Business Writing in Mainland China: A Look at the Development of Sales Genres

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Abstract
This paper sets out to examine the development of Chinese sales genres in relation to the changing social context. An approach embracing both social context and communicative purposes (Swales, 1990) is proposed and used in this paper. Fundamental changes have taken place in Chinese business context since the economic opening-up in 1978. In response to these changes, sales letters have emerged to meet the communicative needs of business. An introduction is given to sales genres in two different periods of business communication: the delinking period (1949-78) and the relinking period (1978 to the present). In the first period, sales ‘qingshi’ (requests raised by subordinates), and sales ‘pifu’ (official approvals) were employed. The second period is characterized by the use of the sales letters to reflect the change towards the market economy. In addition, the use of the specific sales genres is largely determined by reader-writer relationships under different economic structures of the country. While an equal relationship is shown in sales letters in the second period, a hierarchical relationship is exhibited in the sales genres used in the first period.

Keywords: social context, economic structure, communicative purposes, Chinese sale genres, sale letters, changing reader-writer relationship.

Introduction
This paper sets out to examine the current trends of sales genres used in Chinese business communication. The focus is to look at how sales genres have evolved in relation to the changing social context since the beginning of the economic opening-up in 1978. Sales genres in this paper refer to various types of writing used to buy and sell products. Among them, sales letters are only one type, others include sales ‘qingshi’ (requests) and sales ‘pifu’ (official approvals). Very little study has been done to discuss the position of sales genres in either Chinese written discourse or business communication. One exception is Zhu (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999) who investigates the writing of Chinese sales genres. All other literature on Chinese sales genres only relates to textbook materials, such as Gu (1995); Li, (1983). These textbooks mainly provide a ‘recipe’ (Freadman & Macdonald, 1992) style prescription about how to write business letters. The present research represents an initial step to explore sales genres from a historical perspective. The exploration is composed of the following three tasks. First, a combined approach is to be proposed to study the development of sales genres. Secondly, this paper will give an introduction to two different periods in Chinese business communication and to the position of sales genres in Chinese written discourse. The relationship between the use of sales genres in each period and the nature of the economic structure will also be discussed. Finally, a sample letter of each genre will be discussed to show in what way sales genres have evolved. These letters are taken from the data of authentic letters collected from mainland China (see Zhu 1999). The purpose of this research is to answer questions such as: What are the current trends in Chinese business communication? How are the trends related to the changes in social context? What factors determine the type of sales genres used in each period? In what way do these sales genres reflect the changes in the social context?

The Approach
In order to study the current trends of Chinese business writing, this paper proposes a combined approach based on schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980) and Swales’ (1990) Genre analysis in addition to a historical perspective. Swales’ (1990) approach emphasizes the study of the communicative purposes and genres. The important concepts of Swales’ to be discussed are communicative purposes and moves. According to Swales (1990), genre is characterized as having a set of communicative purposes. These purposes and writing conventions shape the discourse of the genre and constrain the choice of linguistic forms. These purposes can be realized in moves, which are considered to be the smaller idea units under a text.

The important concept to be incorporated with this genre approach is schemata. According to schema theory (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980), a text does not have meaning by itself when it is presented to readers. They have to construct the meaning based on their previously acquired knowledge when reading or learning a text. These knowledge structures are called schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980). The process of understanding a text is thus seen by the schematic theorists as an interactive process between the readers’ background knowledge and the text. The understanding of a text does not only require linguistic or formal knowledge, but world knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Cook, 1994) as well.

However, the concept of schema used in this paper will be further elaborated. In line with the schema theory, world schema is defined as genre-related social context which goes beyond the boundary of the text content. However, I attribute the feature of general knowledge to world schema, while Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), as well as others (Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980), confine the definition to an individual’s knowledge. The general knowledge structures in this paper refer to those shared by a discourse community in a certain social context.

If schema theory is integrated into Swales’ genre approach, Genre can be treated as a dynamic process which develops with changes in the social context. I propose a relationship among social context, communicative purposes and world schemata as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Proposed Model of Genre Study

Figure 1 can, first of all, show how genre develops. Changes in social context will bring changes to communicative purposes. Out of a certain social context different communicative needs may arise. These needs are an important basis for changes of communicative purposes, and genre will involve as a consequence. The degree of change in communicative purposes will lead to changes of similar degree in the various lower levels, such as moves and linguistic forms. When fundamental changes take place in communicative purposes, the existing genres will be replaced by new genres. Appropriate world and formal schemata will be required to understand this genre development.

In the discussion to follow, the proposed approach will be used to study how the changes in social context may lead to the current use of the sales genres. A detailed discussion will also be given to each sales genre from this perspective.

Changes in Economic Context and the Development of Sales Genres

The Two Periods in Chinese Business Communication

The period under discussion covers more than fifty years (from 1949 to the present). Fundamental changes took place in 1978 when the open-door policy was first implemented. Since then, China has been developing towards a market economy. Together with this change in economic structure, there has been a fundamental change in business communication. Since the economic opening-up, sales letters have begun to play an increasingly important role in business. Therefore 1978 can be set as a demarcation line, and the period under discussion can be divided into two: the pre-opening up period: 1949-78, and the opening-up period: 1978 to the present. This division happens to agree with the socialist de-linking and re-linking development strategy (Tian, 1996). The
1949-78 period represents China’s de-linking from the market economy; the period after 1978 represents the re-linking to the market economy. During these two periods, business communication was conducted by means of very different sales genres. Since changes in business practice may change the ways business letters are used, the discussion of business practice from 1949 to the present will provide some understanding of the position of Chinese business writings.


This period is characterized by de-linking from the market economy and an emphasis on a planned economy. The de-linking strategy aimed to ‘break with the world market’ (Amin, 1974:35). This strategy involved two main characteristics. The first relates to market mechanisms under socialism. During this period, commodity and market relations were only accepted to a limited extent, and were to be gradually replaced by a planned economy. The second relates to the public ownership of production. The Communist Party leaders strongly believed that public ownership was the prerequisite for a planned economy. Consequently, by 1957, public ownership was established almost all over the country, despite the fact that total socialization had originally been planned to be implemented by 1968’ (Tian, 1996:79).

Under this system, the business of commodity exchange was practiced and controlled by public ownership at different levels. All the enterprises were state-owned and did not have the independence to make any decisions in relation to selling and buying. Products were distributed and sold through a top-down umbrella network. The headquarters was the Central Commercial Ministry, the second level was the provincial bureau, the third level was the district bureau, and the fourth level consisted of the grassroots of the country and town bureaus. The headquarters would make decisions about selling products. The grassroots bureaus could only get what the higher levels distributed to them. Under this system, there was no need to promote products or write sales letters to facilitate selling, because everything was planned and decided on by different levels of superiors. Therefore, no sales letters were actually written during this period. Only sales documents such as sales ‘qingshi’ (requests) and sales ‘pifu’ (official approvals) were employed. These types of writing were not used to promote products, but rather to implement the sales policies of the country. These two sales genres will be discussed in detail later in this paper.

However, this de-linking had created tremendous economic problems by the end of the 1970s. Rigid central economic planning and monopolistic public ownership depressed producers’ enthusiasm and reduced economic efficiency. Thus the de-linking strategy was strongly challenged by Deng Xiaoping as soon as he came to power in 1978. Consequently, at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party, the new Party leaders declared that China would actively expand economic cooperation in terms of equality and mutual benefit with other countries and strive to adopt the world’s advanced technologies. This endorsement of the open-door policy was later clearly defined as ‘economic opening-up to the outside world’ (Deng, 1985:19), thus starting Period 2 of re-linking to the market economy.

Period 2: From 1978 to the Present.

This period represents a re-linking to the market economy, and sales letters started to be used in business communication. This period also has two characteristics. The first is the establishment of a socialist commodity economy. This economic system affirms the central role of market mechanisms and endeavors to combine market and planning to raise productivity. The second characteristic relates to the nature of ownership. The previous nature of public ownership was attacked and a diversification of ownership came into being. An initial attempt was made to introduce collective ownership by the rural reform of 1978. Although this reform aimed at a revival of household agriculture, it turned out to be a success in raising productivity; and as a result, gained support from the Chinese authorities.

Due to the success of this reform, similar reforms took place all over the country. Following the rural reform, enterprises began to change in nature from state-owned to more and more private owned. In fact, the major task of the enterprise reform centers on the decentralization and privatization of ownership. State-owned enterprises are given more responsibility and independence in their own operation. For example, the contract system is quite prevalent throughout the country (De Mente, 1989:131). This is the system under which the managers of state-owned enterprises sign contracts to specify how much tax each enterprise will deliver to the government. In this way, these enterprises are also operated more or less as private enterprises. As a result, four main streams of enterprises coexist side by side: foreign-owned, joint-ventures, fully private, and state-owned enterprises. Although there still remains some public ownership by state-owned organizations, every enterprise in the mainstream is involved in the competitive market economy. The structure of selling has changed fundamentally and every enterprise has to promote its own products. In short, China is changing from a planned economy to a market economy. Under these changes, there appears to have been a gradual revival of the practice of sales letters. Product promotion is becoming vital for every enterprise and this leads to the popularity of sales letters.

The Position of Sales Genres and the Changing Reader-Writer Relationship

The position of sales genres in ‘gongwen’ (official letters) will provide some clues to the understanding of changing reader-writer relationships reflected in sales genres. In Chinese written discourse, sales genres are discussed as belonging to ‘gongwen’ (eg. Zhang, 1983; Liang, et al., 1992). ‘Gongwen’ is a term which contrasts with personal letters, and refers to letters written by an organization or enterprise. Numerous studies have been undertaken to examine the position of ‘gongwen’ in Chinese written discourse. These studies generally agree that ‘gongwen’ can be further divided into the following three genres:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pingxing</td>
<td>gonghan (official letter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shangxing</td>
<td>Sales letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaxing</td>
<td>ling (orders)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pifu (official approvals)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shangwen</td>
<td>Sales enquiry, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 1</td>
<td>Sales pifu (official approvals)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Period 2</td>
<td>sales qingshi (requests)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>qingshi (request)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>sales gongwen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shangxing gonghan (official letter)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>qingshi (requests)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>gongwen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shangxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>baogao (reports)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zongjie (final reports)</td>
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The three genres comprise ‘xiaxing’ or ‘from superior to subordinate’, ‘shangxing’ or ‘from subordinate to superior’ and ‘pingxing’ or ‘equals writing to each other’ genres. These three subdivisions are used to indicate different kinds of relationships between the reader and the writer. As shown in the above figure, sales genres appear within all of these three larger genres. Sales requests and official approvals belong to the ‘shangxing’ and ‘xiaxing’ genres and sales letters belong to the ‘pingxing’ genre.

There appears to be some kind of link between the changing reader-writer relationships and the nature of the communication period. In the first period, sales of products were conducted between superior and subordinate organisations, while in the second period, sales were mainly carried out between companies or organizations without any superior-subordinate relationships.

The use of the sales genres seems to be determined by the economic structure of Chinese business communication. Preference for certain sales genres will be given to those that can best reflect the reader-writer relationship under the economic structure. The current business practice is characterized by the re-linking policy to the market economy and the need arises to develop competitiveness for each enterprise. The reason is that public ownership has been greatly challenged and has given way more and more to privatization. The relationship between the writer and reader in sales transactions therefore represents equal status. This period has seen the wide use of sales letters to promote products. These ‘pingxing’ genres are an appropriate means to realize the communicative purposes of commodity exchange. That means enterprises have to rely on themselves to promote their products. Sales letters are found to best serve this kind of social need. That is why they are gaining increasing popularity.

Examining the Sales Genres
The change of social context and reader-writer relationships has led to the change of communicative needs. In the economic reform, marketing and promotion have become the major purpose of sales genres. All the sales genres will be discussed in detail to indicate how they have evolved.

Textbook advice can be used as a reference in discussing the sales genres. However, textbooks tend to discuss forms of writing in a very general sense of business letters and would not look at sales genres as a particular type. Each of the sales genres will be defined as an individual genre and will be exemplified below. Only translations of these letters are provided and all of them are translated by the author with the original in the Appendix.

**Sales Genres Used in the First Period**

### Sales ‘Qingshi’ (Requests)

According to Li (1983:200), a ‘qingshi’ is an official document by means of which a subordinate makes a request to his/her superior for an approval. This definition can be used to help define sales ‘qingshi’. In a business context, a sales ‘qingshi’ is a formal sales request raised by a subordinate to a superior to replenish stock. In the first period, the subordinate level could only sell what the superior had supplied. If the subordinate organisation was in need of a certain product, they had to go through the request procedure to have the product supplied. The sales request was the first step in these procedures. Take the following excerpt as an example:

```
Document of XX Provincial Bureau

Heading Reply to XX Town Company’s Request for an Increase of Coal Supply
Salutation Coal company of XX Town,

We have received your request about increasing the coal supply for winter heating. After discussion, we have made the following approval.

Owing to an increased demand for coal supplies all over the province, we have to make an overall plan about how to supply the town. The province, therefore, an increase of only 800 tons of coal is approved for you. Detailed information about the time and place of its arrival will be provided in the near future. (We) hope you can solve the rest of the problem by yourself.

Closing This is in response to your request.

Signature

and date XXX, 1965
```

The major purpose of the above letter is to raise a request to a superior. This letter has five moves as indicated in the left-hand column, and the most important move is the request which relates to supply of coal, the main heating material in the past. The writer expresses the request indirectly by telling the writer about the urgent need. The salutation refers to the position of the reader as ‘leading comrades’. The closing indicates the uncertain attitude of the subordinate about whether the request is appropriate, which is a typical subordinate’s attitude in a ‘qingshi’ (request). Both the salutation and the closing indicate the appropriate degree of politeness towards a superior. The letter as a whole indicates that the subordinate does not have control of the planned stock supply, and has no choice but to wait for a reply from the superior. This letter also shows that sales ‘qingshi’ was an important genre since it was the initial step in obtaining supplies at that time.

### Sales ‘Pifu’ (Official Approvals)

According to Li (1983:201), a ‘pifu’ is an official reply letter often used by a superior to a subordinate’s ‘qingshi’. In fact, a sales ‘pifu’ is closely related to a ‘qingshi’ and is used to respond to what has been applied for. This genre can be exemplified in the following letter, which is also the reply to the above sales request:

```
Document of XX Provincial Bureau

Heading Reply to XX Town Company’s Request for an Increase of Coal Supply
Salutation Coal company of XX Town,

We have received your request about increasing the coal supply for winter heating. After discussion, we have made the following approval.

Approval towns of the province. Therefore an increase of only 800 tons of coal is approved for you. Detailed information about the time and place of its arrival will be provided in the near future. (We) hope you can solve the rest of the problem by yourself.

Closing This is in response to your request.

Signature

and date XXX, 1965
```

The major purpose of the above letter is to express an official reply to a subordinate, which is clearly indicated in the move of the approval. It gives a certain degree of approval to the sales request. The official tone to a subordinate is shown by the phrase ‘after discussion’. Here the English translation is only an approximation, and the Chinese original signals that the view concerned is an agreement among a group of decision-makers. The closing is the usual way a superior ends an official reply. The letter as a whole indicates that the superior organization has the control over stock supply. This letter also indicates that sales ‘pifu’ is an important genre in the second and also the final step in obtaining stock supplies. This letter also shows that the customers’ needs might not be fully met, and the supply of goods, especially important energy resources such as coal, was controlled by the country.

Both sales ‘qingshi’ and ‘pifu’ were the important sales genres to conduct sales transactions. The hierarchical relationships expressed in these letters were quite reflective of the actual rigid economic system at that time as discussed earlier on in this paper.

### Sales Letters

Sales letters refer to letters used to promote products. This genre is mainly employed by the owner or manufacturer of the product. The main purpose of sales letters is to advertise the product and persuade the reader to buy it. As Chen (1991:260) puts it, “Sales letters have to arouse the buyer’s interest, and stimulate his/her desire to buy the product.” One can therefore see that the use of sales letters reflects the change towards a market economy. In addition, another purpose of establishing a relationship or ‘guanxi’ (contact) is worth noting. In Chinese culture, it is important to build a personal relationship with the reader or addressee. This is reflected in today’s business practice. According to Hofstede (1980, 1991), group harmony and relationship are strongly valued in a collectivistic society. Similarly in China, using ‘guanxi’ to promote products has become vital for success in business. The concept of relationships building will shed light on understanding some of the cultural norms in sales letters. Characterized by both marketing and relationship building, for the first time in Chinese business communication, the writers of sales letters have begun to compete in the market. This genre can be exemplified by the following letter:

```
Salutation Dear computer customers,
Greeting How are you?
Product offer Do you want to buy an extraordinary, good quality and exquisite looking reserve UPS at the lowest possible price?
Product details · It can run on direct current;
· It has an RS232 communication joint, and matches all UPS control systems;
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concepts in cross-cultural or intercultural communication. In a similar way, Campbell (1996) found that some Chinese business letters tend to include personal

essential details are conveyed through 6 parallel sentences. The details are clearly expressed, with each feature of the product standing out in each line. These
details are introduced by:

Incentives

- It has a voltage stabilizing function;
- Voltage ranges from 160-250 V;
- It is safe and reliable, and has passed the American UL and German TUV tests.

In order to thank customers who are interested in this product, and at the same time, in order to provide your computer:

Original price: 1790 yuan

Special price: 1380 yuan!!!

Credentials

- Now you (H) must be anxious to know what brand this UPS is.
- Of course it has to be UPSONIC. It is the crystallization of American
technology, and has a production history of more than 20 years. Models range from 100VA - 600 VA, among which PCM - 50R (500VA

Soliciting

- most outstanding product, and will also be your most sensible choice.

a response

- The offer only lasts for three months, if you are interested, (please) you can:
- Request
  - Ring us directly;
  - Or fax the response form to us;
  - Or mail the response form to us.

Pressure tactics

- Attention: the offer only lasts till December 31.

Signature

- Xingda Survey Control Company

and Date

XXX, 1994

As indicated in the above (in bold letters) the letter has seven moves which include salutation, greeting, introducing the product, offering incentives,
establishing credentials, soliciting a response, and signature and date. Since salutation and signature are only formulaic moves, the discussion will focus on
the other five content moves. Most of these moves fit in well with the AIDA model which stands for attention, interest, desire and action. For example, the
product is introduced in a way which will attract the reader’s attention, essential details of the product are provided to make the reader interested, a special
offer is made to prompt the reader to buy the product, and the reader is called to react in a certain way. This promotional process reflects the basic mode of
communication in a market economy.

What does not really fit the model is the use of Move 1, the greetings, which are closely related to relationship building. In Chinese culture, greetings can be
used to indicate politeness, and help establish a friendly relationship with the reader, and this new relationship will help the promotion of the product.

Further evidence for the importance of Chinese being a collectivist culture can be found in the business context in Bilbow (1995), Campbell (1996), G-
rner (1993), Murray (1994), Ulijn and Li (1995), and Hu and Grove (1991). These studies note that harmony and politeness are very important Chinese

concepts in cross-cultural or intercultural communication.

In a similar way, Campbell (1996) found that some Chinese business letters tend to include personal

information at the beginning, and use it as a politeness strategy for relationship building with the reader. Greetings such as “How are you?” in this letter can be
seen as a ‘personal’ but an appropriate strategy.

Move 2, introducing the product, is composed of the following two steps:

Step 1. Offering the product

Step 2. Essential detailing of the product

The first step is realized in a question form:

Do you want to buy a 500VA reserve UPS with brilliant function, good quality, and exquisite appearance at the lowest possible price?

A question form is often used to begin an advertisement to attract the reader’s attention.

Essential details are conveyed through 6 parallel sentences. The details are clearly expressed, with each feature of the product standing out in each line. These
details are introduced by:

- It also has the following extraordinary characteristics:

This introduction is a typical use of advertising language, describing the characteristics as ‘extraordinary’. In this way, the writer attracts the reader’s interest
in what makes the characteristics extraordinary.

Move 3, offering incentives, is realized in a subordinate-main clause structure as shown below:

In order to thank the vast numbers of customers for their generous love of our product, and at the same time, to enable your computers to have the
most reliable protection, we offer a special price for 500VA from September 21 - December 31.

In this letter, the first section of the subordinate sentence, ‘in order to thank the vast numbers of customers’, is used to show politeness to the reader.

In this way, the writer attaches importance to the special offer to be made in the main clause: the special offer is made for the reader’s benefits by
protecting computers, which is the ultimate objective of service. In addition, this step also involves the use of formal schemata relating to Chinese subordinate
and main clauses. This sequence indicates an end focus, what is important is not the subordinate clause, but the main clause which is placed after it.

Move 4, establishing credentials, is placed here in the middle of the letter, for the special purpose of keeping the reader in suspense. This purpose is revealed
in a question form:

Now you (H) must be anxious to know what brand this UPS is.

This rhetorical question is used to introduce the company’s credentials. Up to now, the reader has been kept in suspense as to any credentials of the company.

Only in the third part of this main paragraph does the writer begin to reveal the brand name. The section then develops from a description of the brand name
to other credentials: American technology and more than 20 year’s production history. The inclusion of American technology is very important as it is related
to the world schemata concerning the use of advanced technology in promoting products. The credentials are followed by a positive evaluation: most
outstanding product and a prediction of desirable results: most sensible choice.

Move 5, soliciting a response, is composed of the following steps:

Step 1 Using pressure tactics

Step 2 Making a request

The second step, making a request, is both preceded and followed by pressure tactics. In other words, the first step is repeated:

Pressure tactics: the offer only lasts for three months

Request: if you are interested, please contact us

Pressure tactics: the deadline for the special offer

The pressure tactics are used twice as an emphasis to push the reader to respond.
The main step is the request, which is expressed through the following linguistic forms:

- ... if you are interested, (please) you (H) can:
  - Ring us directly;
  - Or fax the response form to us;
  - Or mail the response form to us.

The linguistic realization of the request is shown in the conditional clause. This request is polite, giving the reader two options by using the conditional clause. In the request, both the softener ‘please’ and the modal verb ‘can’ are used. Here the writer might prefer to combine these two forms as a strategy to make the request more polite. The request is respectful as it refers to the reader using the honorific form. The subordinate to main construction also serves to lighten the imposition of the request (Kirkpatrick, 1993).

The above analysis of the sales letter can be summed up as follows. First, this letter is different in style from sales requests and applies in that it is a ‘pingxing’ letter which reflects an equal reader-writer relationship. Secondly, this letter shows how sales letters reflect the changes towards the market economy. The communicative purposes can be seen as realized in this letter in a top-down model of moves, steps and linguistic forms. Each of these levels reflects the cognitive structuring of the text, and the communicative purposes are the central ideas to guide the development of the text. Thirdly, this letter also reflects an important concept of relationship building in Chinese business practice. Although the Chinese market is progressing towards a market economy, it is still deeply rooted in its own cultural values of harmony and relationship building. That is why greetings are preferred in sales letters (Zhu, 1997). Fourthly, this sales letter is linear in style: it begins with the offer of the product and proceeds to introduce the product and solicit a response. Finally, the letter appeals to both reason and emotion. For example, the detailed description of the product is related to reason, while the use of pressure tactics is related to emotion.

**Conclusion**

The current use of sales genres is closely related to the economic and business structure of the country. Changes of economic structure have lead to the popularity of sales letters. In addition, the development of sales genres discussed in this paper has revealed changing relationships which are once again determined by economic structures. Sales letters reflect an equal relationship which differs fundamentally from the former hierarchical sales genres. Not only does the writer choose this appropriate genre, but also has the responsibility to communicate effectively with the reader.

The study of these sales genres also indicates that sales genres are dynamic and are developing with the progress of society. However it is still difficult to forecast what will happen to the use of sales genres in China in the future. There is one thing certain though, which is that sales genres will continuously reflect the changes that take place in the economic structure and sales letters will be more and more widely used if the market economy turns out to be the sole economic structure in business communication.

The findings of this paper have the following implications for intercultural business communication. A sales genre is used to achieve certain communicative purposes, and to reflect a certain kind of relationship between the writer and the reader. It is therefore essential for business people to understand the dynamic nature of language in relation to the economic structure, and this can be a key factor to understanding how to communicate with Chinese business enterprises.

The study also has implications for international business correspondence education. It is not enough to follow the ‘recipe’-style textbook advice in teaching or learning, as this style cannot very well reflect the links between the language forms and the social or economic structure of society. Educators or learners have to take account of the dynamic nature of language, the economic context and even the historical background of a certain culture so as to have a full grasp of the relevant genres.

To sum up, it has been found in this paper that the use of sales genres can reflect a change of economic structure. This finding can provide valuable clues to both business people conducting business in an intercultural context, and to those learning and teaching business communication. However, it is suggested that further study in business communication be undertaken in other places such as Taiwan and Hong Kong to find if similar changes are taking place there. If so, there would be further proof that sales genres are genres in evolution influenced by the social and economic structure.

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