is not cordial and therefore, the seller openly tells the buyer that he does not buy from him all the time hence threatening his face. Below is another example that can further demonstrate the usage of accusation in miraa discourse.

Example 5

B: T1 Wewe, iyu njira iji bwana. (You, come this way
bwana.)

S: T2 Ari kampire miraa yonthe. (No, let me get all the
miraa.)

B: T3 Mwenda, wewe kwenda huko, murongo we Mwenda ita
buru utindetere miraa nii? (Mwenda, you are liar, go away
completely. Why didn't you bring miraa to me?)

Here, the buyer is accusing the seller (Mwenda) of being a liar because he failed to bring him miraa as he had promised.

Below is another example,

Example 6

S: Ukauranira na Richard; Naurire kiri William. (Don't negotiate with Richard, he has
already bought from William.)

B: Mutugi yukia miraa yetu twite rekana na kiaa kii niuntu ni murongo na muntu
wa nthuu.(Mutugi take our miraa we leave this fool. He is a liar and a mad man.)

Here, the seller accuses the buyer for selling to another person. On the other hand, the buyer dismisses the buyer by accusing of being a fool, a liar and a mad man.

It is clear from the examples given above that accusations are rampant in miraa business discourse and are meant to instill guilty in ones conscience so as to comply to the will of the other.

1.8.3 Order

One of the striking things about miraa traders is the fact that they are very rude and any time they want something from one another, they tend to demand for it instead of requesting for it. They rarely use modal auxiliary verbs that are used as markers of politeness or other expressions that denote or indicate politeness. They mostly use imperative sentences. Although it may not be their intention, their language mostly appear like orders or commands. For instance, a negotiation is unlikely to be initiated by an expression like “ Excuse me, would you like to sell that miraa to me”.

The example below can explicitly validate the above claim.

Example 7

B:T1 Jukia mbia unenkere miraa iu yonthe, bwana.(Take the money
and give me all that miraa sir.)

S:T2 Imaana yana ngucokia (I am giving a balance of four hundred
shillings.)

Here, the buyer and the seller do not mind ordering one another. They are making a demand of what they want from one another. The buyer tells the seller to take money while the seller suggests to him that he would be giving a balance of only four hundred shillings. In this case, they are threatening the face of one another by demanding what they want from one another. Below is another example.

Example 8

B: Reka kuringa ituma bwana wee. (You stop making noise sir.)

S: Imana yana ngacokia (I am giving a balance of four hundred shillings.)

The buyer orders the seller to stop making noise. On the other hand, the seller, instead of committing himself to the will of the buyer, he demands to remain with the other money belonging to the seller and give a balance of four hundred shillings.

Just like insults, commands and orders were frequently used by miraa traders in their discourse. Their rudeness is not only expressed by the orders they give but also through other paralinguistic features like high intonation that was observed by the researchers. This constitutes another idiosyncratic feature that depicts a certain degree of uniqueness since orders are not supposed to be inherent in any form of interaction whose sole aim is to make profit.

1.8.4 Reminders

Reminder is another FTA that was noted in miraa traders' negotiation. In an endeavor to buy at a reduced price, the buyers, sometimes, found themselves reminding the sellers on the good things they (buyers) have done to the sellers. For example, reminding them on their reliability as customers. Similarly, the sellers would remind the buyers of the favour they gave them in order for them to continue buying from them.

The above Face threatening Act can be exemplified by the following example.

Example 9

S: Waria siku hizi wewe umekuwa ngamu sana. (Waria, nowadays you have turned to be a miser.)

B: Hii inatosha kwako; mimi ni kastoma wako wa kila siku. (That is enough, for you; I am your daily customer.)

Here, the buyer reminds the seller that he is a daily customer and he should therefore sell to him fairly.

The following is another example.

Example 10

B:T1 Ntiira miraa iu yonthe. Ngakunenkera ngiri inya ii ukwenda endu ti thaa ii (Leave all that miraa with me. I will give you the four thousand that you want but not now.)

S:T2 Ntikwenda marandu mujinga wee. (I don't want debts you fool.)

B:T3 Endu ndii kastoma oku bwana. (But I am your customer bwana.)

S: T4 Katuniyie kilo ii lakini mbia ikaria muno. (Lets reduce the number of kilograms but you should not delay with the money.)

Here, the buyer reminds the seller that he has been his customer. He is able to convince the seller to sell to him in credit.

Below is yet another example.

Example 11

S:T1 Imana yana ngucokia wee bwana wina iyana kunenkere yatano (I am giving a balance of four hundred shillings. Do you have one hundred I give you a five hundred shillings note.)

B:T2 Sawasawa. (It is okay.)

S:T3 Ntiutumaira miraa mwaka ikeja kwaku, tibwo rii bwana. Na timwijaa kana tibwo rii Murithi? (I do send miraa up to you place sir and I do not cheat you or isn't true Murithi?)

Here, the seller is reminding the buyer that he has been doing good things for him; he has been sending miraa up to his place and he has never stolen/ cheated him in anyway. This kind of a reminder was geared towards creating a good rapport so as to reach a certain agreement with respect to the price. Reminders were used by traders though not frequently. Their significance was to persuade either the buyers or the sellers to submit to the wishes of the other and reach a compromise price.

1.8.5 Dismissals

On several occasions, traders found themselves dismissing one another as a result of their failure to settle on the price or on account of the way they relate with one another. This constitutes another FTA that the researchers were interested in. The following is an example

Example 12.

B:T1 Itundu biu korere nabio, mbenderia bio. (You had those bunches of miraa even at night. Sell them to me.)

S: T2 Ndienda kwenderia Njonjo we. Natia riri Njonjo? (I want to sell them to Njonjo. Hi Njonjo)

B: T3 Korere kuo kana niatia ukwonekana thaa ii. (Have you slept here or how comes you are around at this time.)

In the above example, the seller dismisses the buyer who is interested in buying from him. In T2, the seller dismisses the buyer by turning down the offer of the buyer to buy from him; he wants to sell to another buyer of his choice (Njonjo).

Below is another example that can elucidate the existence of dismissals in miraa business discourse.

Example 13

B: T1 Mukuru itu nawe iju. (Man, please come.)

S: T2 Wacha kunisumbua wewe. (You stop disturbing me.)

B: T3 Ngakwongela mbia itu bwana. (I will add you some money sir.)

S: T4 Ntikwenda Mantu yaku rete mbeca turikanie bwana (I don't want your nonsense; let me have the money we seal this deal.)

B: T5 Yukia ngiri ithathatu. (Take six thousand.)

In T2 and T4, the seller is dismissing the buyer due to their failure to agree on the price. As seen from the two examples above, miraa traders, owing to their arrogance, find themselves dismissing others hence threatening their faces. One plausible reason for this is the fact that by their nature, these traders carry out their business in hurry and by dismissing one another, it means they are unlikely to spend a lot of time before they are done with a transaction.

1.8.6 Request

This is yet another Face Threatening Act that was found in the conversations between miraa traders. However, it was the least occurring Face Threatening Act. The following is an example that can be used for exemplification.

Example 14

B: T1 Yukia ngiri ithanthatu. (Take six thousand.)

S: T2 Ongela ngiri imwe. (Add one thousand shillings.)

B: T3 Mukuru nawe yukia iu. (Please man, take that one.)

S: T4 Bwana, uga mauri wongele no yatano. (Sir, suggest another price but add at least five hundred shillings.)

B: T5 Sawa ni bwana rete miraa. (It's okay bwana, let me have the miraa.)

In the above example, request has been used in T3 whereby the buyer is requesting the seller to accept the price he is offering. 'Please' which is a politeness marker has been used to depict it.

The following is another example.

Example 16

B: T1 Ari bwana, ngiri iyiri na maana ya tano. (No sir, let me buy at two thousand five hundred shillings.)

S: T2 Yukia na ngiri inya na mana yatano. (Take it at four thousand five hundred.)

B: T3 Itibua bwana itu. (No bwana, it's not possible please.)

Kiri ngiri iyiri na mana ya tano kwongela maana yatano. (I add you five hundred on top of two thousand and five hundred.)

S: T4 Ari itu niirie. (No please, let it stay.)

B: T5 Sawa ni niirie. (It is okay, let it stay.)

In this particular example, request has been depicted in T3 and T4 using 'please' which is a politeness marker. As far as use of request is concerned, it is imperative to note that they are rarely used since miraa traders' discourse is awash with insults and orders. Politeness markers are only a preserve of the few. Apparently, miraa traders make use of Face Threatening Acts as discussed above. However, it is imperative to note that they occur in their discourse with varying frequencies as demonstrated in the table below.

FTAs Frequency Table.

FTA	Frequency	%
Insult	26	46
Order	11	19
Dismissal	7	12
Reminder	5	9
Request	3	5
Accusation	5	9
Total	57	100

From the above data, it is evident that miraa traders engage in conversations that are awash with FTAs. Both positive and negative FTAs were found in their conversations although in varying frequencies. It was found out that the use of abusive language or insults was on the lead with 46% followed by order at 19% while dismissals followed at 12%. Reminders and accusations tied at 9%. The least occurring FTA was that of request at 5%. It can therefore be deduced that miraa traders are abusive in that they use insults more frequently than any other FTA. It is also clear that they are rude in the sense that they use imperative kind of sentences which happen to be mostly orders and demands and on few instances they use requests.

The findings reveal that these traders exhibit unique salient features in that miraa traders employ insults and orders which are FTAs in many instances thus contradicting Davidson (1993) who discusses tour guiding skills in three areas: customer relations, information and foreign language skills. He describes customer relation skills as the ability to make a visitor feel welcomed properly looked after and confident that he is receiving the standard of service he expects. However, the same findings coincide with Lakoff's (1973) conversation maxim view of politeness that suggests that business negotiations may exhibit particular idiosyncratic discourse features. The current study that also took place in a business context and aimed at establishing whether such idiosyncratic discourse features in relation to communication strategies were evident in the negotiations between miraa traders, established that miraa traders exhibit such idiosyncratic features such as use of offensive language, being rude to one another, and use of very high intonation in their speech.

1.9 Conclusion

It can be deduced from the above findings that miraa business discourse exhibit unique salient features such as the usage of insults and order. This is because of the fact that the usage of such FTAs run contrary to our expectations particularly in the business world.

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