



Lesson 1.12 Discourse & Text: Business

BY CATHY WANG

Introduction

- ▶ With rapid development of global economy and deepening of communication and exchanges among different countries, the use of business texts and discourse is becoming more and more popular.
- ▶ Business texts and discourse are used to meet the needs of business activities, involving not only the translation and use of business language, but also cultural communication, communicative competence, national habits & customs, etc.

Business culture

- ▶ A major difference between China and the west is that in China, there is more emphasis on relationship building (guanxi). In contrast, the western business culture is more individualistic and focused on meritocracy.
- ▶ Chinese mentality is circuitous, while the western mentality is more straightforward.



Business culture

- ▶ In China, because of the hierarchical nature of the corporate structure, an employee who knows his boss better are more likely to get a promotion. While a western person, more often than not, needs to earn the team's respect, and he must be a professional in his field.
- ▶ Do you agree?

Business culture

- ▶ Many Westerners think that Chinese people always respond “yes, we can” even when they cannot fulfil the request. Furthermore, they cannot “lose face” and acknowledge their mistakes.
- ▶ Do you agree?



Business negotiation

- ▶ In business negotiation, according to Li et al. (2001b), Chinese businesspeople strive to achieve the harmonious relationship that they attach great significance to.
- ▶ In a business negotiation, Chinese participants did not go through the key points of the discussion and summarize them; rather, they made small talk beyond the topic at hand and co-constructed a coherent 'story line'.
- ▶ Li et al. (2001b) explained this using the key Chinese cultural concept 和 (harmony).

Business negotiation

- ▶ The British businessperson commented that despite being familiar with 'the blurring between business and non-business matters', he still had problems with it:
- ▶ "Everything seems to take a long time. I'm used to that now, but I'm still having a little trouble with what we've agreed, or not agreed for that matter. They talk a lot, about nothing really. At the end of the day, I want to go home and tell my colleagues, yes we have a deal." (Li et al. 2001a: 144)

Business letters & invitations

Major differences in Chinese and English business letters:

- ▶ Besides the basic function of business communication, Chinese letters seem to have one extra purpose of establishing a long-term relationship with the reader.
- ▶ The combination of greetings and introductory remarks were evident in the Chinese letters.
- ▶ English business letters emphasize a positive image of the sales company, whereas, in addition to this, Chinese letters project a respectful image.

Example: Opening of a Chinese business letter

原文:

- ▶ 贵公司,
- ▶ 您好! 工作一定很忙!

What do you think of the translation?

Translation:

- ▶ Honored company,
- ▶ How are you? You must be very busy with your work.

Analysis:

- ▶ This is a typical example of Chinese business letter writing; greetings and introductory moves—such as ‘How are you? You must be very busy with your work’— **do not exist in English sales letters.**
- ▶ They are, however, common in private Chinese letters, and it reflects the Chinese tendency to emphasize relationship building.

Business letters & invitations

- ▶ Similar to business letters, Chinese business invitations also pay significant attention to 关系 guanxi (relations).
- ▶ English invitations aim to portray a positive image, whereas Chinese invitations seek to portray a positive, collaborative, and respectful image and have the additional purpose of building a host–guest relationship with the reader.

Example: The English invitation

- ▶ Dear Mr. Li,
- ▶ Here's your personal invitation to join 6000 fellow retailers, and 280 leading industry suppliers enjoying the Christmas Stocking Fair experience. (Zhu 2005: 1)

Example: The Chinese invitation

- ▶ 敬启者，
- ▶ 中国经济急速发展，各工商业必须提高其技术以增强本身的竞争力。为满足有关工商业之要求，“X 展览会”将于十二月份在北京举行。我司诚意邀请贵公司派员前往参观。
- ▶ Respected Reader,
- ▶ The Chinese economy is developing rapidly. Every industry or business has to promote its technology to increase its competitiveness. In order to meet the needs of the industries and businesses concerned, 'X Fair' is to be held in December in Beijing. We sincerely invite your company to participate.
- ▶ (Adapted from Zhu 2005: 204)

Analysis:

- ▶ As can be seen, English sales invitations are usually shorter than their Chinese counterparts.
- ▶ Chinese business invitations tend to include introductory moves, such as those in the example above, which do not occur in English letters.
- ▶ This is primarily because the preamble can do facework (Kirkpatrick, 1993) and help build a relationship.
- ▶ Chinese employees reported a greater desire to do business with the sender of an email that included facework and placed reasoning before the request, whereas the American employees were more annoyed by this type of email. (Richard and McFadden, 2016)

Conclusion

- ▶ Based on the cultural differences, business communication should focus on:
- ▶ **Dynamic equivalence**
- ▶ **Functional equivalence**

More examples

- ▶ 目前，本公司经营各类中药三千余种，中药机械十余种。
- ▶ Now our company handles over 3,000 traditional Chinese medicines and more than ten kinds of machinery for manufacturing Chinese medicines.

More examples

- ▶ 对不同的地区，伊利采取了不同的营销战略。在打入北京市场时，鉴于北京冷饮品牌众多的情况，采取“农村包围城市”的战略，逐步向内扩展。
- ▶ Yili adopts different marketing strategies for different regions. In Beijing, where there was fierce competition among different brands, it adopted an encirclement strategy (starting from the suburbs and gradually expanding into the downtown area).

More examples

- ▶ 公司拥有雄厚的技术力量，大、中专毕业以上的技术、管理人才占员工总人数的百分之三十以上.....
- ▶ Boasting tremendous technological strength, the company owns a well-qualified management and staff.

More examples

- ▶ 自**2013** 年以来，我公司已荣获广西玉林市“副会长单位”称号，并先后荣获技术进步等**2** 项省级奖项。
- ▶ Since 2013, our company has been awarded the local honorary title and many prizes, including 2 provincial prizes.

More examples

- ▶ “同仁堂”是北京最古老、声誉最高的一家堂号。它创建于公元**1669**年，至今已有三百多年的历史。其制药宗旨为：“炮炙虽繁必不敢省人工，品味虽贵必不敢减物力”，所制产品以“配方独特，选料上乘，工艺精湛，疗效显著”而驰名中外。
- ▶ Established in 1669, Tongrentang is the most long-standing and prestigious pharmaceutical factory in Beijing, with a history of over 300 years.
- ▶ It follows the principle of “making the best medicines, irrespective of the cost of materials and time consumed”.
- ▶ Tongrentang's medicines are famous for unique prescriptions, superior medicinal materials, excellent technology and prominent curative effect in the world.

More examples

- ▶ 发展新兴产业和高科技产业，把开发新技术、新产品、新产业与开拓市场结合起来，把发展技术密集型产业和劳动密集型产业集合起来。
- ▶ We should develop rising and high-tech industries. We should combine the efforts to develop new technologies, products and industries with the efforts to open up markets and integrate the development of technology-intensive with labor-intensive industries.

References

- ▶ Kirkpatrick, A. (1993) 'Information sequencing in Modern Standard Chinese in a genre of extended spoken discourse', *Text – Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 13(3): 423-454.
- ▶ Li, W., Zhu, H. and Li, Y. (2001b) '*Interpersonal harmony and textual coherence in Chinese business interaction*', *Multilingua*, 20(3): 285–311.
- ▶ Richard, E. M. and McFadden, M. (2016) '*Saving Face: Reactions to Cultural Norm Violations in Business Request Emails*', *Journal of Business and Psychology* 31(2): 307-321.
- ▶ Zhu, Y. (2005) *Written Communication across Cultures: A Sociocognitive Perspective on Business Genres*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.