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COMPOSITIONAL-AND-STRUCTURAL PECULIARITIES OF THE SPANISH BUSINESS LETTER

The article is concerned with the study of compositional-and-structural peculiarities of Spanish business letters. A lexical-and- grammatical analysis of Spanish business letters has been conducted. The analysis has allowed the author to define such features of business letters as: standartization, clearness and accuracy of presentation, brevity, absence of stylistically insignificant and appreciating words and jargons as well.

Key words: business correspondence, business letter, e-mail, layout, officialise correspondence.

Business letters (BL) are the essential part of a company activity. They directly determine a successful outcome of a transaction. The focus of BL on a recipient persuasion and confidence inspiration is their main psychological characteristic that differs them from the other types of correspondence. Not only do BL open the door to communication and commercial relations between companies and their customers, but they also represent the company's image and working style.

If the image created in letters is attractive, a company's commercial goal will be easier to obtain. If a letter, especially a letter of representation, is composed inappropriately, it may never be answered. For this reason it is of primary importance to carry on a correspondence in a way to create a favorable impression on a target reader.

While communicating with foreign business partners in a foreign language, one reflects the cultural thought pattern which is proper to their ethnic culture and simultaneously comes across the different pattern of worldview and way of thinking expressed in the mentality of the other ethnic culture bearer [1]. There is no doubt that language is an integral part of any culture. It is impossible to comprehend a culture without knowledge of language, and vice versa. Successful cooperation with foreign business partners involves the knowledge of concepts that reflect their vision of the world and their national culture [2, p. 119].

There are many types of BL. Among them are an enquiry letter, a letter of representation, an offer letter, an order letter, a shipment notification letter, a confirmation letter, an acknowledgment of receipt, a claim letter [3, p. 15].

The recipient and the subject are the basic elements of any particular context of correspondence. It is the recipient and the subject that determines the main stylistic characteristics of every letter and means used to create them.

The characteristic features of BL are clarity, elegant writing style and the tone. It is not a good idea to take into account the subject only. The recipient perception should certainly be concerned. Writing a letter, one should remember that not only is the content of primary importance but the form and the composition of the letter are, as well. The physical appearance of a letter and its aesthetics make for impression of your company on the recipient therefore they influence their attitude to the company and promote cooperation.

BL in all their diversity are highly standardized to facilitate correspondence. There are three parts in a letter. They are the heading, the body that contains the text of the message (*el cuerpo de la carta*), and the closing or complimentary remarks (*despedida*). The heading includes the letter-head (*el membrete*), the date (*la fecha*), the recipient's full address (*la dirección del destinatario*), the subject line (*el asunto*), the reference line (*referencias*), the direct recipient if necessary (*el destinatario*) and salutation (*saludo*). In turn, each part is structured and contains several elements.

The given three part composition is universal. It is used in all BL types in different cultures. At the same time language representation of the parts varies according to the BL type and to the rules and traditions accepted in some linguo-cultural communities.

The body of the letter may have a diverse content and form. BL samples and tips on BL writing arise from the most frequent situations in trade cooperation. The main stages of trade cooperation such as a commercial offer, an order, a dispatch advice and a claim should be noted. Each stage may include a number of particular situations that depends on actual circumstances of cooperation. Thus, a commercial offer can be preceded by a search for production or sales partners. A letter of representation or an enquiry letter, that contains a request for information about potential partners and provides data on the company, its area of interests and field of activities, corresponds to the search.

Details provided in a commercial offer depend on the information the sender has about the company they address. Consequently, an offer may contain the detailed information about addresser's area of interests and just the outline of the proposal, or vice versa.

While composing a letter, it is essential to pay attention to its size, since one page letter is perceived better by a recipient. Moreover, paragraphs should be of approximately the same size.

There are several styles of business letter layout. The most widespread and frequently used are the following: *bloque extremo* (full block format), *estilo bloque* (modified block format), *estilo semibloque o bloque modificado* (semi-block format), *estilo sangrado* (memo). Let us take a closer look at these styles.

The key feature of an *estilo bloque extreme* letter is that all parts of the letter such as date, inside address, headline, introduction, complementary close are typed at the edge of the left margin exactly. Block paragraph is used.

MEMBRETE(heading)

- *Fecha (date)*
- *Destinatario(recipient address)*
- *Saludo (salutation)*
- *Introducción y texto (introduction and main body)*
- *Despedida (closing remark)*
- *Nombre de la compañía (company name)*
- *Firma y rúbrica (signature and typed name)*
- *Cargo (position)*

Writing an *estilo bloque* letter, one should align the date to the right just below the heading. The address, salutation and body of the letter are placed in the same position as in an *estilo bloque extreme* letter. The closing remark, company name and signature are right-aligned while the typed name is placed at the left margin.

MEMBRETE

Fecha

Destinatario
Saludo
Texto

Despedida
Nombre de la compañía
Firma y rúbrica
Cargo

Identificación

The only difference between an *estilo semibloque o bloque modificado* and an *estilo sangrado* letters lies in a way the recipient address is typed: every following line is one space centered.

*MEMBRETE**Fecha*

Destinatario
Saludo
Texto

Despedida
Nombre de la compañía
Firma y rúbrica
Cargo

Identificación

There is one more business letter style. It is an *estilo simplificado* letter. It contains neither salutation nor closing remark. The body of the letter starts with a block paragraph. This simplification is rarely used as the letter looks like a note without the above mentioned formal parts [4, p. 24].

Having analyzed the main layouts of BL, we should note some distinguishing features of the punctuation. Open, closed and mixed punctuation styles are identified. In an open punctuation style letter there is no punctuation following salutation and complimentary closing. In closed punctuation style a comma follows all lines in the inside address, a colon follows the salutation, a comma follows the complimentary closing and the name. In mixed punctuation style a colon follows the salutation, and a comma follows the complimentary closing. The punctuation in the body of the letter should be followed as the grammar and syntax dictate. It should be noted that exclamation mark is not used in BL.

As noted above, BL are standard and have a three part structure including the heading, the body and the closing.

Let us examine in details how to write a Spanish business letter.

The letterhead includes the name of the company (it is preferable to specify its field of activities), the full address, the phone numbers, the fax numbers and the code, the telegraphic address, the telex and the e-mail address. If one does not use a letterhead form they should type the above-mentioned data at the top. It is advisable to use the logo to aid and promote instant recognition. If the letterhead is in Cyrillic the same data should be provided below in Spanish since Spanish-speaking audience is not familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet. Consequently, information in Cyrillic may complicate communication.

The date is typed below the letterhead at the right margin. The following format is used: date/month/year. For example: *15 de septiembre de 2002*. It should be noted that the months of the year do not begin with a capital letter in Spanish. The city where the letter was written is often added to the date line: *Madrid, a 15 de septiembre de 2002*. It is optional as the city is stated in address, but convenient for the recipient [5, p. 15].

The recipient's address (the same as on the envelope) is inserted below the date at the left margin. It is placed after the addressee's full name. The recipient name accompanied by abbreviated courtesy titles is written with a capital letter. For example:

Sr. Director

Sr. D. Fernando Martín

Sra. D^a. Isabel Miranda

Estimado(a) Sr.(Sra) González.

The name is usually inserted before the surname. In this case abbreviated courtesy titles *Sr.* (*Señor=Mr*)/*Sra.* (*Señora= Ms or Mrs*) are followed by another courtesy title *D.* (*Don*)/*D^a.* (*Doña*). The name of the street and the number of the building are written in the line below. The following line contains the post or zip code, the city and the province unless the city is the province capital. The last line of the recipient address contains the country. For example:

Sr. D. Fernando Martín

Caspe, 73

45032 - Mérida (Badajoz)

España [6, p. 27].

National peculiarity of communication in Spanish is apparent in speech etiquette, for example, when forms of address are used. Pronouns, which considerably change in their use, are of great importance in communication [7, p. 156].

The special attention should be paid to the courtesy title *don/doña*. In the Middle Ages it was an aristocratic title only. In the 16 century the treatment gradually came to be used for other social layers. For centuries to come, it became rather respectful than courtesy form of address. Nowadays the courtesy title *don/doña* is not used separately to address a person. Unlike *Mister* it must be used with a given name. No articles precede it.

The courtesy titles *don/doña* and *señor/señora* are used in the following order: *señor don Mario López, señora doña María López*. The same but a shortened form of the title is written with a capital letter and a full stop on the envelope: *S.D.Mario López, Sra D^{ña} María López* [7, p. 120-122].

The subject line should be placed with a line space below the address. The content of a subject line should be very short and to the point. It is essential to optimize records management and archiving. For example: *Asunto: envío deficiente*.

Since commercial correspondence is archived, an incoming or outgoing (reference) number is assigned to each letter. The number consists of letters and figures that refer to the location of the letter or document. Incoming numbers are necessary for the internal archive only, so they are not referred to in commercial correspondence. References to the outgoing numbers that assigned to the received letters help to arrange correspondence connected with the case. For this reason, the number of the answered letter is placed below the subject line together with the outgoing number of the letter. A comma divides them. The reference to the addressee's and addresser's letter is abbreviated: *s/ref.* (*su referencia* - your reference) or *s/escrito*; *n/ref.* (*nuestra referencia* - our reference) or *n/escrito*. For example: *s/ref.:PL/mc/98-18, n/ref.:0603/12.10.02* [8, p. 233]. An order number may also be used as a reference.

If the name of the person the letter is intended for is known, it may be placed one or two lines below the reference. The name is usually written in brackets and preceded by the word combination *a la atención de* and colon: (*A la atención de: D. José Fernández*).

A very complicated system of address exists in Spanish. However, there is a tendency to simplify and reduce the number of the forms of address in commercial correspondence. The most frequently used forms are the following:

Señor / Señores, Muy señor mío / Muy señores míos, Distinguido señor / Distinguidos señores, Estimado señor / Estimados señores, Querido amigo / Queridos amigos, Estimado colega / Estimados colegas.

The very important point to be made is the special features of addressing officials in Spain. In a letter to the Embassy of Spain to address the Ambassador one should use *Excelentísimo Señor, Su Excelencia, Vuestra Escelencia, Excelencia*. The same form corresponds to the positions

of university rectors (with the addition of *magnífico*) and vice-rectors, mayors of Madrid and Barcelona. Another form of address is *Ilustrísimo Señor*. It is applied to mayors of province capital cities and cities with population over 100 000, university deans, general managers, managers of regional and local government departments, etc.

With a view to democratizing communication the officials at middle and lower level are usually addressed as *Señor* with the addition of the post (e.g. *Señor Director General*). When addressing top-level officials, the courtesy title *Señor* may be followed by *honorable*, *excelentísimo*, *ilustrísimo* [6, p. 115].

The key feature is that the address is followed by the colon whereas the comma or exclamation mark follows it in Russian:

CONSTRUCCIONES Y DISEÑO, S.A.
Edificio MILÁN 1 – San José, 7 – Planta 16
50004 ZARAGOZA – Tel. 233 86 51 – Télex 54353 CONDI E

ENTE ARAGONÉS DE LA ENERGÍA

Avenida de Tiruel, 12

50005 ZARAGOZA

25 de noviembre de 2000

s/ref. 232/DG-4

n/ref. TR/pg

(A la atención de Dña. María Benítez) [8, p. 57].

The introduction of a commercial letter starts with one of many possible cliché phrases which usually make some reference to the topic of the letter. In an enquiry one can use the phrase *Rogamos que nos remitan cuanto antes precios para...* while in a claim more emotional phrases such as *Sentimos mucho comunicarles que los artículos ...* or *Lamentamos tener que indicarles ...* are allowed. Here is the list of [set expressions](#) for the introduction to BL:

En respuesta a su atenta carta de ...; Confirmando nuestra carta de ...; En relación a su (carta, pedido, circular, etc.) ...; Confirmando nuestra comunicación telefónica de ...; Referente a su escrito de ...; Conforme a su pedido de ...; Tenemos el gusto de comunicarles ...; Lamentamos mucho tener que anunciarles ...; Según lo convenido ...; Tenemos el deber de comunicarle ...; Nos es grato adjuntarle ...; Consideramos oportuno comunicarle ...; El objeto de nuestra carta es ...; La presente tiene por objeto comunicar a usted (es) que ...; Confirmandole (s)nuestra carta del 8 de febrero de 2009 ...; Recibimos ayer su carta de pedido de fecha 14 de mayo de 2010 acompañada del cheque número ... del Banco ... por la cantidad de ... como pago anticipado ...; El portador de la presente, Sr. ..., gran amigo, comerciante de sólido prestigio ...; Por razones de salud me veo obligado a ...; Por instrucciones del Director General debo hacerle saber ...; Me complace informarle que acabamos de poner a disposición de nuestros clientes el Nuevo Catálogo general de ...

The body is the main part of a letter where you insert the message you wish to convey. The body should be clear and concise. It may contain several paragraphs started with a new line. In case a letter touches more than one issue, they should be divided by headings written in capital letters.

The coherence is of prime importance. The body of the letter should begin with the most important points:

Valencia, 25 de noviembre de 2005

Señor:

El pasado 10 de noviembre de 2005, su banco rechazó el pago del cheque n.º 123456-L por un importe de 247,92 euros debido a la falta de fondos.

Este incidente se debe a un error que se produjo en la transferencia de mi salario a mi cuenta, puesto que acabo de cambiar de empleo y el contable de la nueva empresa cometió un error en el momento de registrar mi número de cuenta. Le adjunto un certificado de la empresa que da fe de este error.

Tras esta incidencia, el banco me solicitó mi talonario, que le entregué el pasado 20 de noviembre, aunque me es indispensable para el pago de asuntos personales. Ahora, una vez descubierta la procedencia de error, le ruego que me sea devuelto el talonario, puesto que no soy responsable del incidente que se produjo, tal como indica el certificado adjunto. En espera de su respuesta favorable, le saludo atentamente.

The final paragraph contains closing remarks, the complimentary close, the signature, the typed name and the position of the addresser, the identification initials, the enclosures and the courtesy copies.

There is a wide range of closing remarks used in BL in Spanish. The most frequently used ones are the following: *A la espera de noticias tuyas...; En espera de sus gratas noticias...; Agradeciendo su atención...; Quedamos a su entera disposición...; Aprovechamos la ocasión para saludarles...; Sin otro particular, aprovechamos la ocasión para saludarles muy atentamente.*

The phrase used depends on the letter content. For example they may encourage addressee to continue the dialog: *A la espera de que todo merezca su conformidad...; Esperamos vernos favorecidos con sus gratos encargos para poder atenderles como Uds. merecen...; Dándole las gracias por la atención que puedan prestarnos, aprovechamos la ocasión para hacerles patente el testimonio de nuestra consideración más distinguida.*

There is the list of the most commonly used complimentary closings: *Atentamente; Muy atentamente; Le saluda atentamente; Cordialmente; Un cordial saludo; Un afectuoso saludo; Le envía un cordial saludo; Sinceramente; Le (s) saluda (amos) respetuosamente; Es su muy afecto amigo; Esperando su pronta respuesta, soy de usted, muy atentamente; Quedo atento y seguro servidor de usted; Esperando oír de Ud, quedamos muy atentamente* [9, p. 56].

It is also important to show the difference in the use of the complimentary closings. It depends on the addresser's relationship with the person receiving the letter and the level of formality contained within the body of the text. *Atentamente, Muy atentamente, Le saluda atentamente* are considered to be more formal and *Cordialmente, Un cordial saludo, Un afectuoso saludo, Le envía un cordial saludo* are less formal ones.

Written in third person, the closing remark emphasizes a high level of formality. Consequently, it demonstrates more attention and respect for the recipient.

A la espera de sus gratas noticias,

*le saluda atentamente,
Ana Rosales*

If the letter is written in first person, whether singular or plural, the complimentary close should also be used in the first person:

A la espera de sus gratas noticias,

*le saludo atentamente.
Ana Rosales*

When the company name is stated instead of the surname, it is written in capital letters:

A la espera de sus gratas noticias,

*les enviamos un afectuoso saludo
GALERÍA DE LUZ*

Another key feature of the closing remark is its short or expanded form. The short form contains either a word/phrase or a short simple sentence. The subject of the sentence is an address-

er written in third person. The extended form is a simple extended or complex sentence. For example: *les saludamos muy atentamente; aprovachamos la ocasión para saludarles muy atentamente; quedamos a su entera disposición y le saludamos atentamente; entretanto, les enviamos un cordial saludo; aprovechamos gustosos la ocasión para hacerles patente el testimonio de nuestra consideración más distinguida; les saludamos atentamente* [10, p. 78].

The signature is always right-aligned and inserted immediately below the closing. The addresser's name, surname and position should be stated.

If an individual entrepreneur signs the letter personally, they insert the signature and typed name. In case a person signs the letter on the behalf of someone else, abbreviation P. P. (por poder), P. O. (por orden) or P. A. (por autorización) is used:

P. O.

Fdo.: Pablo Billot

Pedro Valcárcer

Directror General

EL DIRECTOR GENERAL

Fdo.: Pedro Valcárcel

In the latter case the name and position of the person having signed the letter is preceded by *Fdo.:* (firmado - signed).

If the letterhead is in Cyrillic, the company address may be inserted below the typed name not to overload the letter heading:

En espera de sus gratas noticias,

Les enviamos un cordial saludo.

EMPORIVM

Fdo.: Ignacio Lacasta ,

Director de Recursos.

C/Ordoño II, 4

28003 Madrid

España

There is a sample of traditional Spanish business letter to illustrate the abovementioned key features:

CONFECCIÓN MUNDO JOVEN

C/Balmes, 122, bajo-izda.

Tlf. 93 5637199 – Fax. 93 5637721

080036 – BARCELONA (ESPAÑA)

RESIDEST, S.A.

C/Hospital, 145

08001 – BARCELONA

2 de junio de 2000

Ref.: 0451 PR/md

A la atención de: D. Fernando Álvarez

Muy señor mío:

Nos es grato ponernos en contacto con usted para solicitar su inestimable colaboración, ya que estamos tratando de actualizar todos los ficheros que poseemos con los datos de todos nuestros clientes, a fin de que la gestión de pedidos y envíos se agilice lo más posible.

Le rogamos que si es tan amable nos remita lo antes posible, y debidamente cumplimentado con todos los datos requeridos, la copia del cuestionario normalizado que adjuntamos.

Le recordamos que la información que usted nos proporcione será totalmente confidencial. Sus datos constarán únicamente en nuestros archivos y serán de uso exclusivo para las relaciones comerciales que usted mantenga con nuestra empresa.

Agradecemos de antemano su colaboración y esperamos su respuesta.

Atentamente le saluda,

*Pedro Ruigómez
Director*

Anexo: cuestionario normalizado [7, p. 168].

We thus arrived at the following conclusion that a Spanish business letter has some characteristic features:

- it is standard with the definite structure and layout;
- information provided is clear, concise and coherent;
- jargon, slang, informal and casual words are avoided;
- industry words are allowed provided that both addresser and addressee know them.

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