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**Business Correspondence Conventions –
Differences in English / Russian / Latvian**

**Biznesa korespondences nosacījumi un to atšķirības
angļu, krievu un latviešu valodās**

Bachelor Paper

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Declaration of Academic Integrity

I hereby declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged material from any source.

Date: 16.05.2007

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Anotācija

Šis pētījums ir veltīts angļu, krievu un latviešu biznesa vēstuļu struktūru analīzei, aplūkojot struktūrelementu izkārtojuma principus. Šis darbs izpēta angļu, krievu un latviešu vēstuļu stilu, kas pamatojas uz dažādiem retoriskiem aspektiem. Pētījuma mērķis ir sistemātiski salīdzināt angļu, krievu un latviešu biznesa korespondences nosacījumus, lai atklātu to līdzības un atšķirības. Darba metodes ietvēra no dažādu avotu saņemtas informācijas apkopošanu un sistematizāciju, kas arī terminoloģijas izpēti un unificēšanu salīdzinošās analīzes nolūkam. Pētījuma rezultāti liecina, ka pastāv gan līdzības, gan atšķirības angļu, krievu un latviešu biznesa korespondences nosacījumos. Pēdējo var izskaidrot ar atšķirībām retoriskajās tradīcijās, kā arī atbilstošo valodu struktūru atšķirībām.

Abstract

The present research deals with the investigation of the structural framework of a typical English, Russian and Latvian business letter, discussing the main principles of structural elements' arrangement, as well as the characteristic features of English, Latvian and Russian business letters' style based on various rhetorical aspects. The purpose of the research was to make a systematic comparison of English, Latvian and Russian business style conventions in order to reveal their similarities and differences. The methods of research included processing and systematization of the data provided by the sources, which also involved the analysis of their terminology and its unification for the purposes of comparative analysis. The results obtained have revealed that there are both similarities and differences in English, Russian and Latvian business letters style conventions. The latter can be explained either by the differences in the rhetorical traditions or by the differences in the structure of the respective languages.

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Introduction

Serious changes that occur in foreign economic policy connected with the enlargement of the area of business cooperation cause the necessity of maintaining trade and business relations with foreign firms and require professional skills of carrying on business negotiations. Business correspondence is closely connected with practical aspects of people's life and their careers in the business world. Thus, nowadays many people enter into business correspondence that serves a variety of purposes. The most significant purpose of business correspondence is to establish and maintain business relations through formal letters. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to remind the company one has contacted of its interest in business negotiations. In order to succeed in business correspondence and meet the needs of the reader as well as the needs of the company in which a person works, it is necessary to acquire business letter writing skills. These skills comprise the knowledge of the structure of a business letter, the types of business letters, the usage of relevant terminology and some other aspects of business letter writing.

The goal of this research is to investigate the structural framework of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letter, as well as to define characteristic features of their style, and on the basis of comparative analysis to find out the differences and similarities in English, Russian and Latvian business style conventions.

Enabling objectives:

1. To investigate the main principles of arranging the structural elements of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letter on the basis of the comparative analysis.
2. To explore distinctive features of an English, Latvian and Russian business letters' style based on various rhetorical aspects.

3. On the basis of the investigation of the structure and style of an English, Latvian and Russian business letter, to make a systematic comparison of English, Latvian and Russian business style conventions.

Hypothesis:

The analysis of English, Latvian and Russian sources is expected to reveal both similarities and differences in business letters style conventions. The latter can be explained either by the differences in the rhetorical traditions or by the differences in the structure of the respective languages.

Research methods:

1. Collecting the data from the sources that provide information English, Latvian and Russian business style conventions.
2. Processing and systematization of the data provided by the sources, which also involved the analysis of their terminology and its unification for the purposes of the comparative analysis.
3. The comparative analysis of an English, Latvian and Russian business letters' structure and style.

Thus, the research will guide the reader through the main principles of structuring a business letter as well as review the main features of English, Latvian and Russian business letters' style on the basis of the analysis that aims at a systematic description of the information presented in the sources, investigating similar as well as different features of the letters' structure and style. Finally, conclusion based on the data provided in the analysis will be drawn.

The sources used in the research provide information on English, Latvian and Russian business letters' structure and style. The sources that give information on the structure of English, Latvian and Russian business letters have been published approximately at the same time, and they are the following:

1. Bjork Lennart, (1996) *Academic Writing*, where the writer discusses the structure of English business letters in the section *Business Letters*.
2. Valentīna Skujiņa (1999) *Latviešu Valoda Lietišķajos Rakstos*
3. М.В. Кирсанова (2003) *Деловая переписка*

The above-introduced sources do not vary in content, still, the amount of information they provide is different. The source that gives information on the structure of English business letters has a bigger volume than Latvian and Russian sources.

Additionally, some internet sources on the style of English and Russian business letters have been used. The sources have approximately the same year of publication and they are the following:

1. Е.А.Кутний (2005) *Бизнес-Корреспонденция на английском языке*;
И.И.Сущинский (2007) *Деловая Корреспонденция на английском языке*
2. Valentīna Skujiņa (1999) *Latviešu Valoda Lietišķajos Rakstos*
3. М.В. Кирсанова (2003) *Деловая переписка*

1. Business letters. Comparative analysis of the structure of a typical English, Latvian and Russian formal letter

Before performing the analysis of the structure of a typical English, Latvian and Russian formal letter, it is relevant to discuss various aspects which influence the effectiveness of business letter writing.

One of them is language usage which involves grammar, punctuation, the ability of a writer to use an appropriate language style depending on the result he/she wants to achieve. Another significant principle deals with the content of the letter. The content of the letter shows whether the writer clearly states the purpose of his/her message that in its turn must be evident to the reader. It is not only the content that has an influence on the reader, but also the way the writer delivers the message. Moreover, the tone of the message that the writer uses is has an impact on the reaction of the reader. The writer must take special care not to offend the reader by the message.

Besides, there is another principle that is essential for the effectiveness of business letter writing. This is the order of presentation of the information or, in other words, the structure of the letter. Bjork states (1997: 372), “The most obvious characteristic of a letter is its “look”. Each element has its place and its function.” In addition, “If the correspondents do not know each other, the only clues the addressee has are those that are immediately apparent on the page. The very first judgment will be made on the basis of outer appearance. (ibid.: 373) Thus, this chapter is going to deal with characteristic elements of a formal business letter’s composition – its format and standard elements.

1. Heading (letterhead) and return address

The first element of a standard English business letter is the heading. Most companies use the letterhead. The letterhead includes the name of the company, its address as well as other significant information. The printed letterhead is important in business correspondence, as business writers can be sure that their reader will have the address for return correspondence. According to Bjork (1997: 378), the letterhead

may be placed at the top of the page, usually either centered or placed on the upper left side in the full-block style, or on the upper right side of the page in the semi-block style as well as in unblocked style. Here, several aspects concerning the format of a typical English letter should be specified. Generally, there are three formats that are characteristic for English business letters: the unblocked style, the fullblocked style, the semiblocked style. Bjork points out their distinctive features:

In the unblocked style, the heading, date and complimentary close are indented about two thirds of the way across the page. This also implies for the semiblocked style, but in the unblocked style the first lines of the paragraphs are indented as well. The fullblock style, in which all the text is written flush with the left-hand margin (no indentations), is widely used in companies and is suitable for letterhead stationary, company stationary at the top left-hand corner or sometimes top middle of the page. The fullblock style is easier and quicker to type because the need to indent and tabulate is eliminated.

(Bjork, 1997:373)

Further it should be stressed that the correspondence may be personal and there may be no letterhead available. In this case, the writer may substitute the printed letterhead for his/her return address, which is located as the first item on the page. Here two important aspects of the return address should be pointed out. Firstly, it should not include the writer's name and, secondly, it is placed above the date with no space between. A typical Latvian business letter starts with the return address, in which the writer should indicate his/her name and surname; work status; an establishment in which he/she works; street number; city, index; country. A typical Russian business letter starts with the return address that is placed on the upper left side of the letter likewise. It can also start with the name of the organization that sends the letter.

2. Date

The date, in its turn, is placed immediately after the return address or the heading in both English and Latvian letter. In an English letter, the date consists of the month, followed by the date, a comma and the year. For example: April 6, 2005. In reality, there are two variants of writing the date. In the British variant there is a tendency to put the date first, followed by the month. For example: 4 July 2004. On

the contrary, the month is placed first and then the date in the American variant. For example: January 5, 2005. In Latvian letter, the date can be written in the following ways: 28. februārī; 28.02.05; 28.02.2005; 2005. gada 28. februārī. It is placed at the right margin of the letter. There is sometimes written a registration number in a Latvian letter. It is put at the left margin below the date. For example:

Rīgā
30.12.2002. Nr. 777-98

There can also be a free space left for the date of the letter as well the number of the letter. For example:

Uz/Jūsu _____ Nr. _____

The date in a Russian business letter is written in the following way: 10 мая 1999 г. or 10.05.99 as in a Latvian letter. Similarly, it is on the right upper side of the letter. In addition, Kirsanova stresses (2003: 28) that if the date in the letter includes only the year, the word 'year' is not contracted.

План на 2002 год, смета на 2002 год

If the date in the letter consists of the year and month, it is written in the following way:

В октябре 2002 г., в октябре-ноябре 2002 г., в первом полугодии 2002 г.

(ibid.: 28)

According to Kirsanova, time periods are written in the following way:

В октябре 2002 г., за 8 месяцев 2002 года, в 2002 году, с 1996 по 1990 год, в 2001-2002 годах

(ibid.: 28)

2. Inside Address

The address that follows the date is called the Inside Address. The inside address is the address of a person to whom the message is written. In the English letter the inside address is always placed at the left margin, and it begins four lines below the date. The address may contain from three to six lines and there is no punctuation at the end of the lines. It is advisable to address a person by name and

title, as it is more polite. There are different courtesy titles that can be used by the writer. For instance, *Mrs., Mr., Dr., Professor.* If the writer is not certain of a woman's title, it is possible to use a courtesy title *Ms.* rather than *Mrs.* or *Miss*, as some women do not like being addressed as *Miss* or *Mrs.* in their professional life. Sometimes the inside address is placed in the center of the letter. The following system is typical of authorities such as tax, health-care and legal authorities. In this case, the envelope for this letter is a window envelope. The inside in the Latvian letter is also placed at the left margin. The inside address is written in the following way:

A. god. J. Medņa k-gam

Jurim Kociņam

Cien. Ezeriņas k-dzei

The inside address in the Russian business letter is placed at the left margin of the letter. The surname of the recipient is written after the initials. It is considered to be more polite to put a courtesy title before the initials. For example: *Г-ну, Г-же или Г-дам.* The writer should indicate the job position of the recipient as well. After the name of the recipient the writer may write "лично", "private" "personal", "confidential".

4. Salutation

The next important element in business letters is the salutation that is placed two lines below the Inside Address in the English, Latvian and Russian letters. Salutation is a greeting, with which the writer establishes a dialogue with the recipient as well as the tone of the message. Most salutations in English business correspondence begin with "Dear". Then comes the recipient's name and professional title. In British English, the salutation ends with a comma, and there is a colon in American English. Yet, sometimes there can be no punctuation at all, both in British and American English. For example: *Dear Professor Reynolds.* If the writer does not know the gender and the name of the recipient, he/she may write *Dear Colleague.* It is advisable to avoid using initials in the salutation, as such a greeting may be considered as cold and impersonal. For example: *Dear Mr. J. B. Riddle.* If the writer is addressing a larger organization, he/she may use the following salutation: *Dear Sir/Madam.* Additionally, salutations such as *Ladies and Gentlemen* or *Dear Sir or*

Madam are preferred and used more commonly than the more traditional *Gentleman* or *To Whom It May Concern*.

In the Latvian letter there are also different types of salutations. The recipient usually addresses a woman using the salutation *Ļ. Cien.*, whereas the salutation *A. god.* is written when addressing a man. If the recipient addresses a number of people, he/she uses the salutation *Ļoti cienījamie....., Cienījamie.....,*

There are also other types of salutations when addressing to the recipient:

Augsti godātais Juri Medņa kungs

Godātais J. Medņa kgs

Godājamais Juri Medni

A. god. J. Medņa kgs

J. Medņa kgs

Direktora kungs

Godājamo professor

Cienījamā profesore

The salutation in the Russian letter is put at the left margin as well. For example:

Господа

Уважаемые господа

Уважаемый г-н

5. Subject Line

It should be emphasized that sometimes there is the subject line after the salutation in the English letter. It is advisable to use the subject line in business letters, since its purpose is to inform the recipient about the objective of the letter before reading the details. The subject line is placed two lines below the salutation. In addition, the subject line is mostly used in correspondence with large companies, and in this case it replaces the salutation. In less formal business communication the subject line is optional. On the contrary, the subject line in the Latvian letter is usually placed after the inside address. It is usually written in italics. For example:

Par sadarbības plānošanu

Par piedalīšanos konkursā

The subject line in the Russian letter is usually placed after the salutation. For example: *Re: В ответ на ваш телекс от 05 мая 2... г..*

6. Body

The body is the part of the letter in which the writer presents his/her message. Bjork describes the process of writing the body of an English business letter in the following way:

[While writing the body of an English letter, the writer should follow the ABC rule]: Accurate, Brief, and Clear. Accuracy is an important virtue in an age of overflow of information. Too much information blurs the focus, too little wastes time, causing undue irritation. Try to be precise as possible when quoting facts and figures.

(Bjork, 1997: 381)

According to F.W. King (2003: 12-13), “the letter should begin with sentences that will introduce the matter without undue delay. The letter should continue with the subject itself and all the necessary information or arguments connected with it, but the wording must carry the reader along smoothly; the letter should have a suitable ending – one that is not long but makes the reader feel that his point of view is being considered.”

In addition, there are certain characteristic features of the body of a typical English, Latvian and Russian letter that make them similar. Usually, the writer starts the body with the Opening Line in order to make reference to previous correspondence or to state the purpose of the message to the recipient. Additionally, all paragraphs of the letter should be logically linked and coherent. Thus, the information should be presented in a logical sequence, and each paragraph of the letter should be written so that it might be summarized in one phrase.

As to opening lines, in the Latvian letter it usually refers to the previous letter, or to a particular document, mentioning its date or number. Russian business letters contain opening lines likewise. They usually serve to express the reason for writing or refer to the previous letter. Still, it should be added that variations in opening lines usually depend on the type of the letter, which may be, for example, the letter of request, informative letters, thank-you letters, letters of apology.

The writer includes the supporting information in middle paragraphs and concludes the letter by a short paragraph in a typical English, Latvian or Russian letter. It should be also mentioned that the supporting information should be linked to the main idea of the letter and correspond to it logically. If the supporting paragraphs appear to be quite long, the writer should summarize the main points in the last paragraph.

The last paragraph of the message ends with a closing line with which the writer establishes goodwill and clearly informs the reader of what is expected.

Finally, it should be stressed that the information about the body of an English, Latvian and Russian letter that has been presented above includes the basic and general conventions. Yet, there are different types of business letters, and each type has its own peculiarities of presentation.

7. Complimentary close

Complimentary close is the ending of the letter. It is placed two lines below the last line of the message in the English letter, Latvian and Russian letter. The choice of the complimentary close depends on the fact whether the writer knows the recipient's name or not. If the writer knows the recipient's name, he/she may end the letter with the following standard expressions: *Yours sincerely, Sincerely, Sincerely yours*. If the writer does not know the recipient's name, he/she may end the letter with the expression *Yours faithfully*. Only the first word in the complimentary close should be capitalized. Complimentary closes in the Latvian letter may be the following: *Ar cieņu, Patiesā cieņā, Ar patiesu cieņu, Dziļā cieņā, Jūs cienot, Jūsu.....*. In the Russian letter complimentary closes may be the following: *Искренне Вам, С наилучшими пожеланиями, С искренним уважением*.

8. Signature

Finally, the whole letter ends with the signature of the writer. Usually, the writer's name and title are placed several lines below the complimentary close in the English letter. The writer's name and title may be placed on the same line, and they are separated by a comma. In the Latvian letter, the writer's name and title are placed on the right side of the letter below the complimentary close. For example:

In the Russian letter, the signature is placed at the right margin.

In business correspondence the writer may use an enclosure or attachment, if some other items are being sent with a letter. The aim of the enclosure is to remind the recipient that there is additional information enclosed in the letter. The following notation may be written: *Enclosure*. In the Latvian business letter the enclosure is written in the following way:

Pielikumā:

1. izglītības dokumenta kopija
2. 3 divas fotogrāfijas
3. izziņa par veselības stāvokli

In the Russian letter it is the following:

Приложение:

1. Контракт (5 л.)
2. Страховой полис (6 л.).

The present chapter dealt with the structure of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letter. It has revealed what the main elements of the letter are and what their purpose is. Each element of the business letter was discussed in terms of its common aspects, i.e. its place and function, and the most common variations of the elements were discussed. The purpose of this chapter was to acquaint the reader with the composition of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letter, as the “look” of the letter is a very essential aspect, especially when the writer does not know the person whom he is writing to.

Additionally, the overall aesthetic appearance is not only important as an influencing factor on a recipient you have never seen and would want to impress, it is also an important factor in terms of courtesy. A badly planned, sloppy letter is impolite, because it makes demands on the reader. The layout of a reader-oriented letter should be organized in such a way that it does not tax the eyes of the reader.

(Bjork, 1997: 375)

In conclusion, it should be stressed that every person involved in business correspondence is supposed to be acquainted with the principles of the composition of a business letter, as it helps him/her to be flexible in communication about correspondence issues.

Comparison has revealed that differences and variations in composition, structure and even the wording of business letters, both within each tradition and across them, are minor, as the structure of letters recommended by the sources in all three languages is fairly rigid and very similar.

The degree of variation allowed is minimal for several reasons.

1. The structure of a letter should be absolutely predictable to the addressee, so that he/she can focus on the contents, which may, in contrast to the format, layout and composition, be highly varied depending on the type of the letter.

2. Conforming to these conventions is a way of making business letters “user-friendly” by ensuring a common compositional framework at both “ends” of communication: the addresser and the addressee. “User-friendly”, among other things, presumes also the possibility of a quick search for the most important part of the information, while the rest may be just looked over.

3. Implicitly, conforming to conventions also shapes the image of the addresser, conveying the idea of his credibility: the knowledge and usage of conventions is to some extent a guarantee of this credibility. The addresser shows that he “belongs” to the respected business community, which has established these rules of the game, by being able to express himself following the required conventions. Implications of credibility are particularly important at the initial stages of communication in business, when it has not been tested as yet in actual business deals.

Formal requirements to composition, therefore, are related to two rhetorical requirements: taking into account the audience/reader’s needs and establishing the credibility/authority of the addresser.

2. The Style of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letter.

The art of writing business letters has significantly changed in the last decades. Jelena Kutnij stresses (2005: 9), “long sentences, complicated grammatical constructions as well as stereotypic phrases remained in the past. According to her, “Modern business letters are more delicate in style”, as modern businessmen realize the importance of business correspondence (ibid). Since business correspondence is a subtle way of communication, it is necessary to discuss certain conventions concerning the style of writing business letters.

In general, writing style is determined by several factors. First of all, the writer chooses appropriate words for his/her writing, and secondly, he arranges these words into sentences in different ways in order to create a meaning. While making these choices, the writer should be aware of the target audience, i.e. the people who will read his/her text. Thus, the writer should follow the conventions suitable in the context in which he/she is working. Therefore, there are different types of styles in written discourse.

Business-letter style has its own peculiarities in English, Latvian and Russian business correspondence. There are certain basic rules that constitute the style of a typical English, Latvian and Russian business letters, and they will be investigated further. Before presenting a profound analysis of English, Russian and Latvian business style conventions, *it should be stressed that although the composition of the sources employed varies across traditions, their description was aimed at conforming to the same pattern, using the same parameters in the same order as far as possible, in order to be able to make their systematic comparison. It should also be emphasised that even though English and Russian authors may use different terminology in their descriptions, the issues discussed are basically the same.*

According to Jelena Kutnij, the style of business letters should be courteous, convincing, concise and clear. (ibid.: 12). In other words, the tone of the letter should be polite, there should not be any needless and redundant information, and the letter should be written in plain language. Plain language means clear language, which is simple and direct. Indeed, F.W. King stresses (2003:13), “that simplicity of word and phrase usually gives the impression of sincerity. Also a style of writing which is natural to the writer carries his personality to the reader”. In writing an **English**

business letter there are certain rules/techniques for keeping the language plain. Thus, the issue of clarity in English business letters will be firstly investigated in this chapter.

1. Clarity

1.1. Clarity at the lexical level. Relevant register in word choice – degrees of formality.

A typical mistake in writing business letters is that the writer tends to make a business letter more formal than it is actually needed, making the letter less comprehensible and more distant from the reader. In addition, the writer may seem insincere to the reader. Surely, a business letter relates to a formal written discourse, but it does not mean that the writer should overuse formal words and expressions. The sentences should contain concise words rather than wordy expressions, and the language must always remain natural and clear. Thus, conciseness in wording serves as a tool of clarity. For example, according to Jelena Kutnij (2005: 13), “ the writer should write ‘later’ instead of ‘a later date’, ‘now’ instead of the ‘present time’, ‘regularly’ instead of ‘on a regular basis’, ‘we offer’ instead of ‘we are prepared to offer’ etc.

Compare the following examples:

*As we noted in the **preceding section**, if you **purchased additional printer options**, such as a second printer tray, it is a **requirement** you **verify** its correct installation.*

*As we noted in the **previous section**, if you bought extra printer equipment, such as a second printer tray, you must check you install it correctly.*

Business Letter Writing, 2003 [online]

In the examples above the first one containing highly literary words does not convey the message clearly. Therefore, it is advisable to use simple words in rendering a message in business letters.

Similarly, Karen Zucco-Gatlin also advises to use simple words in business discourse, as they make the language more natural. For example:

1. We have made alternate arrangements. **Other**
2. Have your attorney perused the document? **reviewed**
3. We endeavor to maintain inventory levels at two weeks supply. **Try / keep**

Karen Zucco-Gatlin (2004) *Writing Business Letters* [online]

On the other hand, according to Jelena Kutnij, the elements of spoken language should be avoided. She draws several phrases that contain the elements of spoken language and advises to write, ‘*you probably know*’ instead of ‘*you have probably guessed*’, ‘*the loan will be repaid*’ instead of ‘*you will get your money back*’, ‘*to invest in property*’ instead of ‘*to go into property*’. (ibid.: 50).

1.1.2. Redundancy.

The examples above that contain wordy rather than concise expressions also illustrate such aspect as redundancy. The sources recommend to avoid redundant phrases in order to achieve clarity and conciseness in business letters. Karen Zucco-Gatlin does not advise to use empty and redundant phrases, such as:

We need extra help for a period of approximately two weeks.

There is no need to worry at this point of time.

Past experience

Mutual agreement

Karen Zucco-Gatlin (2004) *Writing Business Letters* [online]

Finally, it should be stressed that since the sources on business letters in English do not have a separate section that discusses redundancy, it was necessary, analyzing the sources, to “translate” terminology in order to make a systematic comparison with the information presented in Russian sources.

1.1.1. Use of figures of speech and idioms

Another way to achieve clarity in writing business letters is to avoid the usage of idioms as well as various figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, and allegories. Jelena Kutnij advises to write, ‘*prices have increased rapidly*’ instead of

'prices have gone through the roof', 'prices are very low' instead of 'prices are at rock bottom'. (ibid.: 50). Therefore, Jelena Kutnij does not recommend to use idioms that make the text informal/colloquial. Thus, these recommendations also relate to the choice of the register.

1.1.2. Use of clichés

Jelena Kutnij advises to avoid clichés or stereotyped words and expressions, which in reality do not make business correspondence more formal. They are the so-called expletives that are meaningless or redundant. Several examples may be drawn: *'basically', 'strategic', 'in short'* and many others. (ibid.: 51).

Writing the body of an English letter, Bjork (1997: 381) also suggests avoiding business clichés such as *Enclosed please find the copies of the articles you asked for.* It is better to write: *I am enclosing the articles you asked for.*

In the whole, the requirements concerning the relevant register in word choice aim at adapting to the needs of the reader, improving the ease of the recipient's perception. In addition, following these recommendations also conveys the idea of the credibility of the addresser, enabling him/her to create the impression of sincerity in his/her letter.

1.2. Clarity at the level of sentence structure.

a) Length of sentences.

The important element that contributes to good style in writing business letters is the length of sentences. An average sentence length should be about fifteen or twenty words. In addition, the length of sentences should be balanced. This means that longer sentences should follow shorter sentences and vice versa. Furthermore, the structure of the sentences should be parallel. In other words, grammatical structures should be the same in the sentences. Thus, the overall rhythm of the writing is established and monotony is avoided. The following examples may be compared:

I refer to my letter of 13th June, and I am writing to advise you that if we do not receive your completed application form within the next fourteen days, I shall have no alternative but to arrange property insurance on the bank's block policy.

(Forty-five words)

I have not yet received your reply to my letter of 13th June. If we do not receive your completed application form within fourteen days, I shall have to arrange property insurance on the bank's block policy.

(Thirteen and twenty-four words)

Business Letter Writing, 2003 [online]

The first example contains one long sentence, whereas the second one consists of two shorter sentences. As the result two sentences make the writing more effective and understandable.

Other examples showing that long sentences do not help to achieve conciseness and simplicity may be drawn. Compare the following instances:

1. *In reply to your esteemed favour of October 19th asking if we have been able to produce a material that will not shrink when washed or lose its colour when exposed to strong sunlight, we are pleased to advise you that our research department has been at work on same and has finally succeeded in solving this problem. (fifty-eight words)*
2. *We are pleased to say that we are now manufacturing the unshrinkable, fadeless material about which you inquired on October 19th. (twenty-one word)*

(J. Kutnij, 2005: 14)

At the level of paragraphs, Jelena Kutnij advises to vary their length so that that the letter does not seem dull and monotonous to the reader. In addition, each paragraph of the letter should contain one thought. When the letter is divided into paragraphs, it is recommended to start them with such linking words/connectives as, 'moreover, in addition, besides' (ibid.: 48). Karen Zucco-Gatlin also suggests employing the connectives 'however, on the other hand, thus, therefore, consequently' that are used to express contrast and result.

Karen Zucco-Gatlin (2004) *Writing Business Letters* [online]

b) *Use of passive voice.*

Another way to achieve clarity in business writing style is to avoid using passive voice forms, which are the signs of poor business writing. Verbs in the passive make the writing dull, impersonal and sometimes even ambiguous. Therefore, Jelena Kutnij stresses (2005: 48) that the verb being used in the active form sounds more vividly, and the message is more personal. Additionally, sentences that contain verbs in active forms are shorter. Several examples may be drawn:

Your letter has been received by us... We have received your letter...

It was discovered that the salary totals were incorrect.

Business Letters, 2005 [online]

In this example, it is not clear who discovered these salary totals, thus, the doer is not known.

The Accounting Department discovered that the salary totals were incorrect.

Business Letters, 2005 [online]

In this example, it is known who discovered the salary totals. Thus, passive voice helps to achieve clarity.

Yet, regarding the usage of passive voice forms in business letters, it should be underlined that sometimes the writer uses the passive voice intentionally, as the doer may be not important. For instance, it may be not essential who actually discovered the salary totals in the above-mentioned example. In this case, the passive voice form is justified, and clarity is achieved. Still, the writer should know how many passive verbs he/she can use in his/her writing, as two or three verbs will not spoil the style of the writing, but ten and more will.

c) Nominalization

In order to preserve good style in a business letter it is recommended to use verbal forms of words rather than the nominal ones. For example, it is advisable to write '*Managers direct policy*' instead of '*Management directed policies*'.

Business Letter Writing, 2003 [online]

It should be stressed that the advice to avoid nominalization (usage of nominal clauses instead of verbal ones), which is commonly considered to be the feature of the written mode as contrasted to the spoken mode, shows that the requirement not to use

spoken language is not an absolute one. Immediacy and personalization typical of speech may be important for a business letter, and then nominalization should be kept to a minimum.

Finally, it should be underlined that the requirements to sentence structure actually aim at ensuring the ease of perception, which is also related to the needs of the reader.

It is worth noting that while Russian sources also discuss sentence structure, other aspects are covered in the corresponding sections, such as word order, the subject of the sentence and its agreement with the predicate, as well as the issue of complex sentences. Latvian sources, on the other hand do not view the issue of sentence structure at all.

1.3. Use of abbreviations

Another important point concerns abbreviations that are often used in modern business correspondence. According to Jelena Kutnij, “abbreviations should be used only in those cases when both the writer and the addressee can decode them” (ibid.: 51). In addition, abbreviations are sometimes overused. Thus, a writer should be very cautious about them, so as not to cause misunderstanding, which is likely to irritate the reader. There are some abbreviations that are international, for instance, “c.i.f. – cost, insurance and freight; c.a.f. – cost and freight” (ibid.: 52).

1.4. Use of personal pronouns

The usage of personal pronouns is also essential in writing business letters. Jelena Kutnij stresses that the writer must not refer to himself/herself in the third person, but in the first person singular. It makes the letter more natural and helps to avoid ambiguity. Thus, when the writer expresses his/her opinion, he should make use of the pronoun *I*. When the statements refer to the policy of the company, the personal pronoun *we* is used. The writer addresses the reader by the pronoun *you*. Personal pronouns, unlike nouns, acquire their meaning in a particular speech situation, thus these requirements ensure unambiguous reference and therefore contribute to clarity.

On the whole, it should be stated that the style of business letters should be *clear and concise*, and people who write letters should remember the proverb: “Brevity is the soul of wit”. Additionally, the *clarity* of business letters may be

compared to a good diction: the effectiveness of business correspondence depends on the clarity and simplicity of one's manner to render his/her thoughts.

However, the requirement of conciseness does not necessarily imply that business letters should be short. If the letter presents many descriptions, it should contain accurate and concise words and expressions rather than abstract phrases. And the last, but not the least: sometimes concise letters may seem abrupt and impolite. In this case, it is better to add several phrases that will make the letter more benevolent to the reader.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that clarity in business letters is achieved at the lexical level, at the level of sentence structure – syntax, and at the level of composition – structure and sequence of paragraphs. Linguists that provide various sources on English letter writing make an explicit link between language means used and the rhetorical effect achieved by their means. Moreover, the discussion of language means is subjected to the logic of the discussion of rhetorical goals. On the other hand, in Russian and Latvian sources there is no clear link indicated between language means and the rhetorical effect they help to attain.

2. Courtesy.

a) *Courtesy as a tool of persuasion. Tone of the letter.*

Courtesy may serve as a tool of persuasion enabling the writer to convince the reader to act in a particular way. Thus, the tone of the letter is very significant, as it also contributes to a good style of writing and serves as a demonstration of goodwill to the recipient. In addition, the tone of the letter should fit a particular social group to which a recipient belongs. The writer should be always tactful, even if the letter is unpleasant to the reader. Additionally, the writer should use such phrases as '*thank you*' or '*please*'. Thus, J.Kutnij (2005: 17) states that the letter should be reader-friendly, showing respect to the addressee, not containing words with negative connotations.

For example:

This will cut down your expenses and increase your profits. One should write:

This will save your time, work and worry.

(Kutnij, 2005:17)

In addition, Karen Zucco-Gralin recommends to avoid such words with negative connotations as:

'unfortunate', 'inefficient', 'intolerable', 'useless' 'negligence', 'failure'.

Karen Zucco-Gatlin (2004) *Writing Business Letters* [online]

Therefore, the writer should always focus on the needs of the addressee, being able to convince him/her that they are a priority.

b) Use of personal and possessive pronouns. Ways of addressing the reader and referring to the reader.

Firstly, the writer should always imagine himself/herself on the place of the reader, and be cautious about the pronouns he/she uses. Compare the following variants:

(1) Dear Mr. A,

We are sorry you misinterpreted our catalogue...

(2) Dear Mr. A,

We are sorry the description in our catalogue was not entirely clear...

(Kutnij, 2005:18)

In the first version of letter the writer might be claiming that the client was unable to understand the description in the catalogue properly, while in the second version “you” as the subject of the sentence and the agent of the action is left out. Thus, the writer admits that the description in the catalogue is not written clearly, and the issue is discussed from the point of view of the respondent, taking into account his/her interests and wishes. Therefore, the letter sounds more tactful if the reader gets the impression that the writer shares the reader’s reaction to the facts stated in the letter. For the same reason, the writer must never use phrases with possessive pronouns like *'your error'* or *'your failure'*. They may be skipped in the following way:

Because the \$630 balance on your account is now over ninety days past due, your credit rating is in jeopardy.

Business Letter Writing, 2003 [online]

The recommended version above is less personal, because the more personal one would imply that the reader should be blamed for something. Therefore, being personal is not always recommended.

Very often, however, it is stressed that the tone of the letter should be personal as much as possible. The pronouns *'I, we, you, your, yours, yourself'* are important in adding a personal touch to the letter.

Therefore, the choice between being personal and impersonal depends on the rhetorical strategy. The personal touch may help to bridge gaps between the writer and the addressee, while avoiding personal pronouns may be used so as to refrain from blaming the recipient in order not to displease him/her. Thus, the discussion of language means recommended is again subjected to rhetorical goals.

3. The image of the addresser

The image of the addresser is indeed very important in writing business letters, as it reflects his/her degree of confidence and the ability to impose on the addressee his/her point of view. The image of the addresser comprises several elements, such as *authority* and *credibility* that can be conveyed both at the lexical and grammatical levels, which will be discussed below.

The image of the addresser may be viewed on the lexical level, as the requirements concerning the relevant register in word choice convey the idea of the credibility of the addresser. In other words, communicative competence indirectly suggests business credibility. Therefore, following these recommendations enables the addresser to establish a certain degree of trust between himself/herself and the recipient of the letter.

The writer should avoid words that weaken the modality of the message in favour of more categorical statements, as the issue of strong/weak modality concerns the *authority* of the addresser. For example: *'It may be necessary to....'* or *'The company probably needs to....'* etc.

Business Letter Writing, 2003 [online]

Therefore, there are several recommendations that appear at the lexical and grammatical levels and relate to the issue of the image of the addresser. These recommendations serve to achieve several rhetorical goals, forming the image of the authoritative and reliable addresser.

4. The overall structure of the letter: Text coherence. Relation of the text to previous and subsequent communications.

According to Jelena Kutnij the first paragraph of the letter is very important as it greatly influences the reader of the letter. Generally, the opening lines in English business letters may be the following:

Thank you for your letter of (date), asking if...

We have received your letter of (date), enclosing...

We are pleased to receive...

We are writing to inquire about...

We are interested in...

We would like/are pleased to inform you...

We regret to inform you that...

We refer to your order №252...

(ibid.: 36 - 37)

It should be stressed that the opening lines usually link the letter to the preceding one, expressing references to a previous letter, regrets, and confirmations of reception, apologies and expressions of gratitude. Therefore, they also depend on the type of the letter. For example:

With reference to your letter...

We refer to our telephone conversation regarding...

Replying to your letter of... we are pleased to inform you that...

We apologize for...

Please accept our apologies...

We very much regret to say...

We were very sorry to receive your complaint that...

(ibid.: 37 - 39)

Would you please be so kind to...

Would you kindly...

We would be grateful if you..

It will be appreciated if...

We would appreciate your advice...

(ibid.: 39)

In the last paragraph, the writer is hinting that he/she is looking forward to further cooperation. According to Jelena Kutnij (2005: 41) there are several ways of expressing it:

Looking forward to receiving your reply...

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information.

I hope I have covered all the questions you asked, but please contact me if there are any other details you require.

Gratitude may be expressed in the following way:

Thank you for your assistance.

We look forward to the development of very promising and mutually beneficial cooperation between our companies

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

(ibid.: 42)

Before writing a business letter, the writer should carefully think of what he/she is going to say, as each phrase of the letter should contribute to achieving the aim set by the writer. The writer may even draw an outline for the future letter, consisting of its main points in order to achieve coherence and precision of the letter's ideas and statements. Jelena Kutnij states (2005: 10-11) that the style and tone of letter represent meaningful details, by which important conclusions about the writer and the company may be drawn.

Finally, Jelena Kutnij stresses that the style of business correspondence is constantly changing and there is a certain tendency to be observed. In other words, the style of business correspondence is becoming simpler and less formal, as people prefer to express their thoughts in a less complicated and more comprehensible way. Still, she points out (2005: 45) that style of a business letter should not be too simple, so that it does not seem impolite and abrupt to the reader.

The style of **Russian business letters** also has its own peculiarities that will be discussed below.

Vodina (1997: 94) stresses that the main feature of a Russian business letter's style is clarity, which presupposes that a business letter should be clear and accurate without any ambiguities. According to Vodina, clarity in business letters is achieved at the lexical and grammatical levels as well as at the level of sentence structure.

Clarity at the lexical level, which implies that the writer should employ the register that is appropriate to business discourse, will be discussed first.

1. Clarity.

1.1 Clarity at the lexical level. Relevant register in word choice

The language of business discourse excludes the usage of the elements of spoken language as well as the words that attribute an emotional colouring to the text. The following examples may be compared:

1) *Холодильный агрегат ЗИЛ рассчитан на многолетнюю работу без замены холодильного агента.*

2) *ЗИЛ – самый лучший и прочный холодильник. Он много лет у нас работает без ремонта.* (ibid.: 96)

In the second example the register is inappropriate for a business letter.

However, Vodina (1997: 96) emphasises that the writer should not make a business letter more formal than is actually needed, overusing formal words and expressions. As a result, the letter will be less comprehensible, making the writer more distant from the reader. For example:

Обязательным элементом зимнего содержания дороги является очистка её от снега. Instead one should write:

Необходимо очищать дорогу от снега. (ibid.)

This example also shows that in order to achieve clarity redundancy should be avoided.

Clarity at the lexical level is also achieved by using special language means, which form a relatively closed system of business discourse: relevant terminology.

a) Terms.

Legal, diplomatic and accounting terms are used in business letters in accordance with their theme and content. For example:

Импорт, контракт, просрочка, надбавка, предложение, спрос (ibid.: 94).

b) Non-terminological words

Certain groups of words that are not terminological are used in formal business discourse in order to achieve clarity. For example:

Надлежащий, должный, вышеуказанный, нижеподписавшийся, сопровождающийся, настоящий (ibid.: 94).

c) *Nouns naming people by a property determined by a particular action.*

For example:

Квартиросъёмщик, свидетель, наниматель, истец, ответчик (ibid.: 94).

d) *Verbal nouns*

Verbal nouns are widely used in formal business discourse; especially those which have the negative prefix 'не'. For example:

Невыполнение, несоблюдение, непризнание, исполнение, нахождение (ibid.: 95)

e) *Redundancy*

1. *Pleonasms*

Kirsanova points out several stylistic mistakes that may appear in the process of writing business letters. For example, the words that are redundant and do not contribute to the meaning of the message, making the sentence longer. These words are pleonasms, which are defined as the use of more words than are needed to give the sense (Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 2003, p.628). The usage of pleonasms is rooted in the improper usage of foreign words. One may come across such phrases as:

'*абсолютно новый*' instead of '*новый*', '*собранные вместе*' instead of '*собранные*' (ibid.: 37). Another examples may be drawn:

- *Промышленная индустрия* (the word 'индустрия' already involves the notion 'промышленная')

- *Форсировать строительство ускоренными темпами* (the phrase 'ускоренными темпами' is not needed)

- *Потерпеть полное фиаско* (the word 'полное' is not needed)

(ibid.: 37)

-*Памятный сувенир* (Vodina, 1997: 16)

2. *Tautology*

Tautology is the saying of the same thing twice over in different words. (Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 2003, p.852)

For example:

-*польза от использования...*

-*следует учитывать следующие факторы...*

-*данное явление проявляется в условиях...* (ibid.: 37)

f) Words-paronyms

Another problem is inability to differentiate between words-paronyms. Paronym is a word from the same root, or having the same sound as another (Chambers Giant Paperback Dictionary, 1997, p. 774).

For example:

-*Гарантийный – гарантированный*

-*Командированный – командировочный*

-*Поместить – разместить*

-*Проводить – производить*

-*Оплатить – заплатить*

(ibid.: 37)

- *Запасный – запасливый*

- *Тактичный - тактический*

(Vodina, 1997: 16)

g) Use of polysemantic verbs

Sometimes people who write business letters in Russian mix up polysemantic verbs, such as *представить – предоставить*. For example:

- *представить список необходимого оборудования*

-*предоставить транспортные средства*

(ibid.: 37)

h) Improper use of foreign words. Use of calques

Kirsanova (2003: 37) states that sometimes foreign words that already have Russian equivalents, appear in the language of business correspondence. They should be avoided for the purpose of achieving clarity. For example:

Срок выполнения может быть пролонгирован (instead of 'продлён').

Thus, there is no point of using a foreign word, if there already exists a Russian equivalent to it.

i) Use of synonyms

Vodina (1997: 98) stresses that sometimes people who write business letters do not distinguish slight differences between synonyms, as these differences appear in a particular context. For example:

Высылаем ответ на Ваше требование от 12.05.95.

The synonym 'запрос' should be used in the above-introduced sentence.

1.1.1. Phraseology. Use of phraseological units

- *Stable attribute + noun phrase*

For example:

Единовременное пособие, вышестоящие органы, установленный порядок, предварительное рассмотрение. (ibid.: 95)

Vodina (1997: 100) warns that phraseological units may be used improperly in business letters as a result of:

- 1) Lexical substitutions:

Предложения финансового отдела оказались ниже любой критики. (всякой критики)

- 2) Changing grammatical form of the words that form a phraseological unit:

Главный инженер явно покривил в душе (покривил душой)

- 3) Adding a new element that is irrelevant or redundant:

Отдать должную дань (отдать дань)

- 4) Stylistic inconsistency of a phraseological unit with the style of business discourse.

In business correspondence writers should use neutral phraseological units, lacking expressiveness and emotionality. Such phrases should be avoided:

Оставлять желать лучшего, находиться на уровне, называть вещи своими именами.

1.2 Clarity at the level of sentence structure

a) Word order

The word order in a Russian business letter (as well as in English and Latvian business letters) must reflect the logical sequence of the elements that constitute the

content of the letter. In Russian written discourse the informative role of the sentence or phrase grows towards the end. In other words, the absence of intonation in written discourse is compensated by the principle of “linear” rendering of information. Thus, the sentence commonly starts with subordinate information and ends with the principal one, so that the main information is placed after the predicate and the subordinate – before it. Thus, the rheme of a sentence or the part of a sentence that carries the greatest amount of new information is placed after the predicate. For example:

1) *В соответствии с контрактом №..., подписанным между... 12 декабря 2000 г., поставка оборудования для расширения первой очереди завода начинается в ноябре текущего года.*

2) *Ссылаясь на переговоры, проходившие в... в июле с.г. между Вашим представителем г-ном... и коммерческим директором фирмы... г-ном..., с удовольствием подтверждаем, что готовы действовать в качестве агентов по продаже Вашего оборудования в нашей стране.*

(Kirsanova, 2003: 90-91)

b) *Use of passive voice.*

Vodina stresses (1997: 95) that passive voice is employed in formal business writing in order to make the action more prominent. For example:

Оплата гарантируется, предложение одобрено, документация возвращена (ibid.: 95).

Active voice, in its turn, is used when it is necessary to indicate the doer - a particular organisation or a person. For example:

Завод «Электросталь» срывает поставку сырья

Руководитель кооператива не обеспечил технику безопасности (ibid.: 95).

It should be stressed that sources which provide information on English letter writing, investigate sentence structure, but in different aspects, such as length of the sentences, the usage of passive voice and nominalization. Notably, there are no references in English sources to word order since English as an analytical language has fixed word order, while Russian as an inflected language has free word order, which therefore makes errors in word order in Russian more likely and allows more

freedom/variation. Thus, the absence of this area in the part on English letter writing may stem from structural differences in the grammar of the language.

1.3. Clarity at the grammatical level

a) The use of the possessive case in the chain of nouns.

For example:

Для применения мер общественного воздействия, в целях широкой гласности работы органов государственного контроля (ibid.: 95).

b) Grammatical gender of nouns that denote ranks and posts

Nouns that denote posts and ranks are used in masculine gender in business discourse. For example:

Свидетель Федорова, работник милиции Савельева, профессор Емельянова (ibid.: 95)

c) Statements using negative verbal forms

For example:

Министерство не возражает, коллегия не отклоняет, учёный совет не отвергает (ibid.: 95).

d) Predicate + object phrases

For example:

Оказать помощь, произвести реконструкцию, провести расследование

They are used in contrast to such verbs as: *помочь, реконструировать, расследовать*

1.4. Use of personal pronouns

According to Vodina (1997: 120), business letters are written from the viewpoint of the third person singular, and from the first person plural, if the writer is a legal entity.

For example:

Завод «Прогресс» не возражает...

Кооператив «Поиск» гарантирует...

Фирма “уведомляет”, “сообщает”, “просит”, “предупреждает”, “примет меры”,

“Сообщаем”, “подтверждаем”, “направляем”, “отказываемся”, “просим”.

If the writer is a physical body, the action is expressed through first person singular and first person plural. For example:

Прошу...

Ставлю Вас в известность...

Довожу до Вашего сведения...

Поздравляем, поддерживаем, одобряем

Мы получили Вашу телеграмму

(ibid.: 120-121)

2. Other grammatical issues

Having investigated the issue of clarity on the grammatical level, it should be emphasised that Russian sources, in contrast to English ones, contain many recommendations on various grammatical issues that are not viewed as part of clarity, and thus will be discussed separately.

2.1. Morphology

As Russian has very rich form-building morphology, the sources explore grammatical mistakes that may appear in Russian business letters. Therefore several recommendations concerning the avoidance of corresponding mistakes will be further presented.

- *The subject of the sentence and its agreement with the predicate.*

Kirsanova points out (2003: 21) that a characteristic feature of a Russian business letter is that the subject of the sentence is often expressed not by one word, but by several word combinations. When the subject agrees with the predicate the following principle works: the doer of the action is identified not so much with an individual person as with his/her collective status. There are certain ways ensuring concord of the subject with the predicate that may be challenging for the writer of the letter.

- a. When the subject is combined with the cardinal numeral ending in “one”, the predicate is used in the singular. For example:

В 2000 году на предприятие был принят 21 специалист. (ibid.: 21)

b. When the subject is combined with the cardinal numeral meaning “two” or more, the predicate is used either in the singular or in the plural. For example:

На заседании педагогического совета будут обсуждены (будет обсуждено) два доклада (ibid).

It should be noted that when the predicate is used in the singular, the referent of subject is viewed as a single unit. For example:

Заводу выделено 12 автомашин. (ibid.)

The singular is more relevant, when the doers or objects do not participate actively in the action expressed by the predicate, or the doer is not important. For example:

Было рассмотрено три проекта. (ibid.)

The plural form of the predicate is more relevant when the writer of the letter wants to stress active participation of the doer. For example:

12 рабочих предприятия добились отличных показателей. (ibid.)

c. The subject that includes such words and word combinations as «большинство» (*majority*), «меньшинство» (*minority*), «много» (*many*), «не меньше чем» (*no less than*), «несколько» (*several*), «часть» (*a part of*) as well as indefinite and negative pronouns such as «никто», «ничто», «кое-кто» agree with the predicate by the grammatical principle. For example:

Большинство голосовало против.

Ряд предложений проекта не подкреплён расчётами. (ibid.)

d. If the subject is expressed by the pronoun «кто» (*who*), the predicate is used in the singular. For example:

Тот, кто представит лучшую программу, будет награждён.

It is worth noting that the absence of recommendations on agreement in English sources can be linked to structural differences: the issue of subject-predicate agreement in number is irrelevant when the English verb is used in all forms except for present indefinite, and in the latter case it is relevant only in the third person. In Russian, which is a synthetic language, the writer usually has to choose between the singular and plural forms of verbs.

- *Use of full and contracted forms of adjectives*

Finally, according to Kirsanova (2003: 35) there appear mistakes connected with the usage of full and contracted forms of adjectives. Writers of Russian business letters should take into account that contracted forms of the adjectives are more likely to be used in modern business correspondence, as full forms of the adjectives are perceived as belonging to the spoken mode or even substandard.

For example:

Incorrectly:

Выводы комиссии обоснованные и справедливые.

Correctly:

Выводы комиссии обоснованны и справедливы.

(ibid.: 36)

Изменение графика отпусков работников отдела нежелательное (one should write - нежелательно).

(Vodina, 1997: 99)

- *Numbers and numerals*

According to Kirsanova (2003:22), there are certain suggestions about writing numbers in Russian business letters. For example, the number 205 000 is written as *205 тыс.*

The quantity expressed in one figure is written in words but not in numbers:

e.g. *Дефектных изделий должно быть не более **трёх**.* (ibid.: 22)

Time periods are expressed in the same way:

e.g. *Испытания должны продолжаться **три-пять** дней.* (ibid.: 22)

If one-figure numbers express mass, size etc. they are written in numbers.

e.g. *требуется 2 кг масла.*

Compound adjectives that include numbers may be written in the following way:

e.g. *100-процентный, 20-километровый, 5-миллиметровый* (ibid.: 22)

2.2. *Use of connectives and prepositions*

- *Complex sentences – connectives used to join clauses and order of clauses.*

According to Kirsanova (2003:36), there are several points to be kept in mind about complex sentences containing several clauses. Subordinate clauses are commonly introduced with such conjunctions as «что», «который», «если», «чтобы», «где», «вследствие того, что», «как». If a subordinate clause clarifies one word of a principal clause, it usually follows this word. For example:

В работе совещания, на котором присутствовало более 100 человек, приняли участие...

In this case, the subordinate clause explains the main thought of the principal clause.

A subordinate clause may be also placed before a principal clause. In this case the emphasis is laid on the circumstances of the action performed. For example:

Ввиду того, что литье проводилось ускоренным методом, отжиг длился два часа.

- *Verbal government*

Kirsanova (2003: 36) stresses that sometimes writers of business letters use prepositions incorrectly. For example:

*В наше предприятие распределены на работу молодые специалисты. **One should write:***

***На** наше предприятие...*

In Russian business correspondence, the preposition “о”(about) is used quite often. For example:

-Вопрос о доверии, решение о кадрах. (ibid.)

Still, there are cases when this preposition is employed incorrectly. For example:

Управляющий банком отметил о возможности поставленного вопроса.

The correct sentence will be the following:

Управляющий банком отметил возможность поставленного вопроса.

(ibid.: 36)

Finally, it is worth noting that the issue of verbal government, when the case form of a noun and the preposition used with it depend on the lexico-semantic features of the verb, is relevant for Russian because, as a synthetic language, it has more inflectional case forms for nouns than English.

3. The elements of courtesy : ways of addressing the reader

Kirsanova (2003: 34) states there are certain ways of addressing the reader, expressing requests and gratitude as well as presenting argumentation, that are accepted in the etiquette of Russian business correspondence. For example, the reader should be addressed as *Уважаемый*. In addition, comma after the salutation attributes a more personal character to the letter. On the other hand, when an exclamation mark is placed after the salutation, it underlies an official tone of the letter.

The salutation *Уважаемые коллеги* is used to address people of the same occupation.

Additionally, according to Kirsanova (2003: 31), the pronouns ‘*You*’ and ‘*Your*’ are written with a capital letter. For example:

Прошу Вас, Сообщаем Вам

(ibid.: 31)

It should be also stressed that the pronoun ‘*I*’ (‘*я*’) is rarely used in modern business correspondence. It is advisable to write ‘*Прошу*’ instead of ‘*Я прошу*’, ‘*Мною выполнено*’ instead of ‘*Я выполнил*’. (ibid.: 34)

4. The overall structure of the letter.

a) Text composition and coherence

According to Kirsanova (2003: 19), “there are one-aspect and manifold business letters”. Manifold business letters contain stable syntactic constructions as well as several points and sub-points. In addition, each point should be started with a new paragraph. Still, in modern business correspondence in Russian, business letters are more likely to be one-aspect. Usually, one-aspect letters contain two or three parts. Kirsanova (2003: 20) states that in the first/introductory part of the letter the writer explains the reason of his/her writing. The body of the letter, in its turn, reveals the topic of the letter, thus being the most important part of the letter. Finally, follows the part, which concludes the facts expressed in the body. In addition, the concluding part may give an estimation of the information presented in the body:

Надеюсь, что эта информация Вам поможет

Пожалуйста, без колебаний свяжитесь со мной, если Вам нужна более подробная информация (ibid.: 87).

Thus, the letter should have a clear structure, containing an introductory part, stating the theme of the letter, as well as informing what is going to be said further in the letter, the body and, finally, conclusion.

On the whole, it is worth underlining that Russian sources do not provide much information about the overall structure of a letter and its coherence. Thus, the structure of a letter will be discussed mainly in connection to 'b'.

b) Relation of letter to past/future communication

Kirsanova (2003: 20) states that the introductory part/the first part in Russian business letters may start with the phrases that state facts, arguments and motives that gave occasion to write the letter. For example:

Высылаем (ю), посылаем (ю), направляем (ю), возвращаем (ю) (ibid.: 23)

Мы пишем, чтобы узнать (навести справки) о...

Мы пишем в связи с ...

Мы интересуемся (заинтересованы) и хотели бы узнать...

(ibid.: 86)

Additionally, Kirsanova (2003: 23) stresses that, "in order to explain the motives/reason of carrying out a particular action, the writer may use the following fixed expressions":

В связи с отсутствием финансовой помощи....

В связи со сложной экономической ситуацией.....

В порядке проведения совместной работы.....

В соответствии с Вашим письмом.....

В соответствии с протоколом.....

В ответ на Ваше обращение.....

В подтверждение нашей договорённости.....

В целях усиления ответственности.....

На Ваше обращение.....

В ответ на Вашу просьбу...

(ibid.: 23)

Ссылаясь на...

(Vodina, 1997: 117)

It should be stressed that the above-mentioned expressions serve as common beginnings/opening lines in Russian business letters, linking the letter to the preceding one.

According to Kirsanova (2003: 20) the second part of the letter often contains phrases that express requests, proposals or suggestions, confirmations, reminders, refusal of the request or business proposal's turndown, invitations as well as expressions of gratitude. They also serve as a link to the previous or future correspondence.

Просим оказать содействие.....

Просим принять участие.....

Прошу принять меры.....

Прошу принять к сведению.....

Прошу ликвидировать задолженность.....

Направляем информацию.....

Возвращаем справочные материалы.....

Высылаем подписанный с нашей стороны договор.....

Мы можем предложить Вам

Предлагаем Вам

Мы можем рекомендовать Вам

(Vodina, 1997: 119)

Подтверждаем.....

С благодарностью подтверждаем.....

Напоминаем Вам, что.....

Ваше предложение отклоняется по следующим причинам.....

На Ваше обращение о совместной работе считаем.....

Направленный в наш адрес проект плана совместных действий изучен.

Считаем его неприемлемым по следующим причинам.....

Сообщаем, что.....

Ставим Вас в известность, что.....

(Kirsanova, 2003: 23-24)

Приглашаем...

Просим принять участие...

(Vodina, 1997: 119)

Благодарим Вас за...

Заранее благодарим за...

Мы были бы Вам очень признательны (благодарны), если бы...

(Vodina, 1997: 119)

Eventually, the final part of the letter concludes the facts expressed in the body as well as links it to a future communication. Kirsanova stresses (2003: 43) that this part may contain the following expressions:

В связи с этим, на основании вышеизложенного (ibid.: 43).

В связи с вышесказанным (ibid.: 44).

В этой связи (ibid.: 54).

In the whole the style of a Russian business letter (as of an English and Latvian) should be concise, precise and clear, and it should not produce ambiguity. The language of the letter should be marked by accuracy and beauty.

The last issue that will be discussed in this chapter is the style of a typical **Latvian business letter**. Latvian business letters, as English and Russian ones, vary in style and structure. Yet, there are certain features attributed to the style of Latvian business letters. It is of interest to compare the difference between literary style and business letter style in Latvian written discourse to Russian and English one. Valentīna Skujiņa (1999: 125) emphasises that the aim of literary style is to arouse esthetical and emotional feelings. It is based on the expressiveness and diversity of language forms. Business letter style is applied in business correspondence; therefore it is largely based on set phrases. In addition, it uses uniform expressive means of

language in contrast to a literary style that makes use of various expressive means of language, for example synonyms.

1. Word choice

a) Business style vs. literary style

Valentīna Skujiņa (1999: 125) stresses that writing a Latvian business letter, the writer should avoid the words of subjective or emotional estimation, for instance *ļoti, gandrīz, tikko, nemaz*. In addition, the writer should avoid such redundant phrases as:

Tā sacīt jāšaka, Šī lieta, Lieta tā (tāda), ka, Kā teikt, Un tā nu, Un tā tālāk, Saprotiet, Ziniet, Kas attiecas uz, Ja runājam par, Attiecinot uz, Jāsaka.

Secondly, the letter should avoid unknown foreign words, complex words such as technical terms, as well as neologisms. Synonyms should be also used moderately.

b) Conciseness

The style of Latvian business letters becomes more elegant, if the writer makes use of such verbs as *ziņot, piekrist, palīdzēt, sakārtot, pārdot, samaksāt, noderēt*, which attribute conciseness to the letter (ibid.: 125). The writer should avoid such descriptive expressions as:

darīt zinām

dot (izteikt) piekrišanu

sniegt palīdzību

savest kārtībā

veikt pārdošanu

izdarīt samaksu

skaitīties (būt) noderīgs etc.

(ibid.: 125-126)

c) Business discourse vs. spoken discourse

Valentīna Skujiņa (1999: 125) points out that the writer should differentiate between the style of spoken discourse and the style of business discourse. For example:

Kas pārķ, tas maksa – spoken discourse

Pircējs maksā - business discourse

Additionally, the writer should avoid using contracted forms that are characteristic of spoken discourse.

2. Courtesy.

Valentīna Skujiņa (1999: 128) underlines that the writer should be aware of the phrases that will not sound tactful in Latvian business style. For example, one should not write:

1. *Jūs arvien vēl neesat atbildējis uz mūsu vēstuli.*
2. *Jūs mūsu vēstuli nepareizi sapratāt*
3. *Jūsu vēstule mums nav saprotama*
4. *Jūs esat aizmirsuši mums paziņot..*
5. *Jūsu vēstule bez datuma saņēmām šodien*

Instead of these phrases, he/she should write correspondingly:

1. *Mēs vēl neesam saņēmuši atbildi uz mūsu vēstuli*
2. *Varbūt ir noticis pārpratums*
3. *Vai Jūs savā vēstulē domājāt, ka....*
4. *Tā kā neesam saņēmuši Jūsu paziņojumu.....*
5. *Jūsu vēstule, ko saņēmām šodien.....*

In the whole, the style of a typical Latvian letter should be polite, for example, containing the following phrases:

Mēs būtu ļoti pateicīgi, ja Jūs.....

Vai Jūs lūdzu.....?

Finally, it is worth noting that the description concerning Latvian business style conventions is much briefer than English and Russian, as the sources provide less information on business letter writing in Latvian.

The next chapter will deal with the conclusion of the comparative analysis of English, Russian and Latvian business style conventions, exploring common and different features among them.

3. Conclusions of the Comparative analysis of English, Russian and Latvian business style conventions

As seen in the comparative analysis above, the style of English business letters is discussed by the sources in great detail. There are four points, containing several sub-points, which concern different aspects of English business letters' style. These points involve the discussion of clarity, courtesy, the image of the addresser and the overall structure of the letter, which are important elements in business letters' style.

The notion of clarity is discussed at the lexical level, namely the relevant register in word choice, idioms, figures of speech and clichés. Clarity is also explored at the level of sentence structure, and this section contains such sub-points as length of the sentences, the use of passive voice and nominalization. Further, abbreviations and personal pronouns are explored.

Courtesy, being an essential component in business correspondence, is viewed as a tool of persuasion, as well as an indicator of precision and punctuality. The issue of the ways of addressing the reader and referring to the reader is included in the notion of courtesy as well.

Finally, the overall structure of the letter is discussed.

Summing up the requirements concerning the style of English business letters, it should be stressed that the information discussed provides more recommendations and advice for the writers than prohibitions.

Still, there are several things, which according to the sources, should be avoided in order to achieve the clarity in business writing. They include the avoidance of passive forms, stylistic devices, complex words and of some elements of spoken language, as well as clichés. In addition, it is advised to avoid words that weaken the modality of the message. Yet, it should be added that these are mild prohibitions that are more likely to be recommendations that are expressed in a stricter way than the rest.

The sources that discuss the style of Russian business letters deal with four issues: clarity, grammatical issues, the elements of courtesy, and the overall structure of the letter. They involve clarity discussed at the lexical level, containing such sub-points as terms, non-terminological words, nouns that name people by a property

determined by a particular action as well as verbal nouns. Further, this section explores the usage of pleonasm, tautology, words-paronyms, use of polysemantic verbs as well as foreign words and synonyms. Phraseology and the use of phraseological units are also viewed in this section. Additionally, clarity is discussed at the level of sentence structure. This section includes such issues as word order and the use of passive voice. Clarity is also explored at the grammatical level, discussing the use of the possessive case in the chain of nouns, grammatical gender of nouns that denote ranks and posts, statements using negative verbal forms as well as predicate + object phrases. In addition, the sources examine the usage of personal pronouns. Russian sources also provide information on other grammatical issues which are not viewed as part of clarity. Thus, such issues as agreement of the subject with the predicate, use of full and contracted forms of the adjectives, numbers and numerals, complex sentences, and verbal government are discussed in this section.

Further, the elements of courtesy and ways of addressing the reader are explored.

Finally, the overall structure of the letter is discussed.

It should be stressed that the part discussing the style of Russian business letters contains advice and recommendations as well as emphasises stylistic mistakes that may appear, and there are no strict prohibitions.

Further, the paper discusses recommendations concerning the style of a typical Latvian letter. Firstly, such issue as the choice of words is discussed. It is stressed that the writer should try to avoid words that attribute an emotional shade to the letter as well as redundant phrases, foreign and complex words. The addresser should be aware of the phrases that attribute conciseness to a business letter. In addition, the writer should use the relevant register, being aware of the differences between spoken discourse and business discourse, avoiding the usage of contracted forms. Finally, the issue of courtesy is viewed. It is stated that the writer should always be tactful, and there are certain phrases that help to make the letter polite.

It should be stated that the issue of clarity is not mentioned in Latvian sources, as they do not discuss the above-mentioned lexical issues as part of clarity. Therefore, the description of the Latvian part differs from the English and Russian description and it is impossible to make it fully conform to the pattern of the English and Russian description.

After summing up the typical features of English, Russian and Latvian business letters' style, it is of interest to carry out comparative analysis, which will view the differences as well as similarities in English, Russian and Latvian business style conventions. The following summarizing table provides the data for the analysis.

English business style conventions	Russian business style conventions	Latvian business style conventions
Composition: layout	Composition: layout	Composition: layout
<p><u>Clarity</u></p> <p>1. Lexical level: Use of words of the relevant register – degrees of formality</p> <p>Redundancy</p>	<p><u>Clarity</u></p> <p>1. Lexical level: Use of words of the relevant register -</p> <p>a) Terms</p> <p>b) Non-terminological words</p> <p>c) Nouns that name people by a property determined by a particular action as</p> <p>d) Verbal nouns</p> <p>e) Redundancy (pleonasm, tautology)</p> <p>f) Words-paronyms</p> <p>g) Use of polysemantic verbs</p> <p>h) Foreign words</p> <p>i) Synonyms</p> <p>1.1. Phraseology</p>	<p>1. Lexical level:</p> <p>1) Use of words of the relevant register:</p> <p>a) Business style vs. literary style:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Words of subjective or emotional estimation - Foreign words - Technical terms - Neologisms - Redundancy <p>b) Conciseness</p> <p>c) Business discourse vs. spoken discourse; usage of contracted forms</p>
<p>2. Sentence structure: length, passive voice, nominalization</p>	<p>2. Sentence structure: word order, passive voice</p>	

3. Style: use of figures of speech, idioms and clichés		
4. Use of abbreviations		
5. Use of personal pronouns	5. Use of personal pronouns	
	<p>6. Clarity at the grammatical level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Use of the possessive case in the chain of nouns b) Grammatical gender of nouns that denote ranks and posts c) Statements using negative verbal forms d) Predicate + object phrases. 	
	<p>7. Grammatical issues not related to clarity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Agreement of the subject with the predicate b) Use of full and contracted forms of the adjectives c) Numbers and numerals d) Complex sentences e) Verbal government 	

<u>Courtesy:</u> a) Courtesy as a tool of persuasion, tone of the letter b) Use of pronouns, ways of addressing the reader	<u>Courtesy:</u> Ways of addressing the reader	<u>Courtesy :</u> Impolite phrases
Image of the addresser		
Overall structure and coherence	Overall structure and coherence	
Relation of a letter to past/future communication	Relation of a letter to past/future communication	

The table above depicts common and different aspects in English, Russian and Latvian business style traditions. As the description of English business style conventions is the most comprehensive one, various aspects of Russian and Latvian business style conventions will be compared to English ones. The framework and structure of the description reflected in the table does not correspond to that of the sources, it was designed by the author of the paper for the purposes of comparative analysis.

Firstly, similarities in rhetorical aspects will be discussed. Further, rhetorical aspects that are lacking in Russian and Latvian business style conventions as compared to English ones will be presented. Linguistic aspects that are subordinated to rhetorical aspects differ in three language traditions, therefore the differences in language parameters in common rhetorical aspects will be discussed. Finally, the aspects of the overall structure and coherence as well as relation of a letter to past/future communication letter will be touched upon.

On the whole, the table reflects three rhetorical aspects such as clarity, courtesy and the image of the addresser. There is only one rhetorical aspect that is present in all the three business style conventions: courtesy. Clarity is present in two business style conventions – *English and Russian*. The image of the addresser is only discussed in *English* business style conventions.

As courtesy is present in all three-language conventions, the similarities and differences of the linguistic aspects subordinated to it will be firstly considered.

English and *Russian* business style conventions have one common aspect regarding courtesy, and that is ways of addressing the reader. In addition, *English* business style conventions view courtesy as a tool of persuasion. *Latvian* business style conventions represent various phrases that help to achieve courtesy in writing business letters, and contain the smallest amount of information concerning courtesy.

The issue of such *rhetorical* aspect as clarity at the lexical level in *English* and *Russian* business letters concerns the relevant register - degrees of formality. Both *English* and *Russian* sources discuss the issue of phraseology and phraseological units. In addition, *English* sources discuss the use of abbreviations, whereas *Russian* sources discuss such topics as terms, non-terminological words, nouns that name people by a property determined by a particular action as well as verbal nouns. *Latvian* sources do not view the issue of the relevant register as part of clarity, but they still touch upon this issue, discussing business style vs. literary style and business discourse vs. spoken discourse.

The issue of clarity at the level of sentence structure is viewed differently in *English* and *Russian* sources. *English* sources discuss such aspects as length of the sentences, use of passive, and nominalization, whereas *Russian* sources, discuss word order and the use of passive. Additionally, various grammatical issues are discussed at the morphological level in Russian sources. It may be explained by the fact that Russian is a synthetic language, and the writer should be cautious about choosing the inflexions of the words.

The issue of the sentence structure is not considered in *Latvian* sources.

Finally, the use of personal pronouns is discussed in relation to clarity in *English* and *Russian* sources. Still, two descriptions of this issue differ. *English sources* stress that pronouns acquire their meaning in a particular speech situation. In addition, avoiding the usage of pronouns serves a rhetorical goal, courtesy, namely,

avoidance of blaming the reader. However, in *Russian* business style conventions this aspect is just the issue of correctness.

Latvian sources do not discuss the usage of pronouns at all.

English and *Russian* sources explore the overall structure of the letter as well provide general information on text coherence. *Latvian* sources do not view this issue.

English and *Russian* sources also discuss the issue of the relation of a letter to past/future communication, where various phrases that serve as common beginnings in the introductory part, body, and conclusion of the letter are presented, helping to relate the letter to past/future communication.

Additionally, prolonged communication makes the credibility of the addresser, or his/her rhetorical image (image of the addresser), an important factor, which explains why it is discussed in English sources (however, not in Russian ones).

After the comparative analysis based on the table several conclusions may be drawn. Recommendations on register in English sources allow some elements of spoken informal register and, on the other hand, warn against excessively formal style. Therefore, it is possible to view a business letter as a type of a written text in-between a document and an epistle, taking as a basis the classification of written texts by Y. Rozdestvenskij.

Y. Rozdestvenskij points out (1979: 66) that, generally, written texts can be divided into three types: “documents, epistles and fiction” (the classification refers to initial stages of the development of written texts and does not take into account all the variety of written/printed texts circulating today, but it serves the purposes of this discussion). The table below represents this division:

<u>Types of written texts</u>		
Documents	Epistles	Fiction

Business letters have the features of documents, as they should be responded to like documents (“response” here may imply either an action or/and a text), and on the other hand, they retain some features of personal letters, where response is

actually optional, although desirable and required by etiquette. Thus, business letters combine the features of both documents and epistles, and therefore they may be represented as an intermediate type. It is shown in the following table:

<u>Types of written texts</u>		
Documents	Epistles	Fiction
Business letters		

Business letters can also be described as an intermediate type of communication from the viewpoint of register theory developed by M.A. Halliday and his school. They distinguish between two modes of communication: “the written and the spoken mode”, discussing as two “poles” casual conversation and a novel. They point out (1996: 54), however, that “in between these poles we can situate other types of situations”.

Using the parameters of register theory (ibid.: 55-57), it should be stressed that business letters have the following features of the written mode: there is no face-to-face interaction; no visual or aural content; the language used is not spontaneous and not casual, standard grammar and “prestige” lexis is to be used.

On the other hand, there is interaction between the participants of communication in which rapid feedback is possible (e.g. by e-mail); language is used to accomplish some task.

The intermediate status of business letters in terms of register theory explains, in our view, recommendations on register in the sources, where some elements of informal language are allowed.

Finally, it should be stressed that the hypothesis put forward in the introduction stated that the analysis of English, Latvian and Russian sources is expected to reveal both similarities and differences in business letters style conventions. The latter can be explained either by the differences in the rhetorical traditions or by the differences in the structure of the respective languages. The

comparison of English, Latvian and Russian business style conventions enabled the author of the paper to prove the hypothesis.

It is worth noting that the issues analysed in the paper are essential to people who deal with business correspondence and wish to improve their knowledge of business letters' conventions. These issues are topical, as the effectiveness of business relations and negotiations depends on whether business correspondence is carried out professionally.

Theses

1. Several aspects influence the effectiveness of business letter writing. They involve language usage (grammar, punctuation, the ability of a writer to use appropriate language style depending on the goal he/she wants to achieve). Another significant aspect deals with the content of the letter.

2. It is not only the content that has an influence on the reader, but also the way in which the writer delivers the message. If the correspondents do not know each other, the only clues the addressee has are those that are immediately apparent on the page.

3. The comparison of the structure of English, Russian and Latvian business letters has revealed that differences and variations in composition and structure of business letters, both within each tradition and across them, are minor: the structure of letters recommended by the sources in all three languages is fairly rigid and very similar. The structure of a letter should be absolutely predictable to the addressee, so that he/she can focus on the content.

4. Formal requirements to composition are related to two rhetorical requirements: taking into account the audience/reader's needs and establishing the credibility/authority of the addresser.

5. Although the composition of the sources varies across traditions, their description in the paper conforms to the same pattern, using the same parameters in the same order as far as possible, in order to be able to make their systematic comparison.

6. Even though English, Latvian and Russian authors may use different terminology in their descriptions, the issues discussed are basically the same.

7. The style of English business letters involves clarity, courtesy, the image of the addresser and the overall structure of the letter. The notion of clarity is discussed at the lexical level and at the level of sentence structure. Courtesy, being an essential

component in business correspondence, is viewed as a tool of persuasion, as well as an indicator of precision and punctuality.

8. The sources that discuss the style of Russian business letters deal with four issues: clarity, grammatical issues, the elements of courtesy, and the overall structure of the letter. Clarity is discussed at the lexical and grammatical levels.

9. The issue of clarity is not discussed in Latvian sources, and the use of the relevant register is not viewed as part of clarity.

11. Recommendations on register in English sources allow some elements of spoken informal register and, on the other hand, warn against excessively formal style. Therefore, it is possible to view business letters as a type of a written text in-between a document and an epistle.

12. Business letters have the features of documents, as they should be responded to like documents, on the other hand, they retain some features of personal letters, where response is optional, although desirable and required by etiquette.

13. Business letters can also be described as an intermediate type of communication from the viewpoint of register theory developed by M.A. Halliday and his school. The intermediate status of business letters in terms of register theory explains, in our view, recommendations on register in the sources, where some elements of informal language are allowed.

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