

## **Genre Analysis of Enquiry Letters across Cultures: Perspectives on Rhetorical Structures**

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With the globalization of business interaction, writing business letters seems to be necessary as international networks continue to expand. Identifying specific content, organization of thoughts, ideas, and references of business letters becomes clear only if one maintains generic structures of letters; yet the schematic structure of such letters have not been broadly addressed across different languages. To this end, 200 English and Persian business letters were analyzed focusing on the purpose of enquiring information from local and international companies. These letters were investigated, following Santos' (2002) model of negotiation, to explore the generic structure, lexico-grammaticality, and politeness strategies. With a few exceptions in some sub-steps, the two corpora were relatively similar in the exchange of information though they differed considerably in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies and in applying different forms of directives. The important role that an enquiry letter plays in the creation of organizational knowledge and in the functional work necessitates further cross-cultural investigations of such letters.

Keywords: business letter, generic structure, lexico-grammaticality, politeness strategies

### **1. Introduction**

Writing business letters is an essential part of business communication and their importance grows as communication networks continue to expand. The identification of specific content, organization of thoughts, ideas, and references of business letters becomes clear only if one maintains generic structures of letters, the structure that has been widely embraced by linguists and social theorists of communication, especially by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1997) in English for academic purposes. The generic structure of a business letter is shaped by communicative purposes that constrain lexico-grammatical choices and features of style and content (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1997).

Shared schematic structures as "family resemblance" (Swales 1990:49) can be observed in several recent studies on different letters (Cheung 2007; Ghadessy 1993; Kameda 2008; Santos 2002) in just one language to identify their generic configurations, but there has been little research on communicative purposes of business letters across different languages, ignoring the social, political, and cultural backgrounds in shaping generic patterns. We know little about business letters written across languages like Persian, and whether, in general, there exist any social or

cultural factors that shape writing business letters. Moreover, writing business letters is an important element of communication in the current global economy of which English plays an ever-increasingly important role at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is, thus, a clear need to recognize generic specifications of such letters, to find elements of effective communications and to find the significance of culture and the way in which language and business communication come together.

Genres change in response to users' needs and changes in the situations in which they occur (Paltridge 2005), and so text organization is affected by the context in which it occurs (Halliday and Ruqaiya 1990). Therefore, effective business writing, in particular, does not only mean producing a text to address a specific audience but how the text reflects the standards, values, and structure of the organization (Gunnarson 1997). This study, thus, attempted to shed light on genre analysis, as developed by Swales (1990) and modified by Santos (2002), in the description and explanation of the schematic structure and function of modern English and Persian letters with the purpose of requesting information, investigating the link between the opening and closing moves of the letters, and realizing formal expressions as modals, adjuncts of treaty, politeness features in light of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, and the lexico-grammatical resources of their structural forms across Persian and English. To this end, the present study intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any generic differences between English and Persian enquiry letters?
2. Are there any lexico-grammatical and textual differences as well as differences in politeness features across English and Persian enquiry letters?

### **1.1 English and Persian business letters**

According to Machan (1997), business communication in English is typical in linguistic and functional repertoire, in the kind of social practices that language mediates, and in a general sense of what language is and does. These linguistic and functional conventions have been addressed recently in composing modern English letters and they have led to different elements and parts. Each business letter should contain essential inner qualities (such as accuracy, completeness, simplicity, clarity, relevance, courtesy, and neatness) and outer qualities (color and the size of the paper) (Business studies, 2008). According to Ashley (2008:38), a letter of enquiry should contain: (1) *opening* (2) *asking for catalogs and price lists* (3) *asking for details* (4) *asking for samples, patterns, and demonstrations* (5) *suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts* (6) *asking for goods on approval or on sale or return* (7) *asking for an estimate or tender*, and (8) *closing*. It is important to achieve a suitable tone in the writing and not to be too casual or too formal. Thus, in writing a business

letter of enquiry, one should avoid jargon whenever possible, use shorter sentences rather than longer ones, avoid using passive and be perspicuous not too blunt.

There are some simple recommendations for the general structure, content, and the size of paper used in Persian business letters. According to Safi (2005) and Morteza pour (2008), business letters should have purpose, frankness, explicitness, brevity, coherence, politeness, and they should avoid exaggeration. Generally, a canonical Persian business letter, as claimed by Norgostar (2005), comprises five parts: (1) *Sarlohe* (Epigraph), (2) *Az* (Sender), *Be* (Receiver), *Mozo* (Subject of the letter) (3) *Mâetne name* (Body of the letter), (4) *MoshâxâsatEmzakonânde* (Signatory specifications, and (5) *Ronevesht* (References).

Current business communication research and practice considers the English model of business letters dominant, thus marginalizing the communicative patterns in other cultures.

## **1.2 Genre analysis of business letters**

The current study was guided by research on business letters in English-medium communities or across cultures. A few studies have investigated the linguistic and functional features of business letters (Cheung 2007; Ghadessy 1993; Gimenez 2006; Santos 2002). Ghadessy (1993) analyzed 60 English business letters for a micro-element that was realized in the *reference line* and also the *subject line*. He found out that letters have in common a number of obligatory elements which establish the generic structure potential (GPS) of this discourse genre. Ghadessy's work, though useful in identifying the generic structure potential of business letters, cannot be directly applied to other languages and cultures.

To analyze the shared communicative purposes and rhetorical features which contributed to building up business letters of negotiation, Santos (2002) investigated the generic structure of 117 commercial English letters exchanged by fax between a Brazilian company and two European companies. Despite the valuable contributions that Santos' study has for business professionals and students of English, still "a further description of this genre, focusing on each individual cultural pattern, could provide information about what is idiosyncratic or ethnic-related" (Santos 2002:187-188).

Wang (2007) collected 156 business letters from *English for International Business Communication* (2000), *International Business English* (1995), and *Foreign Trade Business Correspondence* (1999) and analyzed their characteristics within the framework of Bhatia's (1997) cognitive structuring model. All business letters covered the content of establishing business relations, enquiries and offers,

counter-offers and orders, conclusion of business, terms of payment, and establishment of amendment, shipment, insurance, complaints and claims, agencies and electronic communications. She argued that business correspondence as a genre shares the conventionalized cognitive structuring. Gimenez (2006) analyzed 123 emails for international business communication, gathered in three phases of the study. The results suggest that business emails now respond to the demands of the new world, conform to the ideologies, and provide opportunities for users to practice textual features.

Investigation of the schematic structure and communicative purposes of different texts as well as the typical textualizations across different disciplines and cultures has recently gained the attention of many researchers interested in genre analysis; however, compared to the number of business letters written, there has been little research on the generic and communicative purposes of such letters across different languages. In fact, we know little about the generic structure of business letters written cross-culturally, and whether there exist any social or cultural factors that condition writing business letters. Starting with a contrastive rhetoric view, Cheung (2007) investigated 160 Chinese and English sales letters from a database of over 10,000 sales letters collected from 36 categories of recipients in Hong Kong over a six-month period. He found that Chinese letters included, for example, more frequent references to social issues and less frequent use of pressure tactics.

The limited number of studies conducted in this area has shown that there are some variations in the use of lexico-grammatical features and generic structures in non-Western communities. With the paucity of research in this area, the current study compares Persian and English business letters of enquiry to see if there are differences in the distribution of forms and functions of various sections of a business letter.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research method**

To investigate the generic structures of business letters as well as the lexico-grammatical features, this study attempted to make use of qualitative and quantitative methods in an analytical framework. Within this framework, it was possible to investigate the interactional relation between the participants' language use and context.

## **2.2 Text selection**

The corpus comprised 100 enquiry letters obtained from Ahvaz and Tehran Oil companies, Tehran JonobSaze-Polband company, Ahvaz Sugar Cane, Natural Resources companies, and the corresponding 100 English letters were found in the net, in Ashley (2008), Naterop, Weis, and Haberfellner (2007), and UK and Germany's business correspondence with Tehran companies. The English and Persian letters – written between 2005 and 2008 – served the purpose of enquiring information from local companies. The only possible way to collect the Persian data was through a request licensed by the management team of each company; thus, having been agreed to have access to some of their letters, after excluding a large number of these letters for the purpose of confidentiality, we could successfully collect their enquiry letters. The principal reason for the selection of these letters of enquiry was the massive importance they play in the inception of business negotiation.

Though the result of this study can be used for educational purposes, some companies asked for extreme procedures to protect confidentiality. Thus, for ethical consideration, the names of the senders or receivers in the letters were deleted. In addition, the management team of the foreign merchandise of each company was given complete information about the aims of the research, how and where the data were to be stored, and what was being done to protect confidentiality.

In attempting to classify letters according to their communicative functions, and lexico-grammatical realizations, letters pose problems that other forms of discourse do not. That is, a letter can have multiple addressees with different power and social relationships to the sender. So it was decided to look at the letters sent to groups separately. It was also decided not to distinguish between commands and requests for two reasons: First, the purpose was to see what functions letters were used for, and second, in the case of multiple addressees the distinction between requests and commands was difficult to make because, depending on power relationships, sometimes what seemed a command to one addressee was just a request to another.

## **2.3 Procedure**

The analytical approach chosen in this study was that of Swales (1990) and modified by Santos (2002), that is, the resulting genre is to be analyzed in light of content, style, and also the lexico-grammatical choices, addressed by Bhatia (1997), which characterize each rhetorical function and move.

The first step was to study each letter separately in order to develop an overall image of an enquiry letter and the communicative events expressed in such letters.

Therefore, all the letters obtained were initially analyzed carefully, and only those with the communicative function of enquiry were picked out for the next phase of the study. The second step was to compare and contrast each letter with the whole corpus in order to elicit the general characteristics of enquiry letters. The focus was on the content and function of enquiry letters as addressed by Paltridge (1995:397) in that “formal aspects and structural features are to be observed in terms of content, intention and function”. This step was done twice with a time interval of about two weeks. This allowed us to go over the letters, rectify our minor faults, and agree on the method of analysis. The final step was about the frame work of formal letters which is reflected by the move structure as establishing the communicative chain, providing information, requesting information or favors, and ending. The presence and sequence of each move and structural elements for each text were cataloged to keep track of the total frequency of each move in the corpus. Then *chi*-square test was run to see whether the differences between the schematic structures of Persian and English letters were statistically significant.

#### **2.4 Models of analysis**

In introducing our study, we were moving from linguistic to textual and rhetorical structure analysis. Comparison of the existing sample of English letters of business enquiry (Ashley 2008; Naterop, et al. 2007; Santos 2002) led us to a modified model of business letters of enquiry illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1 Generic Structure of English Enquiry Letters**

Moves	Steps and Sub steps
Move 1: Establishing the negotiation chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Defining participants</li> <li>(ii) Attention to-line</li> <li>(iii) Attention to the message-line</li> <li>(iv) Reference-line</li> <li>(v) Addressing and greeting the addressee</li> </ul>
Move 2: Opening (providing information)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Provide information:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Introducing and providing information</li> <li>b) Continuing and adding</li> <li>c) Up- dating</li> <li>d) Agreeing</li> <li>e) Showing opposition (unexpected results)</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) Advising about the letter:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) By mail</li> <li>b) Along with the fax</li> <li>c) Within the fax</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Move 3: Requesting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Asking for catalogues, price lists               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Explaining / clarifying and enquiring</li> <li>b) Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance /suggestions</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) Asking for details</li> <li>(iii) Asking for samples, patterns, and demonstrations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Enquiring and Exchange of ideas</li> </ul> </li> <li>(iv) Suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance/ suggestions</li> <li>b) Asking for actions/ attitude/ help</li> </ul> </li> <li>(v) Asking for goods on approval, or on sale or return</li> <li>(vi) Asking for an estimate or tender</li> <li>(vii) Indicating wishes/ plans/ intentions/ engagement</li> </ul>
Move 4: Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Signing-off</li> <li>(ii) Signature-line</li> <li>(iii) Job status in the company</li> <li>(iv) Company credentials</li> <li>(v) Note and PS-line</li> <li>(vi) Copy to- line</li> <li>(vii) File data</li> </ul>

For the Persian letters, analysis of the corpus suggested a possible model of letters of enquiry as shown in Table 2 (See Appendix for examples of all moves).

**Table 2 Generic Structure of Persian Enquiry Letters**

Moves	Steps and sub steps
Move 1: Establishing the negotiation chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) <i>sarlohe</i> (Epigraph)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The company's arm</li> <li>b) Title of the organization</li> <li>c) The company's telephone or fax number</li> <li>d) Date</li> <li>e) Letter's number</li> <li>f) Enclosure</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) Besmehi taala (In the name of God)</li> </ul>
Move 2: Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Be (to)</li> <li>(ii) Mozo (subject)</li> <li>(iii) Ba salam (Greeting the addressees)</li> </ul>
Move 3: Matne name: (Body of the letter): Providing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Provide information:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Introduce, clarify and provide information</li> <li>b) Continuing and adding</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Move 4: Requesting information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Asking for catalogues, price lists               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Explaining / clarifying and enquiring</li> <li>b) Giving opinions/ comments/guidance/ suggestions</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) Asking for details</li> <li>(iii) Asking for samples, patterns, and demonstrations</li> <li>(iv) Suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts</li> <li>(v) Asking for an estimate or tender</li> <li>(vi) Indicating wishes/ plans/ intentions</li> </ul>
Move 5: Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Signing-off</li> <li>(ii) Name Emzakonande (Signatory name or Signature-line)</li> <li>(iii) Onvane emzakonande (Job status in the company)</li> <li>(iv) Company credentials</li> <li>(v) Note and PS-line</li> <li>(vi) <i>Ronevesht</i> (References)</li> </ul>



### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 The generic structure of English and Persian business letters

As shown in Table 3, results revealed no significant difference between the opening part of English and Persian letters – *Establishing the negotiation chain* – except for two sub-steps of *mozo* (subject) and *besmehita?la* (In the name of God). The step *Subject* was not used in English letters, and the expression *besmehita?la* (In the name of God) used above each letter in the Persian corpora was the result of social and cultural influences of context on text, so it was a discipline-independent sub-step and, as Tardy and Swales (2008:12) state, it “reveals the integral relationship between social interaction and the development of genre exemplars”. In the sub-steps of *up-dating*, *by mail*, and *within the fax*, also significant differences were observed.

The analysis developed here revealed that some moves identified by Santos (2002), such as *provide information*, *request information*, and *closing* were obligatory while some steps representing these moves like *suggesting terms*, *methods of payment*, and *discounts*, *asking for estimate and tender* were optional (See Appendix for sample letters).

The majority of Persian letters included *asking for samples*, *patterns and demonstrations*, and *asking for details* while English letters of enquiry included *asking for catalog*, *information*, and *samples*. Some steps like *introducing and providing information*, and *addressing and greeting* occurred at relatively similar frequencies across the English and Persian business letters. Significant differences could be observed in *requesting information* move in exploiting *asking for details*, *asking for samples*, *enquiring and exchange of ideas*, *suggesting terms*, *giving opinions*, *asking for goods on approval, or on sale or return*, *asking for an estimate or tender*, and *company credentials*. Other steps were not statistically different.

In terms of communicative purposes of the letters, revealed in the use of *requesting information* move, the sub-steps of *asking for samples*, *patterns and demonstrations*, *asking for details* and *giving opinions* were the most frequent in Persian letters. The differences between these parts depend mostly on the status and the social distance of the big Persian companies. A further reason is that writers in English mostly depend on their own style, individuality, and creativity in enquiring for samples or information while Persian writers follow the same style or even the same verbs in their enquiry.

Note the following examples of Move 3 (*Asking for details*) in English letters and the corresponding Move in Persian letters:

- (1) Could you tell us the CDs are the leading brand names or made by small independent companies? or Would you inform us of your latest catalogue?
- (2) We are writing to you to know your latest catalogs.
- (3) Ehteramán in sherkát jáháte hesabe ámalkárd niyaz be etela?ti dárbareye hozehaye mali be shomareye..... movárexe ..... darad. Lotfan xaheshmándést eghdamate lazem ra jáháte ersale etela?at morede neyaz mábzol náma?ed  
(Respectfully, for revenue operation, this company needs information about financial areas concerning enclosure projects with ..... number dated ..... . Would you please make the necessary efforts to send the required information.)
- (4) Ehteramán átf be nameye shomareye .....movárexe eghdamate lazem jahate ersal nemone?i áz batri ..... ra be in sherkát mabzol náma?ed.  
(Respectfully, in reference to the letter .....dated....., make the necessary efforts to send this company a sample of .....battery.)

The variation between the two corpora in applying *company credentials* is due to the known status of Persian big organizations in the local community – seeing the arm of *sherkat naft* (e.g., Oil Company) above the letter is known for every company, so writing the company’s credentials seems unnecessary – and the shared information, thus amounting to the decline of this step in Persian letters. In general, the overall generic structure of enquiry letters was compatible with Move 2 and Move 3 of Santos’ (2002) model of negotiation indicating that most writers in both English and Persian appeared to state their opinions, express power over others, find space to negotiate, and finally sign the contract of representation.

**Table 3 Chi- Square Results of English and Persian Enquiry Letters**

Moves	Steps	Sub- steps	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P- Value		
			EL	PL				
1	Establishing the negotiation chain	Defining participants	100	100	000	1.000 <sup>u</sup>		
		Attention to – line	12	2	7.143	0.008		
		Attention to the message-line	5	1	2.667	0.102		
		Reference- line	7	1	4.5	0.934		
		Addressing and greeting the addressee	100	100	0.00	1.000		
		Besmehi taala (In the name of God)	0	100	0.00	.000		
		Mozo (Subject)	1	96	93.041	.000		
		2	Providing information	Introducing and providing information	100	100	0.00	1.000
		Continuing and adding	86	94	0.356	0.551		
		Up- dating	35	10	13.889	.000		
		Agreeing	18	11	1.690	0.194		
		Showing opposition (unexpected results)	8	3	2.273	0.132		
		Advising about the letter:						
		By mail	20	6	7.538	0.006		
		Along with the fax	22	16	0.947	0.33		
		Within the fax	18	8	3.846	0.05		
3	Requesting information	Asking for catalogs, price lists	40	12	15.077	.000		
		Explaining / clarifying and enquiring	100	80	2.222	0.136		
		Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance / suggestions	68	84	1.684	0.194		
		Asking for details	22	55	14.143	.000		
		Asking for samples, patterns and demonstrations	50	88	10.464	0.001		
		Enquiring and Exchange of ideas	22	8	6.533	0.011		
		Suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts	30	14	5.818	0.016		
		Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance/ suggestions	37	64	7.218	0.007		
		Asking for actions/ attitude/ help	42	54	1.5	0.221		
		Asking for goods on approval, or on sale or return	10	1	7.364	0.007		
		Asking for an estimate or tender	25	4	15.207	.000		
		Indicating wishes/ plans/ intentions / engagement <sup>u</sup>	72	65	0.358	0.55		
		4	Closing	Signing-off	100	100	0.00	1.00
				Signature-line	100	100	0.00	1.00
	Job status in the company	98		100	0.02	.887		
	Company credentials	86		12	55.878	.00		
	Note and PS-line	18		8	3.846	.05		
	Copy to- line	10		1	7.364	.007		
	File data	24		12	4.000	0.04		

### 3.2 Textual features of English and Persian business letters

The analysis of the opening and the closing parts of English and Persian letters of enquiry pointed to some significant differences (See Tables 4 and 5). In most English letters, *Dear sir/ sirs/ Gentlemen* was considered the final step of *Establishing the negotiation chain* while in Persian the pattern *jenabe* (the contracted form of *alijenab* used in old letters)+ *aghaye* + *onvan*+ *name khanevadegi* (your Excellency + Mr. + title+ surname) marked the termination of this step, and so the *chi*-square results of this textual feature were significant.

The overuse of titles in Persian is a Persian cultural disposition, in contrast to English. This, according to Hoebe (2001:191), emanates from “situational formality or the addressors practicing more direct strategies to their addressees”. In English letters, *Dear sir/ sirs/ Gentleman/ Gentlemen* are used because of the conversational nature of the letters while *áziz* (dear) is never utilized in any Persian business letters because this Persian word is just used in more friendly and informal letters. Instead, Persian letters continue the chain of negotiation by more formal patterns, which come from the society’s expectations of its members in terms of face work and it is, in fact, the significant cultural influence of context on text. Contrary to Gains’ (1999) reporting a high frequency of messages with no opening, no enquiry letters were found with no polite *opening* or few letters with no polite *ending* were observed in both corpora.

In addition, some significant differences in the closing part of English and Persian business letters were observed. *Sincerely yours* and *best regards* were frequently used in English letters as opposed to *ba kámal táshákkor* (many thanks) in Persian letters. In some English letters, both *Thanking you* and *Sincerely yours* or *Thanking you* and *best regards* were seen.

**Table 4 Results of the Opening Step of English and Persian Enquiry Letters**

Opening	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EL	PL		
Your Excellency + Mr+ Title + Surname	0	64	72.053	.000
Respectful management+ Company's Title	0	5	2.667	0.102
Your Excellency+ sir/ Madam	0	3	1.000	0.317
Your Excellency + Title + first name + surname	0	12	12.250	.000
Your Excellency + title + Surname + Title of the person in the Organization	0	16	13.235	.000
Dear + Sir/ Sirs/ Gentlemen	87	0	84.045	.000
Dear + Addressee's first name	6	0	3.571	0.059
Dear sir/ Madam	7	0	4.500	0.034

**Table 5 Results of the Polite Closing Step of English and Persian Enquiry Letters**

Closing	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EL	PL		
Many Thanks ( <i>ba kamal e tashakkor</i> )	30	69	15.364	.000
Sincerely Yours ( <i>eradatmand e shoma</i> )	36	7	19.558	.000
Best Regards ( <i>ba taqdim e ehteram</i> )	35	18	5.453	0.20
Yours Faithfully	20	0	17.190	.000
Yours Truly	5	0	2.667	.102
No Polite Ending	4	6	.400	.527

### 3.3 Lexico-grammatical realization of English and Persian business letters

This stage of analysis brought in focus verb tense and voice, as indicated in Table 6. Verb frequencies and *chi*-square results revealed no significant differences in applying simple present tense but statistically meaningful differences were observed in applying present continuous, present perfect, simple past, and future. The differences mark how intertextuality is applied in choosing verb tense and voice. The English letter writers' main attempt is to relate the past negotiation to the present and the future cooperation while in Persian, letter writers attempt to draw the addressee's attention on the importance of present negotiation. Note the following examples in English and Persian:

- (5) With reference to your latest information, could you let us know if you allow cash discounts?

(6) Having sent our latest, If you are interested in our services, we shall send our representative to discuss.....

(7) ehteramáén, mostáéd?eáést mosháxáésat va gheymáéte foroshe eskánerhaye márbote ra be in sherkáét ta tarikhe .....ersal fáérma?ed.

(Respectfully, it is requested to send this company the mentioned scanners specifications and price lists until.....).

In addition, Persian and English letters exhibited marked tendencies in verb voice. The frequent use of passive voice in English letters can be traced back to the influence of contextual variation that is subject deletion inclination that specifies the addressor's expectations concerning the addressee's knowledge base as an expectation of existence of shared knowledge on the subject matter.

In some letters, the negotiating strategies come through the rhetorical functions that make use of such lexical options as *feel*, *wish* and *hope* to show some flexibility, as in expressions *We hope you will find it helpful....* in English, and *omid varim dar ?ayéndeye nazdik....*(We hope that in near future ...) in Persian letters. The nouns or noun groups in both corpora including *cost*, *estimate*, *budget*, *payment*, *draft*, *bills*, *price*, *invoice* in English and the corresponding expressions *gheymáét*, *páerdaxt*, *báeravord*, *pish factor* in Persian were used to indicate a high degree of demanding verbal response.

The results of lexico-grammaticality are in stark contrast to those of Cheung's (2007) study claiming that texts written for similar communicative purposes will display similarities in discourse structure across languages. In terms of personal pronouns, differences bulked large in four categories, with *I* and *we* distinguishing the English letters while *he* and *it* specifying the Persian letters (see Table 7).

The current study revealed that, in most Persian letters, the addressors tend to put the responsibility on the company or the manager by using third person singulars as in *be estehzar miresanéd....* or *be etela? miresanéd.....* (It is informed that ...) while in English letters, first person plural *we* and direct discourse were used frequently as in *we are sending you....* or *we notify you.....*, because in English, the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the speaker, and this finding is in consonance with Santos' (2002) model of negotiation, and as she states, "this choice of personal pronoun emphasizes that it is the person providing the information rather than the company or the department"(181).

In some English letters to large organizations, *if*-clause was substituted for direct interrogative by the sender asking the addressee to decide upon answering the question, and it, in fact, revealed the modality of possibility and usuality, which was

seen in just very few Persian letters as in *éégér emkan daráéd gheymát... ra befrestid* (If possible, send the price list of...). The reluctance for such indirect responses, in Persian, might be due to the need to enforce verbal response or action.

**Table 6 Results of Tense and Voice in Enquiry Letters**

Tense and Voice		F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
		EL	PL		
Tense	Simple Present	86	83	0.05	0.817
	Present continuous	33	3	25.000	.000
	Present Perfect	48	3	39.706	.000
	Simple Past	25	4	15.207	.000
	Past perfect	3	3	0.000	1.000
	Past continuous	3	1	1.000	0.317
	Future	52	8	32.267	.000
Voice	Active	40	70	8.182	0.004
	Passive	60	3	51.571	.000

**Table 7 Results of Personal Pronouns in Enquiry Letters**

Personal Pronouns	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value <sup>u</sup>
	EL	PL		
I	36	5	23.439	.000
You	4	3	0.143	0.705
She- They	0	0	0	.000
He	0	57	54.069	.000
It (The Company)	4	25	15.207	.000
We	64	10	39.405	.000

### 3.4 Politeness strategies of English and Persian business letters of enquiry

Starting with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) view of politeness strategies, we analyzed English and Persian business letters and presented the statistical results in Tables 8 and 9. To show a high degree of respect, the words *ehteramén* (respectfully), *xaheshméndést* (please), *kamala táshékor* (many thanks), *be omide* (hope that) were used in most Persian letters of enquiry. A significant difference appeared in exploiting the greeting expressions in Persian and English letters. In all Persian letters, the word *Salam* (Hello) was used but its corresponding expression was seen in just one out of 100 English letters. Similarly, the word *ehteraman* (respectfully) was, being an indispensable part of all Persian business letters, the cause of difference between English and Persian letters. Moreover, Persian and English letters were radically

different in the use of modal expressions. The word *ehteramén* (respectfully) and the greeting word *Sálam* (Hello) in the initial part of all Persian business letters, showing respect and flexibility, indicate the sharp influence of culture on textualization in contrast to English letters.

**Table 8 Results of Positive Politeness Strategies**

Positive Politeness strategies	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EL	PL		
Respectfully (Ehteraman)	0	100	97.04	.000
Please	90	65	4.032	0.045
Directness	90	80	0.588	0.443
Greeting (Hello)	5	100	85.952	.000

**Table 9 Results of Negative Politeness Strategies**

Negative Politeness strategies	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EL	PL		
Indirectness	10	20	3.333	0.068
Expressing Appreciation	55	80	4.630	0.031
Modals (Could, would...)	70	2	11.842	.000

As shown in Table 10, Persian and English writers applied different forms of directives in business letters. The radical differences were observed in interrogatives and imperatives. In most Persian letters, imperatives such as *eblagh fâermaeed* (inform), *ersal námaed* (send), and *târtibi déhid* (make some arrangements) were practiced while in English the enquiry was made through modals like *could* and *would* in English. The frequent use of imperative utterances in Persian letters in contrast to English letters (letters to small organizations) such as *mostáeda? ást* (It is requested), *lazem ást* (It is needed), *târtibi déhid* (Make some arrangements) implies the necessitating of oral response while in English letters frequent use of interrogatives in the form of *would* and *could* indicates the addressee's independence of action, and as Yunxia (2000) states, it can be related to achieving the positive and collaborative public image.

**Table 10 Results of Different Forms of Directives**

Form	F		x <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	EL	PL		
Interrogatives	48	12	21.6	.000
Imperatives	20	50	12.875	.000
Declaratives	30	14	5.818	0.016
If- Clause	22	10	4.5	0.034
Other	10	28	8.526	0.004



#### 4. Conclusion

This research aimed to make a small contribution to the study of enquiry letters to analyze linguistic features, rhetorical functions and communicative purposes practiced in these letters to determine conventionalized purposes associated with different cultural, social, and ideological backgrounds that certain people practice in designing letters. The study draws on the importance of contextualized genre analysis and explains that the institutional identity, register, style, culture, and norms determine the schematic structure and textual features of these letters. In other words, these discrepancies suggest the different perspectives on enquiry letters.

The framework suggested for letters of enquiry should contain specific characteristics that would influence demand, status, power, and interconnected cooperation—factors that have a bearing in globalization in business world. Globalization in enquiry letters can obviously be seen in categorizing letters into different generic structures, and since a simple example of globalization can be seen in even making use of a company's product name in different countries as a symbol of international interconnection, the generic structure of business enquiry letters could be globalized into *establishing negotiation chain*, *providing information*, *requesting information*, and *closing* as the general steps which are obligatory. Globalized concepts of power and status could be clearly seen in placing the company's arm on top of the business letters. This way, the specific contextual and cultural differences such as *salam* (hello) and *ehteraman* (respectfully) made in the initial part of Persian enquiry letters may be practiced and globalized in specific contexts in future.

During this experiment, the study also faced some limitations. Due to confidentiality, some companies avoided presenting their authentic business materials, and this limited access to more genuine exemplars of such letters. Moreover, this study only analyzed one type of business letters-- letters of enquiry – and so more studies including close contextual study – using interviews and questionnaires- should be performed to fulfill the wide range of business world purposes in order to shed light on generalizable features in multicultural business environments. The study presented a synthesis of linguistic and metalinguistic factors with their effects on rhetorical norms of enquiry letters. An understanding of these mechanisms could offer researchers an approach to analyzing rhetorical choices that writers make in different cultures.

## Appendix

Examples of English and Persian Letters:

Dear Mr Winford,

With reference to your advertisement in yesterday's New York Times, could you please send me a copy of your latest catalogue? I would also like to know if it is possible to make purchases online.

Yours faithfully

Jackson

---

Dear Sirs,

We have come to know from M/s Gupta & Co. that you have no representative of your mills in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

We are the reputed wholesale dealers of 'Vanaspati' 'Mustard' and 'Till oil'. Our firm is in the market for a very long time and we are the sole agents of Quality Oil Mills Ltd., and M/s Sarah Oil Works, Kaptur. We have been supplying vegetable products to many cities of eastern U.P. We also have our branches at Gasper.

We are confident that M/s Gupta & Co., of Preston and the State Bank of Preston will speak of our financial position, business dealings and integrity.

Kindly apprise us of your catalogs, terms and conditions.

Wait an early reply.

Thanking you

Yours faithfully

*N. Tanner*

Partner

Shomare : 87/fe/101

Sherkát toli di va saderati montáekhab keshváer

Sherkát .....

Sherkát mohtráém .....

Jenab aghaye moháendes .....

Ba salam

Ehteramén, peyro táemas telephoni karshenase in sherkát, mostáede ?ást dár khosose ghásde in sherkat baraye khárid yek eskáner tárjihán rángi ba sayze A0, mosháekháesat va gheymát foroshe eskánerhaye márbote ra be in sherkát ersal námaeed.

Ali Ahmadi

karshenas .....

emza

jenabe aghaye ..... modiriyát mohtaram sherkát.....

ba salam

ehteramén be estehzar miresanáed in sherkát zemne táeed pishnehad gheymát batri va modát táehvil 10 ela 12 haftei, mogháerár fáermaeed nemoneye batri morede náezár ra táhiye va be in sherkát ersal námaeed.

ba táeshakor

ehsanAsadi

emza

Move 1 Establishing the negotiation chain:

(i) Sarlohe:

(a) The company's arm:



(b) Title of the organization: National Iranian oil company

(c) The company's telephone or fax number: 06113379311

(d) Date: 87/3/30

(e) Letter's number: 105/87

(f) Enclosure: No

(ii) besmehi taala (In the name of God)

Move 2: Opening

(i) Be (to): *modiriyát mohtárm bazárgani* (respectful management of commerce)

(ii) mozo (subject): *?este?lam báha* (GPS) (Enquiring about the price GPS)

(iii) Greeting: *ba salam* (Hello)

Move 3: Provide information

(a) Introduce, clarify and provide information

(b) Continuing and adding

(ia) *ehteramán be etela miresanáed ba tavajoh be shoro? ámáliyat ejra?e pazhoheshgahe.....mostáde ?ést tártibi etexaz fáрма?ed ta.....*

(Since executive procedures of research center of..... have begun, It is requested to follow some arrangements to... )

(ib) *zemnáen ba dashtán mojáveze tarahi az ..... ghader be ánjame porozehaye moshavere niz hastim* (By the way, having the designing authorization from....., we are also capable of consulting projects).

Move 4: Requesting information:

(i) Asking for catalogues, price lists

(a) Explaining / clarifying and enquiring

(b) Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance/ suggestions

(ia) ehteramán mostád ?éást mosháxésat va gheymét foroshe eskánerhayé márbote ra be in sherkát ersal fárma?ed. (Respectfully, it is requested to send this company the mentioned scanners specifications and price lists).

(ib) xahesh máéndást jáhéte emkane estefade áz etela?ate mojud va ádémé téhmile házinehayé téhiye mojáddéd, yek nosxe áz faylha ra dár extiyar vahede GIS in sherkát ghárrar dáhid (To use the available information and to avoid further expenses, would you please place one copy of the files in GIS unit of this company).

(ii) Asking for details:

ehteramán in sherkát jáhéte hesabe áemalkárd niyaz be etela?ti dár bareye hozehaye mali be shomareye ..... movárexe ..... ást. leza xaheshmáénd ást eghdamat lazem ra jáhét ersale etela?at morede neyiaz mábzol náma?ed.

(Respectfully, for revenue operation, this company needs information about financial areas concerning enclosure projects with .....number dated..... Would you please make the necessary efforts to send therequired information.)

(iii) Asking for samples, patterns, and demonstrations

(iii) ehteramán átf be nameye shomareye .....movárexe..... nemone?i áz batri ..... ra be in sherkát ersal náma?ed. (Respectfully, in reference to the letter .....dated....., send this company a sample of .....battery.

(iv) Suggesting terms, methods of payment, and discounts

(a) Giving opinions/ comments/ guidance/ suggestions

(b) Asking for actions/ attitude/ help

(ivab) mostád?e ást ba tévajok be inke házineye máhsolat be sorát riyali ghabele párdaxt mibashád, zemne ersale pishfactor, shomare hesab vá shiveye párdaxt vájh ra be in sherkát e?lam fárma?ed. (Since the above mentioned items are going to be priced in riyal, kindly send this company an invoice in advance along with an account number and methods of payment.)

(vi) Asking for an estimate or tender

(vi) ehteramén béravord énvae? elastic haye dástgahaye váhede xod ra hémrah ba jádvále etela?te morede niyaz ersal nama?ed. (It is respectfully requested to send the estimate of different kinds of your unit's tires along with a table consisting of the enquired information.)

(vii) Indicating wishes/ plans/ intentions/ engagement

(vii) emnén támayol be hémkari vá ersal nemone váera?yehér no? etela?t ishtér hástim. (By the way, we intend to send samples or any further information for more cooperation.)

#### Move 5: Closing

(i) Signing-off: pishapish éz bázle távájohé házráte ?ali kámale téshékór ra darim. (Many thanks for your consideration in advance).

(ii) name emza konande (Signatory name) Ali Ebrahimi

(iii) onvane emza konande (Job status in the company)

(iv) modir amel (Managing Director)

(v) ronevesht (References)

(vi) ráese mohtáráme vahede kala (Respectful head of Goods Unit)

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## 跨文化諮詢信件體裁分析：從修辭架構的觀點

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隨著商務往來的全球化，國際交流的持續擴展，撰寫商務信件的必要性也隨之增加。要清楚確認商務信件的具體內容與其中理念和想法的組織，只有在掌握信件的體裁結構之後方能達成。然而，跨語言商務信件之架構尚未廣受討論。因此，本文分析兩百封英語及波斯語的商務信件，重點放於當地及國際公司的信息諮詢。這些信件，根據 Santos(2002)所提出的談判理論，對體裁結構，詞彙語法，及禮貌策略做了探討。除了些許子步驟上的不同，這兩個語料庫就信息交換上相當相似，但在使用積極與消極的禮貌策略以及指令形式的採用上有顯著的差異。諮詢信件在知識彙整的形成和職能工作上扮演著重要的角色，因此，探討更多跨文化信件顯得十分必要。

關鍵詞：商務書信、體裁結構、詞彙語法、禮貌策略