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TEACHING SALES INVITATIONS—A NEW PROFESSIONAL GENRE IN BUSINESS CHINESE⁶⁸

This paper sets out to explore how to teach Chinese business writing, in particular sales invitations—a new genre relating to sales promotions. Here sales invitations refer to letters to invite the reader to sales exhibitions and a detailed introduction will be given later in this paper. The study of professional genre writing has been an area of research interest and relevant research can be found in Swales (1990) who analyses English academic genres and Bhatia (1993) who examines English business genres. However teaching professional genre is still a relatively new area, although some study has been done in (Freadman, 1999), and a systematic study along this line still needs to be promoted. Zhu (In Press) made an attempt to explore cross-cultural business language teaching using a genre-based approach. The advantage of using this approach lies in its strength in considering business language teaching as a knowledge building process. This paper will further promote business language teaching by examining the teaching of Chinese sales invitations.

Specifically, this paper attempts to accomplish the following tasks. Firstly, the theoretical framework will be introduced and a three-stage teaching model will be illustrated. They include teaching background information, teaching persuasive orientations, and teaching persuasive strategies. Secondly, a brief introduction will be given to invitation letters to indicate the general features of this genre. Finally, a corpus of twenty authentic letters collected from mainland China is used as an example to illustrate the specific teaching process.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Genre Study and the Teaching of Business Writing

This paper uses an integrated approach based on genre analysis (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993) which indicates a further exploration in teaching business writing. As mentioned earlier, an earlier attempt was made by Zhu (In Press) using a genre approach. Specifically, this model reflects Swales' (1990) top-down process of genre study, which is composed of communicative purposes and moves. The purposes can be realised in lower layers of a text, such as moves and steps.

Secondly this integration offers a close link between genre study and knowledge building in business language teaching. The teaching and learning of a text does not only require linguistic knowledge or formal schema, but also requires world knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold, Cook, 1994; 1983). Based on this model, teaching of business writing can be seen as a knowledge building process. Particularly teaching sales invitations involves three stages:

1. Teaching background information
2. Teaching Chinese persuasive orientations
3. Teaching persuasive strategies

The first stage is a preliminary stage providing relevant information for the forthcoming introduction of persuasive orientation. The most important process among the four is Stage 2: teaching as this stage may offer a focal perspective to the other levels of the text. However, these stages are closely interrelated. In particular, the teaching of persuasive orientations cannot be separated from an appropriate understanding of the background information. In addition, the formal structures of the text are specific realization of persuasive orientations.

Chinese Persuasive Orientations: Qing and Li

Aristotle points out three means of influencing belief and action: *ethos* (character and standards), *logos* (reason and evidence) and *pathos* (emotion). According to him, these three elements are inseparable in

persuasion, although they may not enjoy an identical level of priority. The preference for particular elements within a certain culture has drawn researchers' attention. For example, Campbell (1998) found that English business writing tends to exhibit a logical appeal while Chinese stresses emotional and logical appeals at the same time.

Chinese scholars tend to address “*ethos*”, “*logos*” and “*pathos*” at the same time, in particular the “*logos*” and “*pathos*”. According to Chen Wangdao (1947) one of the important criteria of good writing is to indicate both “*qing*” (emotional approach) and “*li*” (logical approach). These principles remain to be a well-accepted principle in Chinese writing theories such as reiterated in Li (1996). The explicitly preferred “*qing*” can be seen as part of the traditional values relating to harmony and relationship building as noted by Hofstede and Bond (1988). This issue is further explored by Campbell (1998), who found that this principle could even be applied to Chinese scientific writing. These categorisations may help students understand the persuasive orientations and purposes in sales invitations.

Culture-Specific Consideration of Politeness Behaviour

Invitation is a directive and politeness behaviour will be examined in the light of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Austin's (1962) major contribution lies in his conceptualisation of the speech acts as comprising of locution and illocution. What is of vital importance is the illocutionary force of an utterance which is the performing of a speech act. Politeness behaviour can thus be related to using appropriate language forms to achieve higher illocutionary force.

Politeness behaviour can also be further explained in the light of Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving theory. Many actions we do with words are potential face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The addresser is thus often confronted with a negative face and has to address it by applying Leech's (1983) politeness principles, in which maximising the addressee's benefits is the dominant strategy to gain politeness.

Chinese culture-specific politeness behavior relating to face-keeping is to show respect by using polite linguistic forms such as honorifics in sales invitations. This point is often stressed in business writing textbooks (Zhuge and Chen, 1994). The writer may try to raise the reader's status by using an appropriate linguistic device, and this kind of

politeness behaviour can be seen as closely related to the use of *pathos* and *ethos* in persuasion.

TEACHING BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Teaching background information, which is an initial stage to help build students' basic knowledge structures for sales invitations, is also the prerequisite to the other teaching stages. The teaching focus can be placed on an introduction to Chinese invitations and to sales invitations as a new genre in a specific sociocultural context.

Introducing Chinese Invitations

First of all, a general introduction to Chinese invitations is necessary in class. The only available literature on this is Chinese textbooks. Invitations are often described as a type of 'liyi xin' (letters of etiquette), or 'shejiao xin' (letters of social contact). The meaning of 'shejiao' (social contact) is readily apparent, however, 'liyi xin' needs some explanation. According to Zhuge and Chen (1994: 361), 'liyi' means etiquette and ceremonies. Accordingly, Chinese sales invitations are treated as a form of etiquette for building relationships. This can be related to the influence of Confucian concepts in which social etiquette is often emphasised. As Zhuge and Chen (1994) explain that 'liyi xin' include invitations, welcome speeches, farewell speeches, etc. and relationship building is the most important purpose in these types of letters. Note the strong emphasis on the emotional approach. Since sales invitations are a sub-division of invitations they are seen as having similar relationship-building feature as well.

Introducing the Development of Sales Invitation

The year of 1978 can be referred to as a demarcation line to introduce sales invitations as a new genre. Before 1978, the business of commodity exchange was controlled by public ownership. Only sales letter variants were used to implement government wholesales policies.

The period after 1978 represents a link to the market economy. One of the most important characteristics of this period is the change in the nature of ownership, as enterprises begin to change to gradual privatisation. Product promotion is becoming vital for every enterprise and this leads to the popularity of sales invitations.

As a consequence, sales promotion becomes a strong component in sales invitations and this genre involves both invitation and promotion. For example, relationship building and sales promotions are emphasised by Chinese textbooks. For example, ‘increase friendship, and develop trade’ is often stressed and this is in alignment with the Chinese persuasive orientations.

The dual purposes of sales promotion and relationship building can be stressed in teaching as an application of *pathos* and *logos*, and can be exemplified in the following letter quoted from Zhao and Lü (1994). The translation of the letter is provided here with the original in Appendix A.

Headline An invitation to Attend an Exhibition

Salutation XXX Ministry,

Introducing exhibition	In order to promote the exchange and popularisation of the world's advanced industrial technology, the Chinese Information Technology Research Institute and the UN Industry Development Organisation have decided that “94's Beijing International Technology Trade Exhibition” is to be held in the Exhibition Hall of the Chinese Information Technology Research Institute
Inviting reader	on December 1, 1994. You (H) are specially invited to send a delegation to
Details about the exhibition	attend the exhibition. If you are planning to exhibit your products, please order exhibiting space by mail through the preparatory department, and send the exhibiting equipment to the exhibition hall by the end of October.
Promoting the exhibition	So far, we have already received dozens of applications from other countries, such as England, Thailand, America, and Canada, and dozens of companies from inside the country.
Polite closing	Awaiting respectfully your presence (H).

The preparatory department,
94's Beijing International Trade Exhibition
September 1, 1994.

The teacher can help students identify the key points, such as persuasive orientations, moves and steps, mentioned in the teaching model earlier on. The students may notice that the major purpose of this letter is to invite the readers to come to the exhibition either to buy products or sell their own. This letter has five moves as shown above. Among them two can be identified as related to the logical approach of product promotion: details about the exhibition and promoting the exhibition. The former gives details about how the readers can exhibit their own products and the latter makes an attempt to advertise the scale of the exhibition with representatives from various countries participating.

As a typical emotional approach, polite linguistic strategies are employed to achieve a higher level of respect as compared to the first period. For example, inviting is shown in the form of:

You (H) are specially invited to send a delegation to attend the exhibition.

The polite closing is expressed with high respect by using the term 'specially' plus the use of 'you' (H) which indicate a high grade in the invitation politeness continuum. The closing with the honorific for 'presence' signals the highest level of respect.

TEACHING PERSUASIVE ORIENTATIONS

Persuasive orientations can be taught by referring to the communicative purposes. Students should be encouraged to identify these purposes from the above sample letter as well as from the authentic letters.

The most obvious and major purpose of a sales invitation is to invite the reader to attend an exhibition, and to elicit the desired response, and this involves a complex communicative process. If students use the world and formal schemata adequately, they can, on close observation, ascertain the following communicative purposes from the corpus:

1. To invite the reader to attend the exhibition, and encourage further communication
2. To inform the reader about the exhibition
3. To build a host-guest relationship with the reader
4. To achieve a positive public image
5. To attract the reader's attention and interest
6. To give positive appraisals of the exhibition
7. To persuade the reader to attend the exhibition

The above seven purposes can be divided into two kinds: inviting the reader to the exhibition and advertising the exhibition. Generally speaking, the first three purposes in the above list are related to inviting, because they focus on information about the activities and inviting the reader to come to the exhibition.

The last three purposes are related partly to the marketing model of AIDA which stands for attracting the reader's attention and making the reader interested, stimulating the reader's desire to own the product and calling the reader to take action. All the three purposes can be seen as recent development of sales invitations in the economic opening-up. These purposes can also be taught as relating to the focus on the logical approach.

The fourth, achieving a positive public image, can be seen as a subordinate purpose to 'inviting the reader' and 'persuading the reader', as a good image is desirable in invitations and sales.

At the same time, sales invitations are, after all, invitations which seek to establish a guest-host relationship with the reader. This is the point the teacher may stress the use of the emotional approach.

TEACHING PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES

The logical and emotional approaches remain to be a teaching focus for the specific realisation of strategies in the lower levels of the text. The representative letter used in this section was rated by one hundred Chinese managers as the best in the corpus of twenty collected from mainland China. The translation of the letter is provided here with the original in Appendix B.

1. Banking China '93
2. China Computer Show '93

3.

4.

Invitation

5.

6. Respected reader,

7. The Chinese economy is developing rapidly. Every industry or business has to
8. promote its technology so as to increase its competitiveness. In order to meet the needs
9. of the industries and businesses concerned, Banking China '93 and China Computer
10. Show '93 are to be held in December in Beijing. We sincerely invite your (H)
11. company to participate.

12. This show is to be held on a grand scale. (Names of the participating countries
13. omitted). Internationally well known companies dealing with bank security,
14. computers, tele-communication and automation equipment will exhibit their latest
15. advanced equipment for financial, banking and other industrial and commercial
16. enterprises.

17. In addition, commercial councils from Australia, Singapore, and Colorado
18. State of the United States will also organise delegations to take part.

19. This show will exhibit all kinds of latest equipment and systems used in
20. banking and financial enterprises. (The detailed exhibits omitted).

21. Through participating in this exhibition, your (H) company can meet more than
22. seventy producers or suppliers from more than ten countries and districts, and talk
23. about co-operative plans with them. (You are) welcome to leave your on-site exhibited
24. products for sale.

25. In addition to this, many technology exchange discussions will also be held so
26. that visitors may have a further understanding of all the participants' advanced
27. products.

28. Our company sincerely invites managerial and technical representatives from
29. your (H) company to visit (H) this Exhibition. Enclosed is an invitation card. Please
30. bring this card with you and go to the International Exhibition Centre to go through
31. admission formalities.

32. If you need further materials, you can contact the Beijing agency of
33. Exhibition Services Ltd:

34. Miss XXX

35. Room XX, China Exhibition Services Building. No. XX, XXX Road,
36. XXX District, Beijing.

37. Telephone: XXX Fax: XXX

38.

39. Wish (you) good health (H)!

40.

41. XXX Exhibition Services Ltd.
42. October, 1993.

The teacher can assign students the task to identify as many moves as possible. This letter is composed of ten moves: (1) heading (line 4), (2) salutation (line 6), (3) introducing the exhibition (lines 7–10), (4) inviting the reader (lines 10–11), (5) describing the exhibition (lines 12–21), (6) offering incentives (lines 21–27), (7) inviting the reader again (lines 29–37), (8) providing registration details, (9) polite closing (line 39), and signature and date (lines 41–42). The first two and last moves can be seen as formulaic moves required by invitation writing, and the rest are content moves which constitute the major information of the letter.

The students may notice that Inviting the Reader is expressed twice. As pointed out by Zhu and Thompson (2000), repetition in Chinese invitations is sometimes necessary because it emphasizes the invitation and indicates the writer's sincerity and cordiality. This can be stressed in teaching as a culture-specific code.

Teaching the Formulaic Moves

Move 1 is just a standard heading for an invitation. Move 2, the Salutation, however, indicates a very high-level respect by addressing the reader as 'respected'. Move 10, the signature and date (lines 41–42) is a required formulaic form to complete a letter.

TEACHING THE CONTENT MOVES

Move 3, introducing the exhibition (lines: 7–10), is composed of three steps:

- Step 1 Providing background information
- Step 2 Indicating background objectives
- Step 3 Providing information about the exhibition

The first step provides background information concerning the economic context in China, which exhibits an urgent need to raise competitive ability. This step may attract the reader's attention,

The aim of the exhibition is introduced this way:

In order to meet the needs of the industries and businesses concerned, Banking China '93 and China Computer Show '93 are to be held in December in Beijing (lines 8–10).

Some linguistic introduction to relevant forms is necessary here. 'In order to' has two functions. The first is to introduce the aim of the exhibition in the subordinate clause, which is to meet the needs raised in the previous step. The second is to link this with the main clause, which provides information about the name, place and time of the exhibition. This form is also a common practice in invitation writing.

Inviting the Reader (lines 10–11 and lines 25–26), is expressed in two places. Or we may say that invitation is indicated in both Move 4 and Move 7. These moves can be taught as a specification of emotional approach, and relevant formal schemata are quite useful for the teaching of these moves. The first invitation is placed in a prominent place in the following form:

We sincerely invite your (H) company to participate (lines 10–11).

In this sentence, 'sincerely inviting' and the honorific form of 'you' are used. These forms may explicate that the writer is both sincere and respectful when inviting the reader and is also used frequently in the corpus.

The second invitation is realized in a similar way, but with more honorific lexical items:

Our company sincerely invites managerial and technical representatives from your (H) company to visit (H) this exhibition (lines 28–29).

Besides using the same form of 'sincerely inviting' as the first invitation, the writer has shown more respect by using 'lilin' (H come). The above is related to the purpose of inviting the reader as a guest. The repetition of inviting and the use of honorific lexis all contribute to this purpose and to a high level of respect in invitation.

Move 5, describing the exhibition (lines 12–21), is presented after the invitation. This move can be taught as an example of using the logical and business-oriented approach, and is composed of two steps:

- Step 1 Providing essential details of the exhibition
- Step 2 Evaluating the exhibition

The first step is realized in three paragraphs. The second and third paragraphs of the letter describe the scale of the exhibition, supported by the name of more than ten countries as participants, while the fourth introduces various products to be exhibited. For an exhibition, the scale and variety of products can be a very appealing factor for the reader.

The major section of the second paragraph is discussed as an example to indicate the main features of this step:

This show is to be held on a grand scale. (Names of the participating countries omitted). Internationally well known companies dealing with bank security, computers, telecommunication and automation equipment will exhibit their latest advanced equipment for financial, banking and other industrial and commercial enterprises (lines 12–16).

These details are introduced in a deductive manner, in which the idea develops from the general, ‘the grand scale’, to the specific including the names of the participating countries, and is used to support the idea of being on a grand scale. The second step, evaluating the exhibition, is scattered among the first step. For example, the first sentence in the above example can be seen as an evaluation because it gives an appraisal of the scale of the exhibition as being grand. Further evaluation can be seen in the above excerpt in the use of other forms of lexical forms such as ‘internationally well-known’ and ‘latest’.

Move 6, offering incentives (lines 21–27), is expressed across two paragraphs, the fifth and sixth paragraphs of the letter. This move continues with the marketing thrust by detailing other opportunities the writer promises the reader, including opportunities for sales and potential co-operation with foreign companies as indicated in the fifth paragraph (lines 21–24).

Move 8, providing registration details (lines 29–37) includes registration procedures and gives further contact information. Move 9, however, deserves more attention in teaching as it may help students build their formal and linguistic knowledge. The polite closing (line 39) is explicated in a very respectful tone in the form of ‘zhu da an’ (wish great health). ‘Zhu da an’ is only used to address someone much higher in position or age and was even used by the subjects to address the emperor in the ancient times. This form is used as a closing to indicate a very high level of respect.

In sum, this letter reflects the use of both emotional and logical approaches as illustrated through the teaching of specific strategies. First the writer indicates a polite and respectful register throughout the letter. Secondly, the promotion elements have been incorporated successfully into this letter. What is more important is that, in addition to advertising the products, the writer employs persuasive strategies and justifies the evaluation of the exhibition with detailed descriptions.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored how to teach sales invitations as a new genre, and persuasive orientations were taught as a starting point in the three-stage teaching process. The teaching focused on the use of both emotional and logical approaches employed in sales invitations, and both approaches were well exemplified in textbook examples and authentic letters as a consistent emphasis.

It has been found that the teaching process is a process of helping build students' world and formal schemata relating to the etiquette of invitation, sales promotion, and reader-writer relationships. For example, teaching the most successful letter provided students with the opportunity to explore how persuasive strategies were employed in the textual structure. The above findings may have implications for teaching professional genre in general, and this model can also be extended to teaching other genres across cultures.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B