



ANALYSIS OF THE WRITTEN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS OF ESL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *This study focused on finding out the features of written English business letters of ESL students. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics is used as the theoretical framework, mainly, interpersonal function. The written business communication is an important written text used for international business linkages and it has its own features of text. This study examined the interpersonal function of written communications in terms of mood, modality, interaction and negotiation and perceived that written communications have their own unique interpersonal features. The different types of letters in business are analyzed in terms of writing mechanics, interpersonal function, mood, and modality. The student writers lack the mastery of the basic mechanics to apply in writing correspondences. Some of the writers are careless in the use of words which may offend readers and some write wordy statements that send vague messages that result to miscommunications. The principles of formal writing are suggested to be discussed by the teachers prior to letting the learners write the different types of business correspondences. Learners are encouraged to master the basic mechanics or writing and be familiar with terms used to send pleasant mood no matter how serious the matter at hand to be delivered to the audience.*

KEYWORDS: *Written Business Communications, interpersonal function, mood, modality*

INTRODUCTION

Business communication has always been highly regarded in commercial circles as the link in business partnership. In line with the means of exchanging communication, business communication in both oral and written are regarded as very important in the business world. In today's high competition in business undertakings, establishing and maintaining business relationship through written business communication is significant. Good business



communications are considered as an instrument to interrelate within a firm and also with external contacts engaged in international trades.

The College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy in Cagayan State University, Andrews Campus offers the course of Business Communications. Its curriculum content is focused on developing students' writing ability in the business context. To master the interpersonal features of the written communication is very beneficial for those who learn to apply all the rules and principles to be followed in writing. It pays to focus on students' development in writing particularly in applications of rules to be able to produce the best quality of written communication for local and international business endeavor. Based on the core theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, i.e. interpersonal function, the paper makes an interpersonal function analysis of the features of written English Business Letter Text (EBLT) as studied by the different Universities in the Province of China (2012). The written communications have the salient feature of courtesy and consideration. In this study, only body part of letters is analyzed in terms of mood, modality, interaction and negotiation. An added touch of the analysis is the writing mechanics. The corpora of the paper are composed of ten (10) types of written communications used in business transactions namely: Sales, Inquiry, Sales response, Purchase Order, Transmittal, Complaints, Adjustment, Credit, Remittance, and Collection. The enumerated corpora are commonly used in the business world.

There are several studies undertaken that focused on the analysis on written business communication in English text. Gimenez (2000) investigates whether the spoken nature of e-mail messages has already started to affect business written communication. He makes an analysis in respect of the register and context of the language and at the style used in commercial electronic mail. In this light, the electronically sent business communication as an avenue of formal communication observes the highest degree of formality in tone and correctness of structure. In China, Wang Xinguo (1997), Li Xuansong (1997), Chen Dongchun (2003), Li Ming (2004), Xu Ju (2004) and Li Junru (2006) conduct researches on EBLTs from the perspectives of linguistic features, textual structure, stylistic characteristics and genre



analysis. Liu Jianfu (2004) explores one of the most important functions of language: phatic communion. He Wei & Pang Yunlin make a study of 30 English business letters communicating bad news, in order to reveal the linguistic devices realizing the interpersonal function (He Wei & Pang Yunlin, 2008). Leila Barbara et. al. do a survey of how English is used for various communication purposes in the Brazilian business setting, namely, different types of business organizations www.ccsenet.org/elt English Language Teaching Vol. 5, No. 7; July 2012 76 ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750 (Barbara, 1996). Carla Vergaro (2002) conducts a research on discourse strategies in Italian and English money chasing letters. Carla Vergaro (2004) describes a contrastive study on rhetorical differences between Italian and English sales promotion letters. Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris (1996) expound requests and status in business correspondence. The previous studies on business communications mainly focused on genre, lexical features, linguistic features, phatic communion.

It is also necessary to analyze the perspective of interpersonal function, Mood, Modality, Interaction and Negotiation embodying feature of courtesy and consideration. One of the main purposes of language communication is to interact with other people: to establish and maintain appropriate social links with them. In practice, employers and employees use formal written communication to exchange messages. When communication is composed, courtesy and consideration should be given attention so that the delivered message would not spark any hint of misunderstanding between sender and receiver. Learners who are speakers of foreign language are specifically taking a closer look at how they put words into writing as Akbari (2017) has focused on the concept of text orientation to find out the linguistic resources of Russian/Ukrainian-speaking students. The study further investigated on ability of students to construct or write business letters in the foreign language (English) and sought to identify whether students have better writing outputs if they belong to those with high grades. It showed in the study that with some assistance and models copied, they have built good will in their interpersonal communication with the audience. Though there are outputs which are impersonal and judgmental in tone, it turned out that many of the learners have built the confidence of composing well-crafted communications frequently



with positive tone like appreciation. Students in the higher level of grades perform well in their writing objectively and more positively. The students' level in English language proficiency and their understanding of writing in particular disciplines and genres are also contributory to their ability to write the task at hand.

METHODOLOGY

This classroom study examined how structural correctness, formats, and courtesy and consideration are observed by student writers of business communications. The letters are analyzed accordingly under the heading of grammar, spelling, punctuation, mood, modality and interaction and negotiation between the writer and the receiver. The sample of letters the students wrote were analyzed along correctness of formats and styles. This classroom research served as guide on preparing students in the actual scenario of the world trade. Based on classification of mood types put forward by Thompson (Thompson, 2000, p. 40) and Halliday (Halliday, 2000, p. 85), an analysis of mood components is made by the author of this paper at clause level to decide types of mood used in written letters. Further, this classroom research aimed to find out the unique features of business letters from the perspective of interpersonal function, structure, and formats. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics is employed as the theoretical framework, mainly, interpersonal function (Halliday, 2000).

Generally, this study sought to find out the impressions of business letters of people who write them and those who are considered as audience or readers.

Specifically, it identified the percentage and findings along the following category of analysis:

1. Total count of committed mistakes in structural rules;
2. Total count of punctuations which are misused or not used at all;
3. Total count of improper use of words from intended meaning;
4. Total count of misspelled words;



- Total count of signal words that identifies the mood, modality and interaction, negotiations

In the paper, the qualitative analysis is the major research method adopted for the study. The findings will be presented and discussed thoroughly on the bases of grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, mood, modality and interaction and negotiation on the body of the letters only.

The scope of the research is focused on the written outputs of students in English – 18, Business Communication during the second semester offering of the college in academic year 2017-2018. A total of ten (10) types of business letters are analyzed accordingly. Each type has five (5) samples for analysis along the following category: grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, mood, modality and interaction, and negotiation. The whole outlook of the different letters shall also be checked

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The written business communication outputs of students are randomly picked for analysis. There are ten (10) types of business communication letters identified as samples for analysis with five (5) samples each for analysis.

Table 1 shows the total count of mistakes committed by student writers in the writing mechanics.

Type of letters	S-V Agreement	Punctuation	Vocabulary(incorrect words used)	Spelling
Sales	75	11	9	8
Inquiry	63	15	13	6
Sales response	67	18	10	14
Purchase order	49	11	6	10
Transmittal	71	13	8	6
Complaints	53	9	11	8
Adjustment	74	7	9	11
Credits	82	15	10	16
Remittance	43	10	11	5
Collections	68	7	15	15
TOTAL	645	116	102	47



The highest count of mistakes that the student writers committed fall under the S-V Agreement criteria. Some of the examples of common mistakes the writers commit are the following: 1) action words ending in *s* like in this example of a sentence, “*The customer remit his payment on-time.*” The correct one should be, “*The customer remits his payment on-time.*” It is not only on cases on using action words ending in *s* that causes problem to writers. The linking verbs (be) *am, is, are, was, were* also are confusing them. Some problems are with the use of helping verbs (forms of have, be, and do) may also function as main verbs. In addition, nine modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) function only as helping verbs. Have, Be, and Do verbs change form to indicate tense; the nine modals do not. The writers have interchangeably used *has* and *have, was* and *were, does* and *do*. In their letters, they have sent poorly constructed statements. The audience may have a negative feeling towards the writer if s/he cared enough to go over the total manuscript. In general, the problem of student writers lies on the application of rules in sentence constructions.

The importance of punctuations in letter writing is oftentimes overlooked. The common mistakes committed in the use of colon (:), semi-colon (;), comma (,), question mark (?), period/full stop (.), quotation mark (“), apostrophe (’), and exclamation point (!) were noted when students write. Example: *Dear Mrs. Andrew’s:* The salutation has two incorrect punctuations because the writer has used apostrophe on Andrews (there is no signifying mark for any ownership), and the other misused punctuation is semi-colon. In formal writing, the colon (:) should come after the name of the person who is the audience. Also, there are writers who fail to use the period in every statement so there is a possibility that sentences are interconnected and they send confusing messages.

The student writers consult the thesaurus for impressive words to use in the body of the letter so there is a tendency of miscommunications. The use of high-sounding words creates confusions on the part of the audience when the writer opts to use words not relevant to the main point or purpose of the letter. The technicality of the letter’s message is sacrificed when writers use words which are not relevant.



The total outlook of a letter is perfectly noted when every single word written is spelled correctly. On the contrary, many student writers commit mistakes in spelling. The letters were hand-written and are done inside the class so the auto-check in the computer is not being utilized. The student writers are used to text-type writing wherein they spell words in short cut manner. They also do not follow the rules of spelling especially when words are turned into another part of speech.

Table 2 shows the percentages of students' mistakes in the declaratives for giving information.

Type of letters	Mood	Modality	Interaction	Negotiations
Sales	3	1	4	3
Inquiry	5	1	2	2
Sales response	2	1	3	4
Purchase order	1	3	2	5
Transmittal	3	2	3	2
Complaints	5	5	5	5
Adjustment	2	2	1	3
Credits	3	4	5	3
Remittance	1	1	2	1
Collections	5	4	5	5
TOTAL	29	19	30	33

The mood of the letter contents are declaratives which provide information for the letter receiver. There are instances though those writers do not observe mood and modality in observance of polite tone to send messages. They work together to provide services to the receivers. The letters contribute to the interpersonal meaning to the receiver with courtesy and consideration. A good relationship between the writer and the receiver is being established when the attitude of the writer in being put in a tone wherein both parties truly understand each other. The mood of letter sent to the audience plays a special role in carrying out the interpersonal functions of the clause. In one of the sales letters, the writer has enclosed a price list together with promotion telling everything about the product. Both parties could examine the kind of response in terms of exchange going on between them.



The receiver has always the luxury of time to interpret the mood and modality of the letter writer for whatever purpose for writing.

When sales letters are out and some probable customers are interested with what is being promoted, inquiry letters are received. There is now a chain of exchanges between parties. The subject expresses the entity that the writer wants to make responsible for the validity of the proposition being identified in the statement. The receiver can then confirm, reject, query or qualify the validity by repeating or amending the subject on-hand. As the discussions go on between the parties to some extent, the answer has begun to emerge from the discussion of subject. There is a possible negotiation about the validity of the proposition. The observation as to whether the business being proposed is presented in a manner that probable customers are persuaded to make business defines a professional and encouraging manner of writing. In the over-all presentations of the different types of letters, very few student writers have not complied in the principles of business writing as to Interaction. The writers of the sample letters should have communicated in a way wherein professionalism must have been observed in sending messages when writing or responding to specific customer. The tone of the letter (in any type) whether to inform, persuade, request for information, and any purpose of the letter should always signal professionalism and express goodwill to the recipient.

There are types of letters though that would signal demands, actions, and solutions to problems. The rest of the statements in the body of the letters are imperatives and interrogatives, both of them play the role of demand, demanding either information or goods and services. They take up a small proportion in the total number but they still count. Besides giving information, the writer also demands something from the receiver especially for goods being transmitted wherein there are wrong shipments made by the letter sender. Example of these letter exchanges are those written by customers who sent purchase orders (P.O). An answer is a transmittal letter wherein the supplier accepts the order and transmits to the address of the customer. There are instances that problems arise along the transmittal procedure so the customer finds it necessary to contact the supplier.



When the letter writer gives information, the receiver is expected to acknowledge the information. While the letter writer asks a question, the receiver is expected to answer the question. As the letter writer gives a command, the receiver is expected to comply with the command. If the receiver does not follow the command, the exchange will be halted. In the case of letter writers in credit and collection, if the audience is complying with the writer's demand then understanding is attained. The demands for goods and services are typically realized with imperatives in statements. Imperatives are the unmarked mood type used to make a command. It is however observed that no matter how bad one feels because of unrealized demands, the tone of letter must not send offensive remarks which may result to misunderstanding.

The credit and collections are business correspondences that student writers need to negotiate. There signal words the student writers are taught to use to convey polite statements to their audience like using modals "may", "could", "please", etc. The signal words like "will" or "shall" signify willingness or determination of the writer to do something. In writing credit letters, the writers have committed very small count on lapses as to negotiation. However, no matter how careful words are chosen so as not to offend the reader's feelings there are still words that would not have subtle tone especially when a request for credit line is disapproved. There are offers at the end of the body of the letter that would bargain for goodwill but the earlier message already said it all. The most difficult type of letter is the collection wherein student writers have common errors in using words that deliver serious and warning tones. Given situations like overdue accounts have been uncollected for couple of months would trigger the writer to use harsh words signaling angry tone. There were letters using words like "mandated", "ought to", "failure to (do) _____", "subject for court litigation", and "your position in the business community would be _____". Other seriousness in tone leads the writer to use warning words about delays or delinquency.



SUMMARY:

The student writers' weakness in the total writing mechanics falls under agreement between subject and verb. Though the count on other criteria like punctuations, vocabulary, and spelling is minimal, the count is still notable. The totality of the letter presentation would not only mean perfect grammar but it requires perfection even in vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation marks. Any letter sent to business acquaintances represents the name of the whole company. It is therefore required for businesses to train its people to master the art to communicate through well-crafted business correspondences.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is highly recommended that the following be undertaken by student writers:

1. Have thorough review of the rules of subject-verb agreement and consult faculty members in authority who could assist or guide writers pertaining grammar rules.
2. Go over the rules when to use appropriate punctuations in the essential parts of the letters and in writing statements.
3. Be definite in using terms. Deliver clear and concise messages.
4. Wrong spelling is always wrong so find time to proofread the total face of the letter before sending.
5. Use polite words so as not to offend readers no matter how furious you may become about business matters.
6. Use convincing or willingness words to convey honesty in tone.
7. Find words that would equal warnings or ultimatum in tone that do not send signals of misunderstanding or war.
8. Follow the over-all principles of writing good letters.
9. Make sure to select mood types to convey courtesy and consideration which indicates that the relationship between you as the writer and the receiver is that of the carrier of emotion and the receiver of emotion.



10. Use imperatives and interrogatives to create a sense of dialogue in the form of command, arousing the receiver's attention and evoking their thinking.

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