

CY-ICER 2014

Kazakhstani and English sales promotional letters: strategies for effective cross-cultural communication

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Abstract

In recent years, the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan has undergone significant development and, as a consequence, many business transactions are carried out between speakers of radically different languages and cultures. Therefore, the growing number of international companies and joint ventures in the Republic of Kazakhstan indicates the increasing use of English, along with Kazakh and Russian, as one of the main mediums of communication. Nowadays, in the context of modern Kazakhstani business discourse business correspondence written in Kazakh, Russian and English is extensively used in the Kazakhstani business context. However, little research has been done in this area so far. This cross-cultural study examines the communication strategies employed by Kazakhstani and English business professionals in their sales promotional letters. In addition, the language, format, organization, and tone of business correspondence reflected the values of the writers and their environment. The study makes an attempt to raise an awareness of Kazakhstani business professionals of differences in persuasive writing across languages and cultures, worth noting for developing cross-cultural understanding and communication strategies for effective intercultural business interactions in the dynamic business environment of the 21st century.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of CY-ICER 2014.

Keywords: Communication strategies, business professionals, sales promotional letters, cross-cultural analysis;

1. Introduction

The study of business persuasive correspondence regulating commercial relations of business partners has become especially crucial under present-day conditions of expanding international business contacts. In accordance

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with many researchers (Zhu, 2005; Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990; etc.), the investigation of persuasive messages in relation to business merits much attention, since business persuasive correspondences, including sales promotional letters, are “a major medium through which business companies convey their brands, ...create a catalyst effect in boosting sales volume, ...have ever affected our buying decisions as consumers, ...enhance cross-cultural intellectual exchange, [and]...contribute to modern civilization (Cheung, 2010: 354). However, despite some shared common writing conventions in business letters, some scholars reveal diversity in some rhetorical moves (Bhatia, 1993; Chakorn, 2002; Zhu, 2005), linguistic realizations (Johns, 1980; Jablin and Krone, 1984; Park et al 1998), the rhetorical appeals (Zhu, 2000; Chakorn, 2002) and politeness strategies (Powell, 1991; Zhu, 2013). Moreover, Iris Varner (1988) demonstrates that “international business communication is culture specific” (p. 55). Thus, to write letters that are effective in other countries, it is important to understand the business communication principles, particularly, appropriate communicative strategies relevant to this or that country. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important for the writers of business letters to better and more successfully transfer a pragmatic plan of business texts, since most of the intercultural breakdown the researchers examined so far is due to pragmatic and discourse rules, and not grammatical or phonological problems (Zhu, 2013; Zhu, 2005; Clyne, 2009; Schnurr, 2013; etc.).

With the economic shift of Kazakhstan in 1991 from a centrally planned economy to a democratically independent republic, the country has seen its volume of external trade increase on a global basis. Consequently, Kazakhstan is now engaged in international commercial activities with more than one hundred and seventy countries and has trading and economic agreements with more than fifty other countries under a “Most-Favoured Nations (MFN)” regime (Salykova, 2012). The growing number of international companies and joint ventures in the Republic of Kazakhstan indicates the increasing use of English, along with Kazakh and Russian, as one of the main mediums of communication.

The purpose of this study is to examine similarities and differences between three corpora - Kazakh, Russian and English business persuasive correspondence, i.e. sales promotional letters, particularly, in the areas of communicative strategies. Despite the presence of a quite wide enough spectrum of the works considering various aspects of the Kazakhstani business discourse, there is a high need for further research into the various features of business correspondence. The research is aimed at a correct perception of written business correspondence, taking into account national-cultural features (in this case English, Kazakh and Russian cultures). This guarantees a pragmatically success in local and multinational business contexts. The research findings contribute to improving pedagogical approaches in training to business English language in Kazakhstan.

The present article will first explain the research methodology and present the results of analysis in relation to the communication strategies of the Kazakhstani sales letters as compared with that of the English ones. Extracts will be quoted from the corpora to illustrate the similarities and the differences. This article will end with the main conclusions, followed by an examination of the relevant limitations and suggestions for further research and study.

2. Methodology

In this study, the business correspondence, which is under analysis, is written by Kazakhstani business professionals working in international, national and foreign companies and is produced by their international business partners. The cross-cultural variation is investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively from contrastive text linguistic and pragma linguistic perspectives.

In general, between December 2011 and September 2013, 167 sales promotional letters were collected, including 55 Kazakh, 62 Russian and 50 English sales letters. The collected sales letters turned out to be written in 3 financial, 3 manufacturing, and 4 service companies. 6 of which were located in Astana, 1 in Almaty, 2 in Atyrau and 1 in Aktau.

In collecting our data, some participating companies required us to make contact at the company level instead of contacting individuals in order to get access to the business correspondence of the company. In this connection, access has been allowed only to the limited types of letters, and all names of persons and organizations were deleted or changed prior to the delivery of data in order to preserve confidentiality. These experiences confirm St. John's (1996) observation that many companies consider their business correspondence confidential, hesitate to give researchers access to it, and prefer not to explain the business contexts.

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