

Discourse Analysis and Business Writing¹

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Introduction

Business writing classes are often designed on the belief that Business writing in English is entirely different from Spanish. Therefore, the classes are an attempt to teach different types of business letters to students assuming that the students have no knowledge about business correspondence in English. However, simultaneously this class is assuming that the students' knowledge about the concept of business letters in Spanish is of no value for writing in English. It is almost as if the idea of Spanish business correspondence did not exist. Therefore, the major presupposition is that there is no relationship between business correspondence in Spanish and English.

I have serious doubts about this presupposition (that is based on informal observation) that Spanish and English are entirely different when used in formal writing. Considering that written language is a relatively recent development in the language history of humankind (Halliday 1992, Yule 1985 and Crystal 1987), it seems reasonable to assume that there are similarities between languages in their written form. Especially, in a format such as business correspondence that is an even more recent development. Furthermore, business correspondence is practiced in many countries in the world and there is everyday communication between companies. I propose that there are no

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differences between Spanish and English commercial correspondence in terms of genre, discourse and grammar; the difference between the languages is in the pragmatical interpretation of the correct use of politeness.

Therefore, in this paper I will analyze a sample of commercial banking sales letters in Spanish and English to see if there really exist any significant differences and propose the pertinent suggestions for modifying the teaching of English business writing to Spanish speakers.

Theoretical Background

To begin a comparison between the written use of Spanish and English, it is necessary to first show the characteristics of written language. In language there are grammatical items that are functions of the language and lexical items that carry content. Written language has more density than spoken language in the sense that more content words are employed. The density is determined by the number of lexical items in relation to the number of grammatical items. Also, it must be noted that a lexical item of rather low frequency in the language contributes a great deal. The employment of a more common lexical item will make the writing appear less dense (Halliday 1992 and Crystal 1987). Considering that written language is of high lexical density, measured in the number (and informational load) of lexical items per clause, and a strong tendency to encode this lexical content in a nominal form: in head nouns, other item (nouns and adjectives) in the nominal group, and nominalised clause. It is these nominal structures that give the clause its enormous elasticity (Halliday 1992). «The clause is a functional unit with a triple construction of meaning: it functions simultaneously as the representation of the experience, as these are interpreted by the members of the culture; as the expression of speech function, through the categories of mood; and as the bearer of the message, which is organized in the form of theme plus exposition (Halliday 1992 p.67).» However, for this paper it is necessary not only to be able to identify written from spoken language; but to be able to classify it into a recognizable form.

The smallest unit of speaking is usually called a speech act. A larger socially recognized unit of speech activity is called a speech event. Rather the event is carried by air, paper or wire it can then be classified into a genre (Stern 1983, Yule 1985, Richards and Schmidt 1983). Genre is a fuzzy idea that was once used for definition in areas of study like: folklore, literature, linguistics and rhetoric. However, it has expanded to such a degree that now we hear about new musical genre or presidential genre (Swales 1990). In order to make this idea clearer, it is necessary to distinguish a genre, which is a unique combination of stylistic structure and mode, from using it. To grasp the difference between genre and performance, consider that a genre has a context or situation where it fits in and can be used. A genre is a recognizable style and therefore

can be used in appropriate and inappropriate situations (Coulthard 1985). Since there is a time and a place to use a particular type of genre, it is necessary to have working definition. A genre will contain the following components»:

- 1) A genre is a class of communicative events.
- 2) The principle criterion's feature that turn a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes.
- 3) Exemplars or instances of genres vary in their prototypically.
- 4) The rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form.
- 5) A discourse community's nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight (Swales 1990, pp.45-54).

« Nevertheless, being able to define genre is not enough, it must be possible to physically identify a genre. Since it is feasible to define genre in an abstract conceptual form, it would seem logical to assume that there are specific components that can be employed to create a practical way to identify a specific genre.

The ability to recognize a genre or a discourse type employs every aspect of language and context. All or any of the following may be brought into consideration for identification according to Cook (1989p.99):

- 1) Sender/Receiver
- 2) Function
- 3) Situation
- 4) Physical Form
- 5) Title
- 6) Overt Introduction
- 7) Pre-sequence
- 8) Internal Structure
- 9) Cohesion
- 10) Grammar
- 11) Vocabulary
- 12) Pronunciation
- 13) Graphology

Considering these elements, it is not at all complicated to identify a commercial bank sales letter. Any individual will determine that because of the: 1) **sender**: will have some type of formal title, 2) **function**: the document wants you to obtain a credit card or increase your use of an existing one, 3) **situation**: you would expect to receive this document in your mailbox, 4) **physical form**: a folded piece of paper in an envelope, 5)

pre-sequence: the document begins with Dear..., and 6) **graphology:** the document will be printed and contain some type of slogan or trademark related to the company (Cook 1989). However, the simple identification of a particular discourse type is not enough here. It is necessary to know to what extent there are similarities or differences between the use of written Spanish and English in commercial banking sales letters.

To decide the extent of the differences or similarities, the comparison must be taken further to look at factors that create the mutual dependence of a text. **Verb form**, in English using contractions such as 'goin' or 'you've' and in Spanish the selection of 'tu' or 'usted'. **Parallelism** that is the «repetition of a formal linguistic structure to create cohesion (Cook 1989 p.157).» **Conjunctive relations:** «What is about to be said is explicitly related to what has been said before, through such notions as contrast, result and time (Crystal 1987 p.119).» **Coreference** refers to the «features that cannot be semantically interpreted without referring to another feature in the text. Two types of relationships are recognized: **anaphoric** relations look backwards for their interpretation, and **cataphoric** relations look forwards (Crystal 1987 p.119).» **Substitution** occurs when a language feature replaces a previous expression. There are times when it is not necessary to employ any type of substitution. The word or words are simply omitted in the sentence; this is called an ellipsis (Cook 1989). **Repetition** is basically just what is says, a word is repeated several times in the text. Which leads to lexical relationships, where a series of words are used to suggest the same thing, like: the apple, the red thing, my breakfast, etc. (Cook 1989). Finally, there is comparison, where an expression is presupposed in the previous discourse (Crystal 1987). This does not mean that all will be found in credit card sales letters, but some will be; and the ones that are found will be one of the aspects of comparison between the two languages. Nevertheless, the formal links of textual dependence that create cohesion are not enough to perform a complete analysis (Cook 1989).

Looking at the scheme for the analysis of a speech act developed by Dell Hymes in 1962, a functional approach is found (Stern 1983):

- Speaker/sender/addressor
- Receiver/audience/addressee
- Speech act/message/(key/genre)
- Channel
- Situation/setting/scene
- Topic/message content
- Code/forms of speech: language, dialect, variety
- Purposes/outcomes/goals/ends (Stern 1983, p.221)

Considering a functional approach to the analysis of a commercial banking sales letter, where the point of interest is the reason or goal for using the language; the following type of division of functions could be applied:

—Questions

—Orders

Directive—Requests—Request for action—Obtain service

—Pleas

—Prayers (Cook 1989, p.27)

Following the idea that written discourse is performing some type of social function (Halliday 1973), the concepts of **coherence**, **politeness conventions**, **given-new** and **implicit-explicit**, become part of the analysis.

Comparative Analysis

Up to this point only the possible way of identification and the possible components for the analysis of written documents have been mentioned. To begin a detailed comparison actual data is necessary. For this paper I will do a comparative analysis of a commercial bank sales letter in English and in Spanish to identify the elements contained in each (one sample letter in each language is used in the paper, and are in appendices A and B). Then I will proceed with a detailed analysis and explanation of the content and meaning; highlighting their differences and similarities.

The comparative analysis of the two documents will begin in the same order as the introduction. When we make the distinction between spoken and written language, the following concepts are used: lexical density, lexical selection and the use of clauses that give the written language its flexibility (Halliday 1992). In the letter in English there is a lexical density of 62.99%, frequent use of clauses and a lexical selection of very common usage (low, variable, credit, month, reward and check). In the letter in Spanish there is a lexical density of 61.53%, frequent use of clauses and a lexical selection of less usage (*registros, inigualable, contrario, comunicación and actualizada*). This is the first difference between the written use of the two languages in commercial correspondence. The lexical selection in Spanish is less common than in English. However, the difference in the choice of lexis is due to the use of the formal Spanish tense «Usted» (Mejia Avila 1984 and Jauralde Pou 1973) and not to a fundamental difference in the two languages.

The next step is to observe the elements that can be found to identify the genre that is being used. The **sender** (Cook 1989) in both cases has an official position within the bank: in English the Senior Vice President and in Spanish el Director de Servicios a

Tarjetahabientes; which corresponds to the same position within the respective banking structures of both countries (Aguirre 1994). The **function** (Cook 1989) in both cases is the same. Both cases show the interest of the sender in that the receiver gets a credit card. The **situation** (Cook 1989) is identical. In both cases the letter arrives in a mailbox. The **physical form** is «a folded piece of paper in an envelope (Cook 1989 p.99).» Both of the letters have at the top of the page the name of the bank, following the concept of a title (Cook 1989). Each letter employs the idea of **pre-sequence**: Dear: J. Goodwin and *Apreciable: Lilia M Morales Sanchez* (Cook 1989). The number of times that logical conjunctions are employed is almost the same five in English (Through, of course, what's more, if and so) and six in Spanish (*sin embargo, a menos que, para solamente, o bien and las cuales*). Both of the letters rely highly on subordinate clauses, which relates to identification of written text (Halliday 1992) and grammar in the identification of a discourse type (Cook 1989). If the vocabulary is compared only in the sense of identification of a discourse type, the letter in English uses common language; while the letter in Spanish employs a less common and more educated vocabulary (Cook 1989). However, since this is the only difference that exists between the two languages in terms of genre identification, it is necessary to take closer look at the two letters. Based on the idea that as language becomes more specific the lexical item rather than the grammatical structure determines the way in which an event is expressed. There is an interdependent relationship between lexis and grammar (Batstone 1994). In the case of the Spanish letter a more formal or less common type of lexis is used. However, in Spanish when the formal verb usage of 'Usted' is employed, it becomes necessary for the speaker or writer to use a more formal lexis (Mejia Avila 1984). In genre classification there is a difference in the type of vocabulary that is used. However, I contended that the difference is based on a relationship of the use of the formal verb structure in Spanish, because when the informal 'tu' is used the lexis of written Spanish is much more common (Mejia Avila 1984). Also, Halliday gives support to this idea with the concept of lexicogrammatically that shows the dependence of lexis on the grammatical patterns that are being used (Halliday 1976). Grammar is 'deterministic' by contrast with lexis which is 'probabilistic'; and in the case of Spanish the formal 'Usted' determines a particular type of elevated lexis. (Halliday 1976, Mejia Avila 1984 and Jauralde Pou 1973). Even from a historical aspect this facet of the pronoun 'usted' is further supported. The development of the pronoun was a way to offer a title of distinction to a particular social class. The distinction was originally referred to as 'Vuestra Merced', which excluded them from manual labor. It gave such importance to the individual that it created a new pronoun 'usted'. It originally it had such importance that not using it was the cause of more than one death. Over time is modified into the polite way to address a person with respect (Zacks da Silva 1972). Up to this point, I think that there exist no fundamental differences in the use of the language. The difference that seems present is due to the fact that in Spanish there is a choice of using a formal or informal word for 'you'. This choice in the grammar determines the type of lexis that is applied. However,

this is not enough to determine if there are or are not differences between the written forms of the two languages. As I stated earlier, the formal links of text cohesion are not enough to perform a complete analysis (Cook 1989). Cohesion is created by many elements: pronouns, lexical chains or terms that share a common element of meaning (Yule 1985). The first aspect that leaps out is the **verb form**. «The form of the verb in one sentence can limit the choice of the verb form in the next, and we may be justified in saying that a verb form in one sentence is «wrong,» or at least 'unlikely', because it does not fit with the form in another (Cook 1989 p.15). Looking at the sample letter in English, it is easy to detect that the present and future tense are being used and that both refer to the future. Also, in each case that a verb is employed a contraction is used whenever possible. From this it can be concluded that the verb tense is helping to create a formal link of cohesion in the text. In Spanish the formal '*Usted*' is used through out the text. This verb form establishes the cohesion with the help of the lexical selection (Mejia Avila 1984). This point further supports the idea that the Spanish verb form creates the apparent difference between the two languages in the identification of the genre.

Another factor along this same line of contextual links is the use of **repetition**. There are several types of repetition: referring expressions, elegant repetition and repetition (Cook 1989). Here in both cases simple repetition and referring expression are employed. In the English letter clauses begin with the word you seven times (seven times) and most of the lexical items refer to the benefits and services of the credit card. In the Spanish letter the word you '*usted*' is used seven times to begin clauses. However in the translation this is lost to some extent, because there five places where the word '*usted*' is directly implied by the verb form. In the referring expressions, almost all the lexical items refer to the services or benefits of the credit card. Also, the lexical chains that are in both letters. In both cases most of the lexis refers to either directly or indirectly to the credit card (directly to the credit card itself or indirectly by referring to how to obtain it).

Parallelism is another link within discourse; a device that suggests some form of connection, because the sentence or clause structure is repeated (Cook 1989). In the English letter the parallelism can be seen in the repeated use of the same clause structure. In seven occasions, the clause begins: pronoun/contraction and the individual is associated with the credit card. In the Spanish letter the parallelism is slightly more subtle. In each paragraph the credit card is the topic and the receiver happens to be in a position to obtain it.

In both cases, the concepts of **verb form**, **repetition**, **lexical chains** and **parallelism** form part of the contextual link in both letters. Nevertheless, the quest for locating differences cannot end here. The use of written language is to perform a social function.

When considering that written discourse is performing a social function, the form of analyzing it becomes distinct, because a new aspect of the language is being added (Cook 1989, Stern 1983 and Halliday 1973). To start this approach, the first concept will be that of '**given-new**' (Batstone 1994, Cook 1989, Coulthard 1985, McCarthy 1991, Halliday 1973 and Halliday 1976) which is the idea that when information is transmitted it follows a certain pattern. This pattern is defined by the fact that first the receiver obtains information that is already known to him and then a piece of that was not previously known. The given information is not necessarily something that is said, it may be obvious to the reader in the context of the text (McCarthy 1991). This pattern can be seen in both letters. The Spanish example initiates with the old credit card (the individual already has one from the company) and continues concerning the new credit card. Then a continual pattern occurs of the services and benefits, but always using first the person or the credit card as a point of reference. In English the letter begins with the person being addressed (here there is not a prior credit card for initial reference) and then the credit card. Again, this constant and obvious pattern of given information and then new information is clearly present. Therefore, both languages are fulfilling the textual macro-function of the language by meeting the «requirement that language should be operationally relevant—that it should have a texture, in real contexts of situation, which distinguishes a living message from a mere entry in a grammar or a dictionary. This component provides the remaining strands of meaning potential to be woven into the fabric of linguistic structure (Halliday 1973 p.42)».

Something else to consider when comparing two texts are the elements that are clearly stated and those that are implied in the text. Even transparent, highly explicit texts are written by someone and for something, and their form is determined by these factors. Implicitness and explicitness will depend on what is being communicated to whom, rather than merely on whether the discourse is written or spoken (McCarthy 1991). Here the person who is writing and the reason for doing so is obvious to the addressee. The difference that occurs between the two letters that are being compared falls into the pragmatical differences in how the individual interprets the form in which the language should be employed within the genre.

Pragmatics can be defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in given situations. Pragmatics differs from grammar in that it is essentially goal-directed and evaluative in its interpretation. Pragmatics is in a way the thesis that communication is problem solving. An addresser or sender is attempting to find the best way to cause a desired result in the receiver or addressee by means of spoken or written language (Leech 1983). A way of approaching this aspect of the language is by looking at the **cooperative principle** and the **politeness principle**.

The **cooperative principle** suggests that all human beings know and apply four maxims that are: be true (the maxim of quality), be brief (the maxim of quantity), be relevant (the maxim of relevance) and be clear (the maxim of manner) (Cook 1989 p.29).» Using this assumption, along with general knowledge of the world, it is possible for a person to interpret the pragmatic meaning of an utterance (Cook 1989). The **politeness principle** can be separated into a series of pairs as follows:

- (I) **TACT MAXIM** (in impositives and commissives) (a) Minimize the cost to *other* [(b) Maximize the benefit to *other*],
- (II) **GENEROSITY MAXIM** (in impositives and commissives) (a) Minimize benefit to *self* [(b) Maximize cost to *self*],
- (III) **APPROBATION MAXIM** (in expressives and assertives) (a) Minimize dispraise of *other* [(b) Maximize praise of *other*],
- (IV) **MODESTY MAXIM** (in expressives and assertives) (a) Minimize praise of *self* [(b) maximize dispraise of *self*],
- (V) **AGREEMENT MAXIM** (in assertives) (a) Minimize disagreement between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize agreement between *self* and *other*],
- (VI) **SYMPATHY MAXIM** (in assertives) (a) Minimize antipathy between *self* and *other* [(b) Maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*] (Leech 1983 p.132)».

These maxims may explain the frequent utterances that we hear that transmit no new information. The sender is using some type of criterion to Figure out how to send the message. Again, people assume that these maxims are being followed in communication and are used to interpret the meaning of what is being said or written. Nevertheless, it is possible to reduce these maxims simple to three basic principles»: don't impose, give options and make your receiver feel good (Cook 1989 p.33).» The last principle that refers to making the receiver feel good plays an extremely important role in understanding the fundamental difference between the English and Spanish letters. Since according to Leech (1983) the goal of pragmatics is to find the best way to achieve a communication aim in spoken or written discourse.

In the case of the letter in English the two aspects that are the most obvious are the constant repetition of contractions and a common everyday lexis. In the letter in Spanish the two major factors are the use of the formal tense '*usted*' and a less common selection of lexis. I have already suggested that the difference in lexis between the two letters is based on grammatical differences in the two languages. Now, I will show that in both cases the letters are fulfilling the principle of making the reader feel good. The fact that this is achieved by different means is due to a cultural difference in the interpretation of the idea of politeness.

The letter in English is of American origin. In American culture there are two particular primary values of high importance, individualism and frankness (Sitaram and Cogdell 1976). These two primary values create in communication the need for being objective and treating each person according to his or hers individual external merits (Condon 1986). Furthermore, these primary values govern the idea of straight-talk; where importance is given to playing down the use of complex language and titles (Condon 1986). The basic thrust is that a person should be direct and personal, since all people are on the same level and deserve the same type of objective treatment. The objective treatment of a person and placing all people on the same level is a central part of individualism in the United States (Sitaram and Cogdell 1976). This is being communicated in the letter in English by using contractions. The use of contractions in English is reserved for informal writing. The type of writing that would be used in a personal letter to a friend or a person that the writer knows very well (Hopper 1975). The use of this form in a sales letter is due to the American culture's interpretation of how a person should be polite or make the other person feel good (Condon 1986 and Sitaram and Cogdell 1976). The sender who has a specific role in an organization is treating the receiver as a personal acquaintance. This type of attitude places both parties on the same social level.

In the letter in Spanish the same objective is accomplished, but by different means. The use of the formal tense '*usted*' communicates respect to the receiver and his special social position (Zacks da Silva 1972). This is due to the belief that the inner quality of the person is more important. The dignity or spirit of the individual must be treated with respect at all costs (Condon 1986). Flattery and the use of formal titles are very important. To make light of these is to challenge one's dignity in Mexico (Condon 1986). This focus on the inner person is because Mexicans' observe two realities in communication: objective and interpersonal (Condon 1986). The focus on the interpersonal reality to make the receiver feel good is considered more important in communication (Condon 1986). The focus on the inner person is central part of the value of human dignity, which is a primary value in Mexican culture (Sitaram and Cogdell 1976). The use of formal titles and the elevated lexis that accompany them require the use of the formal verb tense '*usted*' (Mejia Avila 1984).

Since each letter is written with the same purpose and with the same type of genre, there should exist a reason that leads many people to come to the conclusion that Spanish and English business letters are very different. In both letters there is a definite aim to make the receiver feel good. However, the cultural interpretation of the best way to accomplish this aim is different. This difference is in the pragmatical interpretation of how to correctly fulfill the requirements of the discourse type in each of the two cultures. Therefore, to be able to teach the concept of business writing in English to a Spanish speaker in Mexico, the objective should include how to correctly understand

the use of politeness in the English language in a business letter and not simply in the teaching of business writing formats.

The business writing course taught at the Language Center of the University of Guanajuato is for students who have had three years of English language study and have usually passed the Cambridge First Certificate Exam. These students due to their knowledge of two languages are falling into an error of pragmatic transfer. The use of rules of speaking from one's own native speech community when interacting with members of the host speech community or simply when speaking or writing in a second language (Wolfson 1989). Here, «transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (Odlin 1993 p.27)».

The transfer of cross-linguistic similarities and differences can produce many outcomes, which can be classified as follows: 1) Positive transfer, 2) Negative transfer: a) Underproduction, b) Overproduction c) Production errors and d) Misinterpretation and 3) Differing lengths of acquisition (Odlin 1993 p.36). Positive transfer is only determinable by comparing the success of groups with different native languages. The idea being that the similarities will help the learner acquire the language more quickly. Negative transfer is relatively easy to identify, because it involves divergences from norms in the target language (Odlin 1993). For the case of this paper it is not necessary to consider all of the possible categories. Here, the current analysis is interested in the encounter of production errors. Production errors can occur in the following manner: substitutions, calques and alterations of structures. Substitutions involve the use of the native language forms in the target language. Calques are errors that reflect very closely a native language structure. Alterations of structures or hypercorrections falls into the category of grammatical errors produced by the influence of the native language and are often translated into morphological and syntactical errors (Odlin 1993).

«Substitutions and calques are frequently the types of errors to which writers on bilingualism refer when they discuss transfer errors, and these types might suggest that transfer always involves an obvious correspondence between the native and the target languages (Odlin 1993 p.37)» This is further complemented by Krashen (1987) who suggests that the learners are falling back upon rules in their native language, when the means to achieve their communicative aim in the target language is not clear. This can be seen by observing the sample letters written by students in appendix D. The students have a tendency to employ a more formal language than in the sample letters in appendix A. This would be a more logical conclusion, since in the English language a distinction is not made in the word 'you'. It seems obvious that Spanish speakers would select from their native language a more complex lexis to make the receiver feel good. This leads to the conclusion that it is not necessary to teach Spanish

speakers in Mexico how to write business letters. The objective should be on how to develop their awareness of the pragmatic principles that govern the English language in terms of politeness, so they can express themselves as they wish, while accomplishing the goal of their communicative event in the English language.

According to Jenny Thomas (1983) these errors can be divided into two categories. The first of these is called «pragmalinguistic failure,» it is important to make the distinction of «failure» and not «error» because pragmatics cannot be judged according to the prescriptive rules of grammar. «Pragmalinguistic failure» is when the learners translate an utterance from their first language into the second language but fail to transmit their idea because the communicative conventions behind the language used are different. All that can be said is that the speaker failed to achieve his goal. The second type of «pragmatic failure» that Thomas identifies is referred to as «sociopragmatic failure.» This involves knowing what to say to whom and when to say it. This point is directly related to the cultures that are involved in the communication event (Thomas 1983). This would mean it is necessary to find a way to increase the students knowledge of pragmatics, so they can express themselves the way they choose; but still be able to function within the language expectations of the person that they are communicating with, when writing a business letter. This should not be difficult since « in general, I would suggest that the foreign learner is not noticeably more sensitive about having pragmalinguistic failure pointed out to him/her, than about having grammatical errors corrected. Insofar as s/he is prepared to learn the language at all, s/he is usually willing, if not able, to try to conform to the pragmalinguistic norms of the target language (Wolfson 1989 p.17).» Taking this into consideration the logical path to follow would be to teach business writing by incorporating the different cultural interpretation of politeness into the tasks. In order to help students acquire the ability to accomplish communicative aims in business correspondence.

To show how the interpretation of politeness from a cultural point of view can alter a student's perception of the best way to accomplish a communicative aim. I selected at random eighteen students from the semester six courses (students take the business writing course in semester seven, so these students have not yet had any courses in business writing in English. However, they are all enrolled in the International Commerce program in the University) at the Language Center and gave them the two business letter writing tasks to perform (see appendix C). Task one is an adaptation from the course book, altering the data so that it corresponds to the data in the sample letter in English (the alteration is for comparison to an actual business letter). Task two involves the same information, but the student is asked to consider the receiver as a personal acquaintance in role B and make any changes that they feel would be necessary. However, they are reminded not to forget the position that they are assuming to have at the bank.

When observing the results of role B in the exercises given to the students, four major changes in writing can be detected. There is a reduction in the complexity of the lexis employed. The letter becomes more personalized. There is some use of contractions in the writing. Finally, there is a shift in the central subject of the letter. Instead of the credit card, it switches to the person as the one receiving the benefits (Appendix D).

Of the use of lexis there is a reduction in the complexity in 44.44% of the exercise letters, which could be related to the change in the central subject of the letter being the person; which would coincide with the use of the informal 'tu' in Spanish (Mejia Avila 1984). Also, since the student is addressing a friend, it is no longer necessary to address the interpersonal reality (Condon 1986 and Mejia Avila 1984). This fact is further supplemented by the 100% modification in the personalization of the letter to the receiver in the pre-sequence. There is a substitution of a title with the individual's name (Appendix D).

Similarly, in 94.44% of the cases the central theme of the letter is no longer the benefits of the credit card itself, but the benefits to the user. This is interesting, because it coincides completely with the authentic sample letter in English, but deviates entirely from the authentic letters in Spanish (see appendices A and D). Furthermore, the fact that 16.67% employed contractions in the exercise in role B makes these letters even more similar to the authentic letters in English (Appendices A and D). In fact, all of the modifications that the students made in their letter in role B, help make the letter be more similar to the authentic sample letters in English in appendix A. This is apparently due to the lack of necessity to address the interpersonal reality by considering the receiver a friend.

Conclusion

The combination of the theoretical and practical information clearly suggests that there are no discourse or grammatical differences (with the exception of the separation of the pronoun you in to formal and informal) between Spanish and English commercial sales letters. The difference is in the pragmatical interpretation of the best way to achieve a communicative goal in formal written language. This carries direct impact on the teaching of business writing to Spanish speaking ESL students. The focus of teaching should concentrate on the interpretation of pragmatical differences and not simply of recipe letter formats for the students. Since the students already have the ability to write business letters and are clearly lacking the necessary information to orient in socially common norms their communicative aim in English. This idea is also supported by the research done by Barry Warwick and Sonya Bertini (1995) in the writing of business faxes. They found that the business writing textbooks did not give the students

the necessary discourse and pragmatic information to fulfill the students needs. In the results of their study it was necessary to employ discourse analysis and analyze the corpus of business faxes within several corporations and classify it into genres, indicating the specific components. Based on their results, they used that information to generate the teaching material and concentrated on having the students duplicate the format, content and style. There was an improvement of the students' ability to communicate by fax and the students felt that they had learned more.

Although the information presented here may not be completely conclusive, it clearly suggests the importance of discourse analysis in language teaching and the impact that it can have in improving the quality of the information in the teaching of business writing. Considering that many textbooks for teaching business writing are only concerned with the presentation of formats for writing and not the quality of information or how to correctly interpret business social situations in English speaking countries. This can easily be seen by reviewing the textbooks produced by: Fournier (1990), Frailey (1989), Pearson (1974), Castro de Bravo (1984) and Abrams and Wales (1977). These particular textbooks offer no help to the student in how to interpret the information that should be used in business writing. There are only standard formats and situations given according to the authors' opinion.

Discourse analysis is clearly the means to employ in order to determine the type of information that should be used to develop material for the ESL classroom in business writing. In order to take advantage of the knowledge that the student already has and orient the classroom towards giving the student the ability to interpret the best way to use the language skills that he already has acquired. There needs to be more emphasis on how to achieve their communicative aims in the target language.

I feel that in conclusion there are no discourse differences between Spanish and English in business sales correspondence. The native Mexican Spanish speaker is quite capable of transferring his knowledge of writing to English, when given the necessary information of how to interpret the speech event. I consider that the manner in which the teaching of business writing has been incorrectly approached. The material that is used in the classroom definitely needs to be adapted to orient the students towards how to interpret the discourse of business writing in English.

Author's note: I used credit card promotion letters, since no bank that I spoke to was willing to give me copies of actual correspondence. This was the type of letter most easily obtainable through friends and coworkers. I think it would be of great value to carry out the same analysis on other types of letters, when available.

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Appendix A

You're Pre-Approved for the

-PICTURE OF CREDIT CARD- BankAmericard Mastercard Account

- 9.9% APR
- No Annual Fee
- \$50 Balance Transfer Reward

Pre-Approved for \$3,500__

Douglas J. Goodwin
33935 McFarland Rd.
Tangent, OR 97389-9740

Dear J. Goodwin:

You've been pre-approved to receive a BankAmericard MasterCard account with No Annual Fee, a low variable annual percentage rate (APR) currently just 9.9%, * and a

Through December 1994, you'll benefit from our low variable APR which is based on the prime rate plus 3.9%- currently just 9.9%. And, of course, you'll pay no interest on purchases when the new balance is paid in full each month. generous pre-approved credit line of \$3,500.

What's more, we've enclosed an optional Balance Transfer Request, so you can reduce the amount of interest you're paying on other higher-rate credit cards. And if you transfer a total of \$1,000 or more, we'll send you a \$50 reward check. So you'll save even more.

Please complete and return the attached pre-approved Acceptance Certificate today. We'll send you the BankAmericard Mastercard account with No Annual Fee and a low introductory variable APR- currently 9.9%. If you'd like to save even more on interest and receive a \$50 reward check, simply fill in the optional Balance Transfer Request

Sincerely,

-signature-

Stephen B. Galasso,
Senior Vice President

P.S. Please respond soon-this pre-approved offer expires February 16, 1994.

Appendix B

GRUPO FINANCIERO SERFIN

LILIA M MORALES SANCHEZ
DON JOSE FCO GOMEZ 12
LOS ALCALDES
36000, GUANAJUATO, GTO.

Noviembre de 1994.

REF.:4556 1605 0693 2997

APRECIABLE: LILIA M MORALES SANCHEZ.

Nuestros registros muestran que la Tarjeta Clásica Serfin arriba indicada renovará próximamente. Sin embargo, la inactividad de esta tarjeta en los últimos meses bloqueará el envío de **La Nueva Tarjeta Serfin Clásica Visa Internacional**, a menos que Usted nos indique lo contrario.

Para continuar disfrutando de esta línea de crédito y conocer los servicios de **La Nueva Tarjeta Serfin Clásica Visa Internacional**, solamente llene y envíe la solicitud firmada que se adjunta con la información actualizada, o bien llámenos al 728-7000 en el Area Metropolitana o Lada sin costo al 91 (800~50-100 las 24 hrs. los 365 días del año, lo atenderemos con mucho gusto.

Recuerde, Serfin le brinda la mejor Tarjeta de Crédito del mercado, con servicios y beneficios inigualables. Con esta nueva Tarjeta, Usted disfrutará de especiales y exclusivas ofertas durante el año, dos de las cuales se las anexamos con esta comunicación.

Atentamente,

Francisco Javier Aviña Gómez.
Director de Servicios a Tajetahabientes.

P.D.: No olvide enviarnos la solicitud adjunta antes del 5 de diciembre para disfrutar los servicios y beneficios de la Nueva Tarjeta Serfin Clásica Internacional.

Appendix B: Translation to English

FINANCIAL GROUP SERFIN

LILIA M MORALES SANCHEZ
DON JOSE FCO GOMEZ 12
LOS ALCALDES
36000,GUANAJUATO, GTO

November 1994

ESTEEMED: LILIA M MORALES SANCHEZ

Our files show that the **Serfin Classic International Credit Card** indicated above will be renewed soon. Nevertheless, the inactivity of this credit card in the last few months will prohibit the arrival of the New Classic Visa International Credit Card, unless you indicate the contrary

To continue enjoying the credit and know the services of the new **Serfin Classic Visa International Credit Card**, just fill out and send the signed application that is enclosed with current information, or call us at 728-7000 in the Metropolitan Zone or toll free

91 (800) 50-100 24 hrs.,365 days,, a, year, we will gladly assist you.

Remember that Serfin offers you the best credit card in the market, with unequal services and benefits. With this new credit card, you will enjoy special and exclusive offers during the year, two of which we include in this communication.

Sincerely,

Francisco Javier Aviña Gómez
Director of Credit Card Services

PS.: Do not forget to send us this enclosed application before December 5 to enjoy the services and benefits of the New Serfin Classic Visa International Credit Card.

Appendix C

Business Writing TaskProcedure:

Read the situation and the role assigned to you. Using the writing guideline, write a persuasive sales letter.

Situation:

BankAmericard is preparing a pre-approved credit card sales program with the following: 9.9% annual percentage rate, no annual fee, pre-approved credit line of \$3,500 and a \$50 balance transfer reward. The offer expires November 16, 1995. The offer will be sent to a list of 200 potential clients.

Role A:

You are the Senior Vice President of sales and have decided to prepare the sales form letter.

Role B:

While reviewing the list of potential clients, you discover a friend on the mailing list. How would you rewrite the letter for him/her, trying to make the letter more personal, assuming the same situation as above (do not forget you are still the vice-president of the bank).

Writing Guideline:

- 1) Why are you writing this letter?
- 2) How will it benefit the reader?
- 3) What makes you think the reader will request the credit card?
- 4) How can you state differently how your request will benefit the reader?

Ways to address your Reader

Dear Ms. Jones

Gentlemen: (no dear)

Dear Sir: (never Sirs)

Dear (full name of person):

Now write the letter. (Adapted from Open for Business, Fournier 1990)