

Analysis of Language Features in Business Correspondences

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Abstract: Along with the global economy integration, China's accession to the WTO and the rapid development of information technology, the communication between our foreign trade enterprises and foreign enterprises are extremely with bright theme, accurate expression and high quality, be worth us to discuss and study. increasing. The English business correspondences in foreign trade play a more and more important role, and was used and praised by more business people. Therefore, how to complete a business correspondence This thesis is analyzed from three aspects of the vocabulary, the structure and the characteristics in business correspondences, and compared with the ordinary letters. On the basis of finding some methods for writing good business letters and in the meanwhile tries to suggest some writing references.

Keywords: business correspondences, using of words, structures and format, stylistic features

1. Introduction

With the further opening up of China and the rapid development of foreign trade, more and more enterprises begin to deal in import and export trade business. There are a wide range of means in business communications. Besides face-to-face negotiations with clients, some written forms of communications are also needed to contact with the outside world and conclude a deal. Therefore, business correspondences play a vital role in international trade.

A business correspondence is a letter written in formal language, which is usually used when writing from one business organization to another, or for correspondence between such organizations and their customers, clients and other external parties. It is a letter that is more than a personal letter. Like letter of thanks, condolence letter and letter of apology, it owes its particular features: simple language, accurate information, polite manner and fixed structure.

Since business correspondence is regarded as an important means of communications in international trade, how to write a high-quality business correspondence? Many practitioners put forward many questions. Several business writing books have been compiled, such as "*Business English Writing*", "*Forbes Book of Great Business Letters*", and "*The McGraw-Hill Handbook of Business Letters*". They are of much help to the writing of business correspondences. These books introduce features and writing skills of all kinds of business letters. But most of the books just list a lot of letters and provide many templates. We recite blindly many templates rather than understand and use them well.

This thesis intends to explore three important aspects of business correspondences, and to find differences between business letters and personal letters. On

the basis of finding some methods for writing good business letters, some writing references are suggested in the meanwhile.

2. Using of Words in Business Correspondences

Business correspondence plays an important role in foreign trade. In English business correspondences, vocabulary is an important aspect which can influence the effect of communication. In this chapter, the using of vocabulary in business correspondences will be elaborated from four aspects.

2.1. Using of Terminology

The vocabulary of business correspondences take on a more professional aspect. In business correspondences, practitioners use a large numbers of terminologies and jargons, which are required to be used actually, professionally, and properly.

Due to the unique industry characteristics of business correspondences, its language form, vocabulary and content are related to the professional knowledge. As far as international trade, business talks, economy, finance, marketing, and insurance are concerned, each area has its own professional vocabulary. Thus a large quantity of terminologies is used from different fields. For example: in international trade, there are, "standby credit", "cost, insurance and freight", "free on board", "partial shipment", "blank endorsed", "marine bills of lading"; in insurance, "all Risks", "free from particular average", "war Risk", "with average or with particular average", "force majeure", and etc (Yin Xiaoying & Yang Runhui, 2008). To write a good business English, people should learn relevant knowledge related to business English, avoid professional vocabulary changing into normal

vocabulary. Otherwise, it may be easy to be a laughing-stock, even causing serious economic damage to enterprises.

In international business activities, the differences of language and culture are may create misunderstandings easily. While using single professional term, clear concept, it is good for describing accurately all aspects of business activities and relevant documents, letters and agreements, contracts, etc, which can effectively avoid ambiguity and omissions. So terminology is widely used in business correspondences writing.

2.2. Polysemy of Business Correspondences

Polysemy is a feature of English vocabulary; especially in business correspondences. The same word in business English has different meanings. For example, the common meaning of the word “premium” is “an extra payment added to the basic rate”. It has different meanings in the different fields of business activities. In the business contract or the insurance business, it means “an amount of money that you pay once or regularly for insurance policy”; in the financial futures industry, means “the balance of the long rate higher than the spot exchange rate”. Now let's see two sentences: “We shall be glad to establish business relations with you.” and “The relevant L/C has been established”. Here are two meanings about “establish”. It means “starting to have a relationship, especially a formal one, with another person, group and country” in first sentence and “opening or setting up certain bill” in second one.

The following words are used widespread in business correspondences, such as “average”. For example, in “If a particular cargo is partially damaged, the damage is called particular average”, and “average” means “the material and costs of ship or goods in sea transport caused by natural disaster or other accidents”. But in “It's obvious that the products are below average quality”, it means “calculated by adding several amounts together, finding a total, and dividing the total by the number of amounts”. In business correspondences, “confirm” is frequently used by businessmen. In “We'd like to inform you that our counter sample will be sent to you by EMS by the end of this week. Please confirm it as such as possible so that we can start mass production”, it means “making a position, an agreement, etc, more definite or official”, but in “Payment will be made by a 100% confirmed, irrevocable Letter of Credit, available by sight draft”, its meanings is “cash guaranteed” (Hoenbi, 2004).

Many words have the phenomenon of polysemy in business English, so we should pay special attention to this in business correspondence writing.

2.3. Conciseness and Formalness of Vocabulary

Brevity is the characteristics of business English. A.

Martinet, a French linguistics, put forward his famous *Economie des changements phonétiques* when explaining the evolution of language. His opinion is that people may try to reduce the loss of power and use familiar, energy-saving, multifunctional expressions in the process of words, according to the inertia of people. This principle is fully embodied in business English writing. Business activities are binding on a clear objective and business language shows its strong purpose. In today's society, both sides want to reduce cost and improve efficiency, with the growing trade competition. The use of modern communications tools, such as telegram, correspondence, and letters, bring pressure for concise words to save space and time. A concise letter should be written in a simple and natural way, directly to the point. Wordiness, flowery words, and the over-frequent use of conjunctions (as “and”, “but”, “however”, etc.) should be avoided.

Another feature of concise words is the wide use of abbreviations. Initials abbreviations are one of the most common methods in business correspondence writing. Usually these abbreviations are technical terminology or abbreviations of a company or an organization. For example, L/C (=letter of credit), B/L (=Bill of Lading), FOB (=Free on board), CIF (=Cost, insurance and freight), CFR (=Cost and freight), and IBM (=International Business Machines), P&G (=Procter & Gamble), HP (=Hewlett-Packard). Clipped words mean to abbreviate and intercept a part of the word, mainly the suffix, prefix of the word. For example, biz (=business), Corp (=corporation), Ad (=Advertisement), PC (=piece), NO (=Number), etc. We use the abbreviations to avoid lengthy explanation and simplify the process of transaction, and improve work efficiency, in accordance with the requirements of saving time and improving efficiency in international business. Thus it is frequently used in business correspondences and documents.

Like telex, contracts, agreements and documents, business correspondence are required to be expressed accurately and clearly. While there are specific regulations or commitments of product type and transaction in certain file or agreement, they shall be binding on both parties. Therefore we should regulate words more rigorously. Business correspondences writing belongs to the formal style, so words must be formal. The formalness of business correspondences are mainly embodied in the following three aspects: Firstly, we usually write in a casual way to our friends but a formal way to business partners. The basic vocabulary or oral English is being replaced by more formal expressions. For example, “inform” and “advise” replaces “tell”; “duplicate” replaces “copy”; “dispatch” replaces “send”; “purchase” replaces “buy”; “certify” replaces “prove”, etc. Secondly, verbs are used to replace verb phrases. For instance, “continue” replaces “keep on” “go on”; “supplement” replaces “add to”. Thirdly, the simple preposition and con-

junction are replaced by the prepositional phrase. For example, “in accordance with” replaces “according to”; “for the purpose of” replaces “for”; “in the case of” replaces “if”; “with reference to” “with regard to” replaces “about”, etc (Zhang Ganzhou, 2007). These words have the feature of being accurate in meanings and they make business correspondence writing more formal.

2.4. Special Usage of General Words

In business correspondences, it has been formed gradually in fixed pattern and the commonly used words. Some common words have been given entirely different meanings in foreign trade. For example, in the status inquiry letter, the word “confidence” means top-secret. Thus it extends to the adjective—“confidential”, it “meant to be kept secret and not told to or shared with other people”. Like other words, metric ton, long ton, carton, wooden case, container, all are the common business vocabulary and other trade terms, accepting bank, confirming bank, bill of lading, etc. we should devote our efforts to think and accumulate.

In the letter of establishing trade relationship, we often use these words—opportunity, establishment, advantage, appreciate, catalogue, materialize, etc. In the letter of enquiry and offer, use competitive, confidence, satisfactory, available, immediately, etc.

Taking the word discharge as an example, we usually regard it as noun or verb, its general meaning is unloading. According to the different occasions, the following are good examples:

1) *Routine duties of the Joint Venture Company are to be discharged by the general manager appointed by the Board of Directors.*

2) *Party A agrees that the expiration of this license shall not discharge party B from its obligation.*

3) *Mr. Smith, chartered accountant, has been appointed as liquidator to wind up the business and will discharge all the firm's liabilities and receive all payments due to it.*

4) *Party B shall check the quality of each discharge in accordance with the contract.*

There are four meanings about the word-discharge. The first meaning is doing everything that is necessary to perform and complete a particular duty, the second is exempting, the third is repaying, and the last meanings is emitting. Therefore we should take note of these words in business correspondences writing.

Actually, many common words get a specific professional connotation by many methods such as extension, conversion, words adding. Examples will make this clear: in ordinary English, the meanings of literature is a pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems. But in business correspondences, it means printed matters, including leaflets, instruction, product catalogue, price list, etc. So we can

make a sentence-In order to market our new product, we have printed fine literature. Another example: reference means the act of looking at something for information in general English but a person who guarantees or certify for somebody in business correspondences.

3. Structures and Format of Business Correspondences

3.1 Structures of Business Correspondences

The structure of a business correspondence follows a more or less set pattern determined by customs. It includes seven principal parts and seven optional parts.

Seven principal parts are made of the heading, the date, the inside name and address, the salutation, the body of the letter, the complimentary close, and the signature.

3.2 Format of business Correspondences

Generally speaking, four main patterns of layout are in current use: block style (In a Block format letter, all text is aligned to the left margin; paragraphs are not indented; parts and paragraphs are separated by double or triple spacing.) semi-block style (In a Semi-Block format letter, all text is aligned to the left margin and paragraphs are indented.) modified block style (In a Modified Block format letter, all text is aligned to the left margin, except for the author's address, date, and closing; and paragraphs are not indented. The author's address, date, and closing are usually indented three inches from the left margin, but can be set anywhere to the right of the middle of the page, as long as all three elements are indented to the same position.) modified semi-block style (In a Modified Semi-Block format letter, all text is aligned to the left margin, except for the author's address, date, and closing; and paragraphs are indented.) The practice of displaying business correspondences in one style is now quite common. It is a good habit to adopt one form of layout and show it in business letter.

But in our familiar personal letters, it usually consists of five parts, the heading, and the salutation, the body of the letter, the complimentary close and the signature. Compared to business letters, we usually don't write the inside address. We only write the date in the heading and call the counterpart on a first-name basis for the salutation.

Because of a single piece of content, less paragraphs and shorter space, and the whole simple structure, so business correspondences are easy to see. This kind of simple structure reflects its practical function that servicing for international trade, and easy to facilitate the readers.

4. Stylistic Features of Business Correspondences

4.1 Features of Business Correspondences

There are a few obvious characteristic in business correspondents:

1) *Single contents.* Their purpose is to trade in goods and content is to trade negotiations. This doesn't apply to unrelated goods trading. At the same time, it reflected one article to one thing, to put it in another way, a business correspondence only involves a deal, but for involving several trading.

2) *Concise language.* The business correspondence, on the basis of illustration, is use to introduce the business scope, offer the products and price, propose quantity and quality of goods purchasing, require payment, notify dispatch of goods and the date of arrival. All language is straightforward and clear.

3) *Coming straight to the point.* In the beginning of the business correspondence, we put forward directly the theme so that it dose not fall convention. At the end of the business correspondence, we express our hope.

4.2 The Seven Cs of Business Correspondence Writing

To write an effective business correspondence, we should keep in mind why we are writing it, understand our reader's needs and then clearly write what we need to say. Every business correspondence should be clear, human, helpful and as friendly as the topic allows. People should master the seven Cs principles in business correspondence writing.

4.3 Inspection Standard of the Five Ws

Besides the seven Cs principles, the five Ws principles also are the features of business correspondences. They are as follows: Who, What, Where, When and Why.

Take an order letter for example, it must be specified "What you want", "When you need the goods", "to whom and Where the goods to be sent", and if we make negative answer for requirement of the counterpart, we need explain "Why". So when we finish a letter, we can use these five Ws principles to check.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, we have been trying to search for a comprehensive approach to writing of business correspondences.

First and foremost, we have introduced two main aspects of words in business correspondences, i.e., its formalness and its conciseness. Then more detailed, we figure out four basic characteristics of vocabulary in business correspondences. There are: using of terminol-

ogy, polysemy, conciseness and formalness of vocabulary, special usage of general words.

Consequently, we have introduced seven principle parts and seven optional parts in structures and format of business correspondences. We compare the business correspondence with the personal letter, there were some differences in format and structure, i.e., the business correspondence should be more rigorous than the personal letter.

What is most worthy of mentioning is that we have done a quite fundamental job about stylistic features of business correspondences. Combining the before mentioned, concise language, simple structure and unitary contents, are stylistic features of business correspondences. Also we can use the seven Cs and the five Ws to test that whether this is an excellent business correspondence.

Business correspondence is vital to the business field. For those enterprises that engaged in foreign trade, a good letter is the key to success in the business and trade. Little research work has been done on it so far. Thus this thesis is just a bold attempt.

Correspondently, we have studied and explained the business correspondence from three aspects: vocabulary, structures and stylistic features, while comparing the personal letters and business correspondence. We sincerely hope that the thesis will help more and more practitioners in this area.

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