



PRAGMATIC AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE TEXTS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the pragmatic and linguistic features of business correspondence texts from a theoretical and functional perspective. It examines how pragmatic categories such as communicative intent, addressivity, modality, and politeness shape written interactions in professional communication. By analyzing contracts and business letters, the study demonstrates that pragmatic meaning in business discourse is not limited to literal semantics but reflects social hierarchy, institutional norms, and interpersonal strategies. The paper also highlights cross-cultural differences between Uzbek and English business communication, emphasizing the importance of pragmatic competence in international correspondence.

Keywords: Pragmatics, pragmalinguistics, business communication, speech act theory, politeness, addressivity, pragmatic effect.

Introduction

In the modern globalized world, business communication has evolved into a complex system that relies on linguistic precision and pragmatic appropriateness. The effectiveness of business correspondence depends not only on what is said but also on how it is said — that is, how meaning is shaped by social, cultural, and communicative context.

Pragmatics provides the theoretical foundation for understanding this process. It studies the relationship between language users and the communicative situations in which utterances occur. In other words, pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by context, speaker intention, and social norms. According to Levinson,



pragmatics focuses on language use in context, exploring how speakers convey meaning beyond literal expressions¹.

Business correspondence — including contracts, agreements, memos, and e-mails — is an essential component of institutional communication. These texts are characterized by their formal tone, purpose-oriented structure, and the balance between informativeness and politeness. Within business discourse, pragmatic features determine the tone, style, and impact of a message, influencing decision-making and professional relationships. The study of pragmatics and pragmalinguistics provides a foundation for analyzing how business correspondence operates as a communicative act. As Thomas notes, pragmalinguistics includes the linguistic resources speakers use to convey polite or strategic meaning, such as modals, hedges, and indirect speech acts². Business correspondence employs these tools to maintain professionalism and avoid misinterpretation. Thus, analyzing their pragmalinguistic properties contributes to both linguistic theory and practical business communication. Pragmatics emerged as an independent field in the 20th century through the works of philosophers such as C. S. Peirce, J. Austin, and J. Searle. Austin's concept of *speech acts* (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts) and Searle's classification (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations) provide a foundation for analyzing business correspondence as a set of intentional communicative actions.

G. V. Kolshanskiy (1979) viewed text pragmatics as a universal category that reveals the author's attitude toward both the communicative act and its participants³. Similarly, Marova (1988) emphasized that the pragmatic component of a text includes its emotional, evaluative, and motivational dimensions — all of which contribute to achieving a desired perlocutionary effect⁴.

In business communication, this pragmatic effect can take the form of agreement, compliance, or the establishment of mutual understanding. The linguistic realization of these effects depends on the use of pragmatic markers such as modal verbs (*should, may, must*), hedging devices (*perhaps, we suggest*), and politeness strategies (*please, we would appreciate if...*).

¹Levinson, S.C. (1983). **Pragmatics**. Cambridge University Press.

²Thomas, J. (1995). **Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics**. Longman.

³Kolshanskiy, G. V. (1979). *The Pragmatics of Language*. Moscow: MGPII nashr.

⁴Marova, N. D. (1988). *The Pragmatics and Perspective of the Text*. Alma-Ata: KazGU Press



Business correspondence is not merely a medium for information exchange; it is a tool for establishing and maintaining professional relationships. Pragmatic features in such texts are determined by institutional norms, power relations, and communicative goals.

Addressivity and Role Relations

The relationship between sender and recipient defines the degree of formality and directness. For example:

- “We kindly request your confirmation...” (polite, indirect, formal)
- “Please confirm by Friday.” (direct, neutral)

The first example demonstrates positive politeness and respect toward the addressee, which is culturally significant in both English and Uzbek communication.

Modality and Politeness

Politeness theory, as developed by Brown and Levinson, is particularly relevant to business correspondence⁵. Writers must balance clarity with courtesy, often using mitigated forms such as “could you please” or “we would appreciate it if...”. Moreover, the pragmatic structure of business texts—greetings, openings, requests, and closings—reflects both hierarchy and social distance. The communicative purpose dictates lexical choices, tone, and modality. Modality expresses obligation, possibility, or permission. In business texts, modal verbs help balance authority and politeness:

- *must* (obligation): “The supplier must deliver the goods within 10 days.”
- *may* (permission): “The client may terminate the contract upon notice.”

Politeness markers such as *please*, *could you*, *we would appreciate if...* mitigate the illocutionary force and maintain a cooperative tone.

Indirectness and Strategic Vagueness

Indirect speech acts are often used to maintain politeness and avoid confrontation. For instance:

⁵Brown, P. & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press

- Instead of “You are late with the payment,” a letter might state: “According to our records, the payment has not yet been received.” This mitigated form softens the criticism and preserves the relationship.

Pragmatic Coherence and Text Structure

A well-structured business text typically includes the following pragmatic components:

1. **Opening formula** (greeting, reference to previous contact)
2. **Main message** (request, proposal, agreement, or refusal)
3. **Closing formula** (thanks, future contact, signature)

Each section fulfills a communicative function and contributes to the overall pragmatic effect of professionalism and respect.

Cross-cultural pragmatics plays a vital role in understanding how business correspondence differs across linguistic and cultural contexts. In Uzbek business communication, politeness is often expressed through indirectness, honorifics, and expressions of gratitude (e.g., *hurmat bilan*, *iltimos qilamiz*). In contrast, English business communication values clarity, brevity, and balanced politeness.

For example:

- Uzbek letter ending: *Sizning ijobiy javobingizni kutib qolamiz.*
- English equivalent: *We look forward to your positive response.*

Both expressions are pragmatically polite, yet the English version is more concise and focuses on future cooperation. Awareness of such differences prevents miscommunication and strengthens intercultural business relations.

The pragmatic effectiveness of business correspondence depends on the writer’s ability to combine linguistic precision with strategic communication. Following Grice’s (1975) Cooperative Principles — quantity, quality, relation, and manner — writers must ensure that their messages are informative, truthful, relevant, and clear⁶.

In analyzing business correspondence in English and Uzbek contexts, differences emerge in formality, directness, and honorific usage. For instance, English business emails prioritize brevity and clarity, while Uzbek business letters often emphasize respect and relational harmony. This supports the idea that pragmalinguistic

⁶Grice, P. H. (1975). *Logic and Conversation*. New York: Academic Press



patterns are culturally conditioned⁷. Cross-cultural misunderstanding can occur if linguistic forms are interpreted without regard to the communicative norms of the target culture.

In the digital era, business correspondence has expanded to include e-mails, online contracts, and instant messages. These new genres retain the same pragmatic principles but demand additional attention to tone, clarity, and response time. Overly direct or ambiguous wording can easily lead to misinterpretation in intercultural communication.

Furthermore, pragmatic failures — such as the misuse of politeness markers or inappropriate modality — can negatively affect corporate reputation or contractual outcomes. Hence, pragmatic competence should be regarded as a crucial component of professional language training.

The study of the pragmatic and linguistic features of business correspondence reveals that such texts are inherently multifunctional: they inform, persuade, and establish professional rapport. The pragmatic framework — including speech act theory, politeness strategies, modality, and addressivity — provides valuable tools for analyzing how business messages achieve communicative success. In both Uzbek and English contexts, the effectiveness of business correspondence depends on aligning linguistic form with pragmatic intention. Future research should focus on the comparative analysis of digital business discourse and the development of pragmatically informed language teaching methods for business professionals.

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