Research on Language Characteristics of Business Letter Writing

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Abstract

Business English letter writing is an important language skill especially for students majoring in English and business English. A large number of scholars both at home and abroad have already started researching on business letter writing, and the fields involved are quite extensive. However, the analysis of the language features of business English letter writing still has yet to fully tapped, which has a great value and space to explore. Especially in China which is increasingly open to the outside world with a booming economy, such a study will significantly promote the multilateral economic intercourse.

This study would systematically summarize the relevant language features of business letter writing, supplemented by a number of examples of demonstration, to deepen the reader's understanding of business letter writing. In addition, the results of this study will provide some inspirations and suggestions for the instruction of business letter writing.

Key words: Business letters writing; language characteristics; writing strategies; polite principles

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The significance of Business English Letters Writing in Learning

As global economic integration increases, all countries have enforced communication and trade in commerce. As an information carrier, China plays an ever increasingly important role in international communication, where the application of business English has been widely penetrated into every field of the daily life and work, in particular after China's inclusion to the World Trade Organization.

With the establishment of business relations abroad, business English letter naturally acts as a crucial tool for written exchanges in international trade, which not only fulfills business contacts such as inquiry and offer, order and payment, package and shipping, but also helps people to establish a better cooperative image in public.

Just as Jia Yongqing, a professor of Linyi Normal College, said: "The application of English business letters is a model of applied language and has become an indispensable linguistic communicative tool in the world's economic activities. It features in notification the other party of certain matters and requirements, and the other party acts accordingly the provisions. It concludes that foreign trade English controls international exchanges, and in turn international exchanges would fail to run without the help of foreign trade English." (Jia Yongqing, 2006).

1.2 The Current Situation of Business English Letter Writing Classroom Instruction in China's Universities

In China, textbooks would be seen as dominant resources to achieve teaching goals and objectives based on learners' requirements. At present, the main domestic business English letter writing textbooks publishers comprise 6 primary publishing agencies: Foreign Trade and Economic Publishing House, Higher Education Press, Tsinghua University Press, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing University Press and Zhejiang University Press.

As a new branch of science, Business English actually has a comparatively short development history in China.

The first textbook of business English letter writing was published by the Commercial Press in 1908. This book is divided into two parts, and the second part involves the writing of business letters and the content of the letter.

It was not until the 1950s that our country appeared in the formal publication of specialized business English letter writing materials. Subsequently, the development of business English letter writing textbooks in China has gone through three stages, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the 1980s to the 1990s, and the 2000s to thereafter.

In the existing business English letter writing textbooks surveyed, the materials covered are as follows: introduction to business letters, business process letters, office letters, job letters, business reports, tenders, tabulation and questionnaires, advertising rhetoric writing, text analysis, ethics, rhetoric writing, paper writing and so on. 27% of the business English letter writing textbooks completely follow the traditional mode, whose content and form of textbooks are obsolete while the phenomenon of repeating is also serious.

The real materials are like a channel of transportation that facilitates learners to easily perform their tasks. At present, however, the domestic textbook materials of business English are mainly collected in the current market at home and abroad by only summing up front-line work experience, and some are even compiled on the basis of the data collected from certain teaching plans of foreign authors, or retrieved on the internet. Some investigation found that 93.5% of the editors have no real business context work experience, then no wonder a big gap exists between the application of the textbook contents and the real context of business activities.

1.3 The Major Problems of Business English Letter Writing Among Students

Business English majors have been required to have a good command of a wide range of business knowledge, which poses a heavy challenge on business English learners. In particular, writing business English letters are often regarded as one of the poorest abilities among students, since it has not only been a bit laborious for students to take the grammatical knowledge of writing texts into consideration, which may ascribes to insufficient-content textbooks of three-dimensional construction with a monotonous and outdated the layout design.

In addition, a large number of business terminologies, writing skills, business communication strategies and business English letter writing structure and style are beyond students' easy comprehension, some even to abstract extend, causing an uphill challenge to business English letter writing acquirement as well as instruction.

1.4 Purposes of This Study

Owing to the significant role that business English letters writing plays in foreign language acquisition and intercourse, the practical value of Business English Correspondences, the comparatively inadequate empirical researches on learners' use business English correspondences, it is essential to further study the characteristics of business letters writing by English foreign language learners.

Based on certain undergraduate teaching materials of corresponding business correspondence writing and examples of business correspondence in real life, this study aims at exploring and analyzing the practical business letters used by English majors on business English majors' writing strategies (including cognitive strategies and meta-cognition strategies), and explores the principles of business letters to follow, in order to improve the current teaching mode and update the structure of business letter writing, so as to strengthen the use of business English letter writing strategies.

Besides, the author hopes that the findings of the study will benefit both English learners and teachers. For English learners, if they realize that their Business English Correspondences proficiency has a close relationship with their mastery of its language characteristics while learning, they might be able to pay more attention to them and bring their roles into a full play. For English teachers, business English teachers in particular, the author hopes that this study may provide them with an additional and systematic characteristics of business English letters and then facilitate their imparting of business English letter writing.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

2.1 EFL Writing Strategies

Strategy is more a psychological communication method for learners to learn and handle language. Learning strategies comprise direct strategies and indirect ones (Oxford, 1990, quoted from Nunan, 2001: 172). Direct strategies include memorization, analysis, rationale, speculation; indirect strategies include assessment and cooperation with others. Ellis (2000) defines the learner strategy as a special method of foreign language learners. He divided learning strategies into three categories: cognitive strategies, meta-cognition strategies and social (emotional) strategies. Cognitive strategies are of analysis, integration and transformation of learning content. meta-cognition strategies consist of planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process. Social (emotional) strategy is a particular way that various learners adopt to communicate with other learners.

2.1.1 Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategy covers the analysis, integration and transformation of learning content (Ellis, 2000: 77). Nunan (2001: 183) classified cognitive strategies into classification, prediction, induction, conceptual mapping, inference an discrimination. In addition, cognitive strategies help learners to deal with information and materials in different ways. Cognitive strategies have repetition (imitation), inference and etc. .

2.1.2 Meta-Cognition Strategy

The term "meta-cognition" was put forward by American cognitive psychologist Flavell in 1976. He contends that meta-cognition is knowledge and understanding of your own thinking process. He distributes meta-cognition knowledge into three categories: personal knowledge, task knowledge and tactical knowledge. Personal knowledge, is the inherent knowledge of the participant in cognitive activities, about motivation, self-concept and writing problems; task knowledge, is the imperative knowledge to be engaged in a task and to fulfill it; tactical knowledge, is the useful information to achieve some goals (Flavell, 1979, quoted from Xu Jinfen, Tang Fang, 2007).

Generally, Chinese' scholars allot meta-cognition strategies of writing into four categories: planning strategy, focusing strategy, monitoring strategy and assessing strategy. Conclusions are varied from a researcher to another. Mei Ting and Pan Buhan (2010) have discovered that focusing strategy and monitoring strategy mostly influence writing quality, while Lu Wenjun's (2006) research demonstrates that planning strategy and focusing strategy are closely relevant to the quality of writing. However, Ji Shourong (2006) claims that planning strategy, focusing strategy and assessing strategy have a larger impact on writing process. To conclude, which metacognitve strategy is more effective remains to be discussed and investigated.

Besides, some researchers also point out there are four categories of meta-cognition strategies of writing: self-planning, self-monitoring, self-assessing, and self-regulating. They drew a conclusion that junior and senior students of English major employ self-monitoring, self-assessing, and self-regulating with more frequencies. As for the issue that whether meta-cognition strategies are relevant to the quality of writing, they still have a disagreement with others.

2.2 Business English Letter Writing Language Features

2.2.1 Grammatical Metaphor

Halliday first introduced the concept of "grammatical metaphor" in the Introduction to Functional Grammar published in 1985.

He pointed out that "the phenomenon of metaphor is not limited to the vocabulary level, but often occurs on the grammatical level."

As Halliday has supposed, "Metaphor is a kind of grammatical metaphor", he believes that grammatical metaphor is no more than a variant of the meaning of grammatical expression coupled with mutual transformations among the grammatical domains, resulting conceptual grammatical metaphors and interpersonal grammatical from metaphors grammatical metaphors. He also suggests that "the phenomenon of grammatical metaphor exists in all adult languages."

Many scholars both at home and abroad apply grammatical metaphors to various textual analyses, achieving fruitful academic results in this realm.

2.2.2 Vague Language

One of the basic attributes of natural language is fuzziness, the concrete manifestation of which is the existence of a large number of vague language in communication. The research of vague language is in the ascendant, referring to profuse fields. For example, Wu Tieping systematically studied the fuzziness of the language, the interrelationship between fuzziness and accuracy, and the relation between vague language and lexicology, lexicography and rhetoric in his book-*Vague Linguistics*(1999); Zhang Jiao further explored the quantification of vague language in his book-*The characteristics of Vague Semantics*(1998). Pang Jianrong (2007) analyzed the vague rhetoric in political texts from the perspective of pragmatics, combining pragmatics, rhetoric and vague language researches, which made a new attempt to study the practical application of vague language. In recent years, the pragmatic research on vague language has mainly focused on the study of linguistic hedges. Chen Zhian (1995) used the principle of cooperation and politeness to analyze the communicative function of the hedges. Gao Xiaofang (2002) discussed the pragmatic meaning and its pragmatic characteristics of hedges from the view of violating the principle of cooperation in his paper, holding that hedges are closely related to the principle of cooperation and are able to reflect the speaker's attitude and topic content. Then he explained that hedges are also a verbal means and communicative strategy. Yang Yujun (2002) analyzed the hedges in verbal communication and pointed out the reasons for using hedges and their role in verbal communication. In addition, Zhao Yingling (1999), discussed the pragmatic functions of hedges in scientific and technical style. Huang Xiaoping(2002) discussed pragmatic problems of hedges in academic papers. It can be seen from these mentioned above that the academic research on hedges of vague language is more and more inclined to apply the language in verbal communication.

2.3 Business English Letter Writing Principles

2.3.1 Cooperation Principle

P. Grice, an American philosopher of language, proposed the Cooperative Principle (CP) in speech communication, which is a major breakthrough in the field of pragmatics research. Grice subdivided the principle of cooperation with four criteria, namely quantitative criteria, qualified criteria, associative criteria and mode criteria.

2.3.2 Politeness Principle

The principle of politeness issued by British linguist Geoffrey Leech, which reflects public assumptions and explanations of verbal communication behaviors and guides on successful communications abiding by six corresponding guidelines.

As a written communication, business letter translation also follows the principle of politeness in this particular context. The successful application of the politeness principle in translating can play a role of harmonizing interpersonal relationships, alleviating conflicts and facilitating communication.

2.3.3 Peter Newmark's "Communicative Translation" and "Semantic Translation"

British translator Peter Newmark divided the text into three types complying with relative functions of textual language: expressive functional texts, informative functional texts and responsive functional texts. With respect to these three types of texts, he came up with two basic strategies: communicative translation and semantic translation.

The strategy for communicative translation is relative, while the one for semantic translation is arbitrary. The former takes an advantage in natural translation, free translation and authentic translation. First, communicative translation (or communicative approach) refers to any translation method or approach that translates as "the communicative process that takes place in a social context" (Hatim & Mason 1990, p.3).

The latter pays attention to the original form and the original intention of the original author instead of the target language or its expression, let alone make the translation into a target culture. Because semantic translation treats the original sentence as something sacred, it sometimes produces inconsistent, semantic ambiguities or even errors. Semantic translation is usually applied to literary, scientific literature and other discourse genres that are as important as the original language and content. However, it should be pointed out that Newmark himself also believes that semantic translation is less a perfect translation model than a "golden means" (comprehension) between compilation and progressive translation in the translation process, similar to that of communicative translation. (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p.7).

Business letters are informative functional texts and should be applied with the communicative translation method. The language of the text has not a single function, and often maintains three functions at the same time with one dominant. In order to ensure that the expected functions of business letters are maximized during the process of the English-into-Chinese translation, the English business letters should follow the stylistic conventions and the industrial norms of the target language. (Yuan, 2012)

2.4 Business English Letter Language Features

As far as the history of stylistic evolution is concerned, the language nowadays in business English letters originally was used for British overseas trade in the 19th century. It is characterized by simplicity, rigorous norms, solemnity and dignity. It endeavors to maintain "business poise" with a unique, self-contained style (Liu Miqing, 1998).

Since business English letter is a common style of business intercourse in international business activities, no wonder its wordings, syntax, expressive style, connotations and meanings are commercial, concise and accurate in nature while its expression is strong and moderate. At the same time, more often than not its composition is strictly in compliance with the "7Cs"- the writing principles: courtesy, consideration, completeness, clarity, conciseness, concreteness, correctness.

Courtesy. Written business English features polite euphemism, which is sincere but not arrogant, domineering and pushy. A polite letter is propitious to erect an image of integrity for the cooperation between the two sides, so as to avoid and break many communication disorders.

E.g: (a) We are sorry that you misunderstood us.

(b) We are sorry that we didn't make ourselves clear.

In the case above, the meaning of the two sentences is basically the same, but sentence (a) obviously has a meaning of blaming the other party, while in sentence (b) the author takes the initiative to assume the responsibility, the better expression of the two sentences is self-evident.

Consideration. To be more specific, consideration here refers to the manner that business letter adopts to take the "you-attitude" attitude, which means to consider in the other side by putting yourself in the other's shoes and taking priorities of the other party's requirements, wishes and feelings. For example:

E.g:

(a) We allow a 5% discount for cash payment.

→ You earn a 5% discount when you pay in cash.

(b) Perhaps next time we can send you what you require.

→ We regret our inability to serve you at this time.

Completeness. When writing a business letter, it is necessary to be careful to include all details and information needed, whether to answer the questions or the customer's request. Generally speaking, "5Ws" (Who, what, when, where, why) and "1h" (how) can be exerted to detect whether the letter is complete.

Clarity. The so-called "clarity" is to ensure the written meaning of the correspondence is clear and will not produce misunderstandings. There must be no ambiguity and no ambiguous wording in the letter.

E.g: As to the steamer sailing from Shanghai to Los Angeles, we have bimonthly direct services.

In this sentence, "bimonthly" has two meanings, which means "two times per months" while it can also means "one times per two months", so it is prone to make misunderstandings and therefore would be read as follows:

(a). We have two direct sailings every month from Shanghai to Los Angeles.

(b). We have a direct sailing from Shanghai to Los Angeles every two months.

Conciseness. Conciseness does not imply a contradiction of integrity, but rather requires an expression of the richest content with the least words. In writing, you should use short, direct and plain English to avoid unnecessarily repetitive, lengthy , and flowery words.

E.g: I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your kind cooperation.

→ Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Concreteness. Concreteness refers that information is detailed and clear, rich and vivid, instead of a vague, general or abstract language. Abstract and vague expressions would retard the communicative process by indirect and inaccurate expressions while specific and clear words would facilitate the quick communication between the correspondence.

E.g: We wish to confirm our telex dispatched yesterday.

→ We confirm our telex of July 2nd, 2005.

In the example displayed above, the expression "yesterday" was ambiguous and unspecific, so that the receiver could not clearly know the exact date on which the letter was issued.

Correctness. This is an even more important feature for those who write English as a foreign language, because it not only refers to the use of correct words and grammars, but also to the use of precise numbers, appropriate expressions and the right format.

For example, "The offer is open for five days inclusive of the date of dispatch." is more accurate than "The offer is open for five days".

2.4.1 The Lexical Features of Business English Letters

1) Business English letter favors formal and objective words. The international business English letter is known for its official writing style, although some idiomatic expressions in the letter have a tendency of colloquialism. Therefore, formal, basic and informal words do coexist in business English letters, which actually make formal written words to be more dominant than ordinary words through a more adoption of the formal, simple and neutral vocabularies than informal spoken words to maintain accurateness and concreteness, and to fully embody the the formal, businesslike characteristics of international business letter.

E.g: We are pleased to inform you that your order No.123 has been dispatched in accordance with your instruction.

(Here, "inform" means a notification instead of "tell", and the the colloquial word "send" is displaced by a official word "dispatch")

In fact, the basic words and colloquial terms often give way to formal written words of the same or similar meaning in English business letters, such as: "inform" or "advise" instead of "tell", "duplicate" instead of "copy", "dispatch" instead of "send", "otherwise" instead of "or", "therefore" instead of "so".

Here are more examples, such as "begin"- "commence", "make"- "manufacture, "help"- "assist", "buy"- "purchase", "expect"- "anticipate", "believe"- "trust", "tell"-"inform", "send"- "dispatch".

In addition, business English letter has more consistent prepositions without using a single simple preposition such as "in favor of", "in compliance with", "as per", "in view of". Because business English writing belongs to formal writing, more intuitive use of language makes people feel dignified and serious.

E.g:

(a) Freight payable as per charter party's plus ton on negotiable copies.

(b) This certificate of silk products is issued in compliance with the consignee's request.

2) Business English letter use words succinctly and clearly. Business English letter writing is characterized by clearness and conciseness. In the transmission of information, in addition to the use of professional terminologies to express the intention of information, the use of a variety of rhetorical devices is rather common in the English business letters.

As for modern ones, they have similar characteristics, which would also employ concise and straightforward words to make the meaning clearer and more effective. For an instance, "about","soon", "now", and "due to" are respectively more preferred than "with reference to" or "in reference to", "in the near future", "at the present time" and " because".

In general, business English letters do not emphasize rhetoric and avoid the use of too many modifiers in literary style, except of professional terms which accurately express their own intentions:

E.g:

Dear sir,

Our customers are interested in your bicycles, particularly Model No. PA-18.

Please send us a copy of your illustrated catalogue, quoting your prices FOB Shanghai if possible. Meanwhile, please indicate your usually delivery date.

Yours faithfully.

(*Foreign trade English*, Foreign Economic Press, 1998)

In addition, some propositional words and pronouns are adopted to avoid unnecessary duplication and makes the meaning more concise such as "here", "this" , "there" ,"that" ,"where" ," what", "which", "whom".

On the other part, some vague language, of course, are also necessary according to some business principles. Some specific examples in business English letters are as following in bold section:

Scientifically designed to make ironing easier, the Steam Easy SE III is not only **incredibly light**, but also **extremely versatile**.

From the sales letter, the seller used vague verb phrases: "Scientifically designed" , "incredibly light",

and " extremely versatile" to emphasize the advantages of their design science of the steam iron, which is good at convenience, lightness and

versatility.

(b) As you know, we have **a number of** industrial clients who require **urgently** of the cables that we ordered from you but you recently lost during the shipment, which is causing **a great deal of inconvenience**, and **may** leads to **a great loss of business**.

In the above example, the buyer complained to the seller that the goods they were sending were missing a batch of cables that the customer badly needed. The use of the vague quantifier "a number of"and the vague adverbs "urgently" is intended to render sellers understand the urgency of the situation, and then by using vague quantifiers and nouns "a great deal of"and "a great loss of " to emphasize the inconvenience and loss caused by sellers.

To start by stating the seller's mistake could arouse their high attention of the loss of business, then to further understand the seriousness of the incident. These vague languages could strongly express the buyer's complaint to the seller and effectively urge the other party to take remedial measures.

3) Business English letter exacts accurate and rigorous words. To transmit information, the expression of business letters must be precise without ambiguities and tendencies of mistakes. Otherwise, it will make each other misunderstand and create obstacles to future interpersonal communications, even causing economic losses and damaging the reputation.

E.g:We assembled them by the new machine.

In order to express the meaning accurately, "them" and "the machine" should be indicated clearly about their category and model.

Moreover, Arabic numerals are used in conjunction with English numerals to ensure their accuracy and avoid tampering and forgery. For example:

(a) Four Hundred Twenty Thousand Five Hundred Sixty Dollars Only(US＄420, 560)

(b) US＄ 4550, 00 (US Dollar Four Thousand Five Hundred and Fifty Only)

(c) Quantity:10000 (Ten Thousand) dozens only

(d) With fifteen(15) days after the Sixty day of March, 1999 (nineteen ninety-nine)by and between...

4) Business English letter imparts business connotation to common vocabularies. In business English correspondence there is a large number of words transformed from ordinary words with specific business implications.

E.g:We strongly demand of immediately full or partial payment with a statement when you will pay the balance.

Their prices are always quoted in dollars.

The words "balance" and "quote" in a sentence have a specific meaning in the business world.

Other common terms also include: firm offer; cover ; claim; document ; draft and so on.

5) Business English letter uses a compound word consisting of "here", "there", or "where" plus an "in", "by", "after", or other suffixes. For example:.

E.g:

(a) We **hereby** acknowledge with thanks receipt of the captioned L/C for the amount of US $2000 covering your Order NO. 15 for coffee.

(b) Further to our last discussions in Melbourne and the faxes exchanges **thereafter** on a joint venture in Australia, we are very pleased to receive your letter of December 12 with detailed proposals on the subject.

6) Business English letter frequently uses dynamic words, such as "be going to", rather than those static words.

E.g:

(a) We are glad to inform you that our customers are quite satisfied with the quality of your products.

(b) Your products are being sold well.

Here the adoption of the present continuous tense to show a good market at which the product is sold.

7) Business English letter takes the use of abbreviations. There are a large number of fixed phrases or terms in business English letters. The frequent use of a large number of specialties in terminology, jargon, foreign loanwords, acronyms and general words in business contexts at various stages of business activities is due to the fact that these terms are specific and expressive and make the actual operation of business activities more smooth and quicker. In the process of translation, readers should not read literally.

E.g:

(a) Industrial averages were up.

The average price of industrial stocks is rising.

(b) : We have covered the goods against the risk of breakage, TPND, leakage, rust, and etc.

"TPND" refers to theft, pilferage and non-delivery insurance. Common abbreviations used in business English letters are as follows:

(a) CIF: cost, insurance and freight;

(b) FOB: free from particular average;

(c) S.S: steamship ship;

(d) P.S.: post script;

(e) S / D: sight draft;

(f) D / D: demand draft;

(g) D / A: documents against acceptance

Other combinations like acronyms, conversions, and omissions are commonly used to reduce vocabularies in the information chain in business English writing. Such as:

(a) EXPEDITE-hurry up;

(b) SOONEST- as soon as possible;

(c) BECAUSE-on account of;

(d) FIRMOFFER - We make you a firm offer;

(e) SHIPMENTSENT - The shipment has already been sent

(f) WRITNGDETAILS - We shall write you the details later

B. Auxiliary verbs, department verbs, modal verbs, most of the pronouns, partial adjectives, adverbs and word forms are omitted. Such as:

(a) RECOMMENDACCEPTANCE -We recommend your acceptance

(b) GOODS QUALITY UNSATISFACTORY-The quality of the goods is unsatisfactory

Punctuation is not used directly in the information chain but often replaced by COMMA, STOP, PCT and so on.

", "- COMMA
"." - STOP
"?" - QUESTIONMARK
"& "- AND
"= "- EQUSLS
"+" - PLUS
"%" - PCT
"$ "- DLS, UDS

2.4.2 The Sentence Patterns of Business English Letters

1) Firstly, to show politeness, business English letter uses a combination of a declarative sentence and modal verbs such as "should", "would", "could" to express an euphemism. Both sides of business English letters, as trading partners, have equal statuses. Therefore, if a party wants the other to take some actions, generally such a match would be more appreciated to express their wishes rather than a merely use of imperative sentences. Whether the other party takes such an action or not, the requiring party should pay more attention to this point during the translation.

E.g.: We should be obliged if you could give us a quotation per metric ton CFR Lagos. Nigeria.

Secondly, a large number of conditional sentences, interrogative sentences subjunctive mood and the imperative sentences with word "please" would be widely appeared in business English letters to express polite requests.

We would be grateful if you would help us with your suggestion.

Could you quote us CIF5% New York, please?

We wish you would let US have your reply soon, please.

What's more, the passive voice would be used to avoid blaming the performer of the action, which is politer than the active voice. Try to compare the following sentences:

E.g.: (a) You made a very careless mistake during the course of shipment.

(b) A very careless mistake was made during the course of shipment.

Sentence (b) has a more tactful and more acceptable tone than sentence (a). In addition, affirmative sentences are more readable for readers. In business dealings, readers would like to see a objective and affirmative letter. This kind of impersonal statement will make readers treat and deal with the thing calmly and objectively. Conversely, subjective statements would easily arouse people's negative emotions.

2) Business English letter has fixed sentence expressions and a mass use formula. In order to express a specific business content, business English letter has formed a variety of fixed stylized formula in the long-term practice. This is a syntax feature of business correspondence English distinctive from other styles. Usually, such formula are seen at the beginning and end of a letter. For example:

(a) Thank for the your letter of ....;

(b) We have received your letter of ...with pleasure;

(c) It would be appreciated if...;

(d) We should be obliged if you would send us...;

(e) Catalogue and price list of ... are as following;

(f) We are looking forward to your early reply;

(g) With reference to your last inquiry, we take pleasant in making the following offer...;

(h) The new price has already reached to the bottom of price range.

(i) We do appreciate your concession and want to accept your price and please send us your price list.

(j) Enclosed... .

3) Business English letter's sentences have rigorous structures with formal and complete patterns. As a formal body of written English, business English letter often use a complex and long clauses and its semantic levels are distinct, forming a complete, accurate, and concise content. This kind of sentence expresses complex logical relations, which is not easy to produce ambiguity and misunderstanding. At the same time, it would transmit more information, promoting the international business activities to be under way within the statute of limitations.

E.g.:

(a) We have investigated the situation and found that your specifications are

exactly the same as the design of a proprietary camera battery manufactured by a large Japanese electronics company.

The sentence (a) is a combination of two single sentences in the next sentence, the clause contains an object clause and a comparative adverbial clause, in which the past participle "manufactured" as an attributive modification of "battery".

(b) Transshipment is all owed on condition that the entire voyage be covered by through B/L.

(c) Should the negotiating bank not be advised of stopping renewal within 15 days after each negotiation, the unused balance of this credit shall be increased to the original amount.

From the examples (b) and (c), it is easy to find that the associated word of conditional clauses sometimes are omitted, but the writing style of the whole sentence is more concise and rigorous.

Besides, adverbial clauses are massively and frequently applied in business English letters. When declaring a decision or duty, a document must accurately indicate at which circumstances, when, where, or how to accept the business. This requires the use of adverbial clauses of time, conditions, forms and so on.

In addition, vague language can also be found by such syntactic approaches, mainly in the passive voice, through using "it" and other inanimate nouns as a subject, as well as a mass use of "shield" words, and adverbial clauses with constantly-changed sentence structures such as (d) and (e):

(d) The provisions of this contract shall continue to be applied after it has exported in the territories of the contracting parties.

(e) Should the seller fail to effect shipment by the end of this year, the buyer has the right to cancel the contract.

(f) Having checked with our suppliers, it appears that a mistake has been made on this occasion, and that you have been sent as invoice with incorrect details.

In the case (f), due to a failure of the seller's sending correct invoices to the buyer, when replying to other complaint, if admitting the mistake directly, the seller will inevitably injure the company's positive faces and image. So, it is smart to use a vague syntactic structure "it appears..." to form subject, which can effectively diminish the responsibilities assumed.

2.4.3 The Textual Features of Business English Letters

Discourse refers to a series of consecutive composition of paragraphs and sentences as a whole, which can be conversations, debates, notes, letters, research reports, and so on. Due to different communicative functions of the text, the subjects, contents, structures of the text vary from each others. Business English letter is characterized by grammatical, semantic coherence and logical logic in general discourse.

First of all, business English letter is usually short and always keeps its length in a page. Business English correspondence is rather dapper and straightforward, whose simplicity and timeliness is well known. It often includes no more than three to four paragraphs with around 100 words.

Second, business English letter's format is relatively fixed, commonly used block style, indented style, and modified style. Generally it consists of the following parts: letterhead, date, salutation, body, closing, and signature.

The main body of business English letter has formed a fixed mode, which comprises three parts. Part I, the first paragraph has formed a number of formula to point out the purpose or the intention of the letter. Part I, the second paragraph specifically points out the conditions or replies the questions raised by the other party during the last communication, and then explains according reasons if needed. Part II, the last paragraph is often used to ask questions or requests, and to express the writer's expectation to the early reply.

2.5 Results and Analysis

Based on the research on the language of business English letters, the author of these papers concentrates on the characteristics of its compositions from lexical features, sentence patterns and the textual features under the guidance of accordingly economic principles. The major findings this paper arrives at are as follows:

(1) The lexical items in business correspondence mainly are formal and solemn words with clearness and conciseness, dynamic and common words with rigorous structures and business connotation, as well as adverbial compound words with a combination of Arabic numerals and English numerals. It also prefers consistent prepositions single to simple preposition and concrete words to abstract words. In addition, many language features embody the politeness of the writer; for example, using the positive words, the affirmative sentences, you-attitude and the active voice.

(2) The sentence patterns of business English letters has fixed sentence expressions and a mass use formula with rigorous structures, euphemism,and adverbial clauses, which has a full play of principles of completeness, courtesy, consideration and conciseness.

(3) The textual features of business English letters is rather distinct by its shortness and fixed model, facilitating the business intercourse to the maximum effective and convenient extend.

3. IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of the findings of this investigation indicates that a good command of the features of each part of the business English letters is conductive to its writing process. Thus strategy training is an integral part of writing instruction. As there are differences among students in their cognitive styles and learning preferences, teachers need to help students find proper and efficient strategies to meet their respective needs.

During the pre-writing phase, some activities can help learners build a meta-cognition awareness, which is important for students to make their writing to be purposeful and considerate and to have a whole concept of the writing genre, activating their background knowledge and memories of personal experiences to seek an appropriate pointcut to compose the article, and developing a sense of audience to check its property and applicability of each part of the letter. According the

target and principles of business English letter mentioned above, cooperation principle, politeness principle, and Peter Newmark's principles -"communicative translation" and "semantic translation"- are beneficial to the process of writing. If necessary, role playing is also a good idea to start before the writing.

What's more, meta-cognition strategy training on what and how to revise during the post-writing stage is another challenge, which requires instructors to pay much attentions. Revising and discussing in groups are regarded as effective methods, by which students can often learn from others' mistakes and offer their own suggestions to others.

Besides, revising in groups cultivates a sense of cooperation among students, which may infuse more vitality to the writing instruction. Also, teachers are supposed to impart students how and what to revise step by step. During the instruction of revising, teachers should not only focus on mistakes of grammatical and spelling, but also encourage students to analysize their choices of words, cohesion and coherence of statements, and the whole structure of business English letter.

Considering the fact that the study of business English letters writing can facilitate writing process, instructors also need attach more importance to the characters of business English letters. In the first place, teachers should view business English letter as a self-planned, self-monitored, self-assessed, and self-regulated process. What's more, teachers need to keep providing their assistance and guidance to students and help them find out and practice effective strategies during the learning. Lastly, teachers can motivate students to find problems during the writing by themselves, evaluate their own writing and grasp every possible opportunity to improve their writing capabilities.

CONCLUSION

With the acceleration of the globalization process, business English has been glowingly important for all walk of life as time goes by. As a significant means of communication during international business activities, business English letter is originally designed to make international business activities to go smoothly. Business English letter is a variant of English writing in the business letters with unique stylistic features, so the in-depth study of its style characteristics will help students to better understand and master the writing features of business English letters as well as to improve business communicative ability.

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