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THE GENRE OF OFFICIAL-BUSINESS LETTER IN A COMPARATIVE STYLISTIC ASPECT (ENGLISH-UKRAINIAN PARALLELS)

Doubenko O.Yu.

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

The article presents a comparative stylistic analysis of official-business letters as one of the major genres of both English and Ukrainian bureaucratic discourse. It focuses on similar and divergent stylistic features of English and Ukrainian bureaucratic correspondence, paying special attention to types of official-business letters, their trite structural parts and standard etiquette prescriptions. The paper deals with the system of subgenres that has established itself in both English and Ukrainian official-business correspondence and describes hackneyed verbal structures or clichés typical of official-business letters in the compared traditions. It highlights such specifically English forms of official documents as requests for recommendations, letters of recommendation, letters of introduction. In the article special norms of English official-business correspondence termed *disemphasizing techniques* are characterized.

Keywords: official-business letter, clichés, request for recommendations, letter of recommendation, letter of introduction, *disemphasizing techniques*.

Introduction. Assignment formulation. The style of official business communication has been traditionally treated as that formal, matter-of-fact variety of speech which is the most conservative of all functional styles in any language. Scholars rightfully describe it as a neutral «zero style» where practical criterion takes precedence over other literary standards. However, at the present stage the problems of stylistic studies of official-business discourse draw increasing attention of foreign and domestic researchers as, in the light of modern cognitive paradigm, stylistic features of official texts have ceased to be equaled to purely linguistic characteristics: they are inevitably interpreted as those manifestations of certain historical-cultural background that are highly relevant in intralanguage and interlanguage communication. The domain of official-business correspondence seems to be rather indicative of many homologous and dissimilar distinguishing stylistic characteristics displayed by English and Ukrainian clerical traditions and therefore calls for a comprehensive comparative investigation.

Previous publications on the topic. A special interest of scholars is invariably attached to such variants of official style as legal language and texts of diplomacy analyzed in a number of papers, in particular, in the scholarly works by P. Dámová [3], B. Danet [4], R. Hiltunen [7], M. Gustafsson [5], D. Kappeler [8], N. Krivchikova [9], N. Lisina [10], O. Matsko [11], V. Shabunina [12]. At same time, such major genre of bureaucratic style as official-business letters remains not sufficiently studied in a stylistic perspective for it is traditionally given much prominence in this aspect basically in English practical manuals which

offer numerous rather valuable stylistic observations [see, for instance 2; 6]. However, those not numerous works that deal with official-business correspondence proper, offer rather fascinating and promising topics open for further scholarly discussion. These are, for example, the issues of the art of persuasive business of «organizational» writing tackled by L. Bielawski [1], sensitive and non-sensitive business messages [13], certain linguistic priorities that secure excellence in business communication [14].

Besides, although there is a considerable volume of studies that focus on the style of official-business discourse in English and Ukrainian traditions one should mention lack of comparative papers in the scholarly field under discussion, whereas the relevance of such comparative analysis seems to be unquestionable in view of the necessity to supply a solid linguistic basis for both further linguistic and translational studies. **The aim of this paper** consists in giving a comparative stylistic description of convergent and divergent stylistic features of English and Ukrainian official-business letters addressing the issues of different types of bureaucratic letters, their clichéd structural parts and etiquette prescriptions related to the appropriate tonality of sensitive business messages.

Homologous features and discriminants of English and Ukrainian official-business correspondence

Types of official-business letters. Upon the whole the genre of official-business letter reveals a similar system of subgenres in English and Ukrainian bureaucratic documents (tabl. 1).

Although documents of such kind are more frequently used in English clerical work encompassing

Table 1

Basic subgenres of official-business letters in English and Ukrainian bureaucratic traditions

The letters of positive content		Neutral letters		The letters of negative content	
Letter of Appreciation (Letter of Recognition, Thank you Letter)	Лист-подяка	Letter of Offer	Лист-пропозиція	Letter of Claim	Лист рекламація
Letter of Congratulation	Лист-привітання	Letter of Inquiry	Лист-запит	Letter of Rejection	Лист-відмова
		Letter of Confirmation (Acknowledgement)	Лист підтвердження	Reminder Letter	Лист-нагадування
				Letter of Demand	Лист-вимога
				Letter of Adjustment (Letter of Apologies)	Лист-вибачення
				Letter of Condolence	Лист-співчуття

the forms that can be hardly found in Ukrainian bureaucratic tradition, as, for instance, warnings about coming late and messages on promotion are normally committed to paper here. One should also mention a special popularity of **requests for recommendations, letters of recommendation and letters of introduction** in English official-business style.

Requests for recommendations take on slightly different stylistic features depending upon the kind of recommendation required. For example, it may be a letter on behalf of the administration of a certain company as an inquiry for recommendations to another company viewed as a prospective business partner (Inquiry for Recommendations from the Third Party):

Gentlemen,

We are planning to do business with the firm of ...

We have been informed that you have had business connections with this firm for many years and we would appreciate it if you could advise us about their business practices.

We wish to assure you that this matter will be treated in strict confidence? And we shall be glad to reciprocate the favor at any time.

Sincerely yours, ...

It may also be a more personal request for recommendations from the former employer:

Dear Mr. Brown,

I am applying for the post for the post of salesman with Kingley Marketing of Milton, and I wondered whether you would be willing for me to give your name as a referee.

I have been happy in my present post, as I was during my four years with M&B, but I have decided to apply for the post with Kingley Marketing as it seems to offer greater responsibility and a chance to use my own initiative more frequently.

Please pass on my regards to any of my colleagues still with M&B and, of course, to Mrs. Brown.

Yours sincerely,

English **letters of recommendation** may also be either personal or general. The personal type is addressed to some person or firm by some writer who is recommending someone for a position. It may be written at the request of the seeking the position or in answer to inquiry of the prospective employer. Its aim is to help the employer in determining the applicant's fitness for the position:

448 Ward Street

Knoxville, Tennessee

June 12, 2009

Central Insurance Company

1668 Blair Street

Louisville, Kentucky

Gentlemen:

It is with pleasure that we recommend Mr. H.F. Warren, about whom you inquire in your letter of June 10. He has been with us for five years and in that time he has continued to grow in efficiency as an insurance salesman until he is now among our largest and most consistent producers of quality business. It is because of this development that he now wishes to enter a larger field, such as you can offer him. Although we are loathe to give him up, we are not selfish enough to wish to hold him back from the greater opportunities you can provide.

Mr. Warren is a persistent and tireless worker who considers rebuffs only as a challenge to lead him to improve his sales presentation. He is, we sometimes think, unduly impatient at his own reasonable progress; but this may be, after all, a most commendable fault.

You will, we feel sure, find many occasions to consider yourselves fortunate if you engage Mr. Warren as a salesman.

Sincerely yours,

THE BLAND-DOW INSURANCE SERVICE

Stylistic requirements to such kind of letters consist in absence of vague statements, there should also be no over-stressing of good qualities to make the applicant seem super-human. The general type of recommendation, which is placed in the hands of the one recommended, is not much in favour at present and does not carry much weight because the tendency of the writer is to give only favourable facts. The employer of today prefers to send a questionnaire to references furnished by the applicant. In this way he or she gets information which might be omitted from the regular letter of recommendation. Of course, the employer interprets failure of a reference to answer the questionnaire or any item of it as unfavourable to the candidate.

The letter of introduction is used to introduce a friend or an acquaintance of the writer, it may be given for either business or social reasons. The letter, delivered in person by one introduced, should be enclosed in an unsealed envelope, bearing in proper position, the name and full address of the one for whom it is intended. It should be written in all seriousness. One should never give a letter of introduction for business purposes unless he or she is absolutely sure of the ability and integrity of the person introduced.

In Ukrainian clerical work recommendations are given not in form of a letter but in form of a special document (testimonial) or as part of the person's general presentation (in the so-called «Подання»).

АТЕСТАЦІЙНА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА

*Корнієнка Олексія Вікторовича,
бухгалтера планового відділу
Харківського тракторного заводу,
1974 р. народження, українця,
освіта незакінчена вища.*

Пан Корнієнко О.В. працює на посаді бухгалтера від 1996 р. після закінчення Харківського кредитно-фінансового технікуму.

Службові інструкції та доручення виконує сумлінно. Має високий професійний рівень із питань нарахування коштів, оплати праці й бухгалтерського обліку.

Заочно навчається на V курсі економічного ф-ту Харківського інституту народного господарства. Має шану колективу.

Панові Корнієнкові О.В. рекомендується більше уваги приділяти питанням господарсько-фінансової діяльності й опанувати роботу на ПК.

Характеристику видано для подання (на запит) до _____

10.09.16

*Завідділу
Голов. бухгалтер*

(підпис)

О.Л. Яременко

(підпис)

Ю.І. Зуєнко

Clichés of official-business correspondence. The bureaucratic discourse is a considerably standardized type of speech that is conditioned by stereotypical situations which arise in the course of official communication: addressing documents, signing them, expressing reasons that lead to the subject of the document and so on. The most characteristic manifestations of standardization are: a) widespread use of ready-made verbal structures, established clichés, some stenciled beginnings and endings of the documents; b) frequent repetition of the same words, forms, phrases, structures as a result of striving for uniform ways of expression in such situations.

A separate group of clichés is made up by stereotyped opening and closing lines in official and business letters. Such opening formulas are found, for instance: a) in answers to inquiries: *Further to your request for ...*, *Following our meeting last week, I am writing to confirm ... With reference to your telephone call of yesterday ...* // *Відповідаючи на Ваш запит ... На підтвердження нашої домовленості ... Ми отримали Вашого листа з повідомленням про ...*; b) in Letters of Appreciation: *I am pleased to confirm that, It was a pleasure to ...*, *I am writing to extend my appreciation, Please accept my heartfelt thanks* // *Висловлюємо свою щирю вдячність, Прийміть нашу щирю подяку за допомогу ...*, *Вдячні Вам за запрошення, Дозвольте подякувати Вам ...*; c) in Letters of Claim or Rejection: *I am disappointed at the quality of ...*, *It is with regret that I must inform you ...*, *I was disturbed / concerned / unhappy to learn* // *Вибачте, але ми не можемо погодитися на ...*, *На жаль, ми не можемо прийняти Вашої пропозиції, Вважаємо за свій обов'язок нагадати Вам про ...*; d) in Letters of Apologies: *My apologies for ...*, *I am sorry that you have not received the ...* // *Просимо вибачення за прикрю помилку, Щиро просимо вибачення за вимушену затримку ...*

Stereotyped closing lines of official letters fall into three kinds: a) stock phrases used to offer further correspondence and cooperation – *We are looking forward to hearing from you, I hope to hear from you soon, If you are interested in further information, please call ...*, *If you would like to know more, please ...*, *Please consider my proposal ...*, *Do not hesitate to give us a call if you ...* // *Сподіваємося почути Вас ...*, *Маємо надію на встановлення тісних контактів між нашими фірмами ...*, *Ми завжди до Ваших послуг ...*, *Чекаємо Ваших замовлень ...* *Якщо Вам знадобляться наші послуги, телефонуйте, будь ласка ...* *Якщо Ви зацікавлені у придбанні наших товарів, будемо раді обговорити з Вами це питання ...*; b) trite phrases used to induce the addressee to do something – *Please contact me as soon as possible ...* *Please confirm receipt of this letter, I hope you will resolve the matter immediately, I expect action to be taken immediately* // *Просимо Вас якомога швидше підтвердити свою згоду, Сподіваємося на виправлення прикрї помилки*; c) final formulae of politeness – *Thank you beforehand for your cooperation, Thank you for your interest / help / attention* // *Наперед вдячні Вам, Дякуємо Вам за виявлений інтерес / за допомогу / за проявлену увагу / терпимість.*

In both languages some groups of official style clichés can be differentiated according to their formality. The existence of such a scale is predetermined by differences in addresser-addressee relations. If the addressee of the letter is unknown, the typical forms of salutation are:

<i>Dear Sirs (GB)</i>	<i>Шановні панове</i>
<i>Dear Gentlemen (Am)</i>	<i>Шановні пані та панове</i>
<i>Sir or Madam</i>	<i>Шановний пан або пані</i>

This **formal** mode of address presupposes a corresponding complimentary close:

<i>Yours faithfully</i>	<i>Щиро вдячний Вам</i>
	<i>З глибокою пошаною</i>

Neutral polite salutation and complimentary close can be found in letters addressed to a concrete person:

<i>Dear Mr / Ms Jones</i>	<i>Шановний пане Кохан</i>
	<i>Шановна пані Кохан</i>
<i>Yours sincerely</i>	<i>Щиро Ваш</i>
	<i>З повагою</i>
	<i>З найкращими побажаннями</i>

Informal friendly forms of address and closing formulae are used in regard of colleagues or those whom the addresser knows personally and who are equal to him or her in status:

<i>Dear Arthur / Mary</i>	<i>Шановний пане Леоніде</i>
	<i>Шановна пані Галина</i>
<i>Best regards / Best wishes</i>	<i>Бажаю успіхів</i>

In both languages the formality of stereotyped opening or closing lines may be enhanced at the expense of a split predicate used instead of a simple one:

We apologize for – we offer apologies for..., *Please accept our apologies for...* / *We are sure (confident) that – We express confidence that...* / *We are pleased (glad) to inform you that – We have pleasure in informing you that...* / **We regret to learn...** – **We express our regrets that...** // *Вибачаємося за...* – *Прийміть, будь ласка, наші вибачення...* / *Ми впевненні в тому, що...* – *Ми висловлюємо впевненість в тому, що...* / *Раді повідомити Вас.* .. – *Маємо приємність повідомити Вас.* .. / *Ми з жалем дізналися, що...* – *Висловлюємо наш жаль з приводу...*

Disemphasizing techniques. In English clerical work a special importance is attached to the use of disemphasizing techniques which allow to counteract undesirable negative modality in business documents. Among universal strategies of that kind one should mention 1) the use of passive constructions instead of active ones (*I/We would like to get a prompt reply – A prompt reply will be appreciated*); 2) the use of complex sentences instead of short ones for the latter can create an abrupt effect (*We are large wholesalers. We are interested in your range of shirts. – We are large wholesalers and we are interested in your range of shirts.*); 3) depersonalization of claims at the expense of avoiding the pronouns *you, your*: **your**

mistake, **your error**: **the mistake, the error**...; 4) avoiding the particle «no» and various negative forms and substituting them for synonymous expressions that sound positively. As there is no such a general rule in Ukrainian clerical work one can observe shifts of positive modality in Ukrainian translation:

<p>We are so overloaded with orders from most of our regular customers that there may be some delay in delivery of the goods.</p> <p><u>To encourage all customers we are prepared to offer a special trade discount of 4% on all orders over \$500 net value received before the end of this month.</u></p> <p><u>This is the third time this mistake has occurred, and we are far from being satisfied with the service you offer.</u></p>	<p><u>Щоб не втратити клієнтів ми готові запропонувати...</u></p> <p><u>Ця помилка сталася вже втретє, і нас абсолютно не задовольняють послуги, які ви надаєте.</u></p>
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Apart from the foregoing universal strategies of disemphasis there exist some special etiquette prescriptions used in the so-called «bad news» letters where the writer has to lodge claims, to inform of the failure to comply with the terms of the contract or to turn down the partner's offer.

According to L. Bielawski [1], the basic rule underlying the use of persuading strategies in such letters lies in preferring rational appeals to ethical and emotional ones as though the latter make the language stronger they will hardly produce the necessary effect on the reader. Professionals who usually apply rational appeals in their day-to-day communication have a routine practice of resolving problems through logical and reasonable consideration and debate. Therefore many writers of business letters consider that reacting to a problem emotionally (= making an attempt to evoke an emotional response, for instance, eliciting fear) or ethically (= appealing to the reader's moral sense) is inappropriate in business correspondence. Besides, an appeal to emotion can easily backfire. The reader may also sense the emotional ploy and then the writer will appear to have taken a too shallow and subjective approach to the problem. For instance, letters of complaint should not be accusations, they are rather requests to correct mistakes or faults; and should be written remembering that the supplier will *want* to put things right. That is why such letters should never be made personal through the use of corresponding personal pronouns: **your mistake, your fault, you are to blame**. An impersonal tone is preferred in such cases: **the mistake, the error, it might have happened because...**

Likewise, any letter of adjustment should include certain mandatory elements of politeness which form a precondition of any successful business communication. Let us consider the following example:

Dear Sir,

We understand that you have complained that you have not received your usual weekly supply of cattle feed from us. I note from your records that we usually deliver to you on Mondays but that, due to our deliver being taken ill on the Sunday, the relief driver was not able to get to you until Tuesday morning. It was not possible to telephone all our customers to tell them what was happening and, anyway, most people received their usual delivery on the usual day. Only a few people had to wait another 24 hours.

We apologise for any inconvenience.

Yours sincerely,...

Although this letter contains an exhaustive description of the reasons of delay and adduces an excuse for the committed mistake, it does not meet the requirements of English business communication. Because the apologies for inconveniences are too depersonalized and stenciled, there no assurances that the firm values the client and that similar errors will not happen in future. That is why a more acceptable version of the letter seems to be the following one:

Dear Sir,

May I sincerely apologise for the inconvenience caused to you by the late delivery of your cattle feed last week. This was due to unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances – namely, the regular driver was taken ill the day before he usually makes your delivery – and poor communication – the relief driver did not inform us at that he would be unable to deliver to all our regular customers by the end of Monday and would be completing the round the following morning.

Had we known this in time, we would have telephoned you to explain the problem. Should this situation arise again, we will be better prepared.

Once again, please accept our apologies for the late delivery and please be assured that you are one of our most valued customers.

Yours sincerely,...

The author of this letter attends to all the above mentioned requirements, expressing both respectful attitude to the addressee and regret about late delivery (*I sincerely apologise, unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances, one of our most valued customers; May I sincerely apologise ... Once again, please accept our apologies ...*).

Conclusions. A comparative analysis of nomenclature of English and Ukrainian official-business letters, their stylistic features and etiquette prescriptions related to this genre of bureaucratic style in the compared cultural traditions provides evidence of certain similar and divergent stylistic characteristics of the material under discussion. As a result, it is safe to say that the system of subgenres of English and Ukrainian official-business letters reveals nearly identical character, with the exception of such specifically English bureaucratic documents as request for recommendations, letter of recommendation and letter of introduction, some of which have only approximate analogies in Ukrainian official-business style. The set of clichés found English and Ukrainian official-business letters is also basically the same as it is represented

by stereotyped structural parts of the letter – salutation, opening and closing lines, complimentary close. All these clichéd parts are differentiated according to their formality into formal, neutral polite and informal friendly stylistic varieties in both compared bureaucratic traditions.

Finally, one should accentuate that exceptional attention which is paid in English official-busi-

ness communication to the use of regulated etiquette formulas and disemphasizing techniques. This long-standing adherence to certain psychologically grounded norms of speech behaviour in official-business correspondence has given rise to the articulation of some generally established prescriptions as for the appropriateness of certain stylistic elements or stylistic modality of the letter.

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Дубенко О.Ю.

Київський національний університет імені Тараса Шевченка

ЖАНР ОФІЦІЙНО-ДІЛОВОГО ЛИСТА У ПОРІВНЯЛЬНО-СТИЛІСТИЧНОМУ АСПЕКТІ (АНГЛО-УКРАЇНСЬКІ ПАРАЛЕЛІ)

Анотація

У статті представлено порівняльно-стилістичний аналіз офіційно-ділових листів як одного з основних жанрів англійського та українського офіційно-ділового мовлення. Увагу зосереджено як на гомологічних, так і відмінних стилістичних рисах порівнюваних текстів: їхніх стереотипних структурних особливостях, базових типах офіційно-ділових листів та загальноприйнятих етикетних приписах. Охарактеризовано систему піджанрів, що ствердилася в порівнюваних традиціях офіційно-ділового листування, описано трафаретні вербальні структури, властиві англійським та українським офіційно-діловим повідомленням. Розглянуто такі специфічні для англійського ділового стилю види листів як лист-прохання про надання рекомендації, лист-рекомендація, лист-представлення. Проаналізовано прийоми деземфази, що набули статусу особливої норми англійського офіційно-ділового листування.

Ключові слова: офіційно-діловий лист, кліше, лист-прохання про надання рекомендації, лист-рекомендація, лист-представлення, прийоми деземфази.

Дубенко Е.Ю.

Киевский национальный университет имени Тараса Шевченко

ЖАНР ОФИЦИАЛЬНО-ДЕЛОВОГО ПИСЬМА В СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКОМ АСПЕКТЕ (АНГЛО-УКРАИНСКИЕ ПАРАЛЛЕЛИ)

Аннотация

В статье представлен сравнительно-стилистический анализ официально-деловых писем как одного из основных жанров английской и украинской официально-деловой речи. Внимание сосредоточено как на гомологических, так и отличительных стилистических чертах сравниваемых текстов: их стереотипных структурных особенностях, базовых типах официально-деловых писем и общепринятых этикетных рекомендациях. Охарактеризована система поджанров, сложившаяся в сопоставляемых традициях официально-деловой переписки, описаны трафаретные вербальные структуры, свойственные английским и украинским официально-деловым сообщениям. Рассмотрены такие специфические для английского делового стиля виды писем как письмо-просьба о рекомендации, рекомендательное письмо, письмо-представление. Проанализированы приёмы дезэмфазы, которые приобрели статус особой нормы английской официально-деловой речи.

Ключевые слова: официально-деловое письмо, клише, письмо-просьба о рекомендации, рекомендательное письмо, письмо-представление, приёмы дезэмфазы.