

# The Characteristics and Skills of Business Letter Translation

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**Abstract:** Business English letter is a kind of letter in the international business environment, used to communicate with clients of different social background and cultural background. The application of business English letters is becoming more and more widespread. It is very important to recognize and master the characteristics of business English letters and translation skills.

**Keywords:** Business Letter Translation; Translation Skills; Translation Characteristics

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With the development of global economic and trade integration and the increasing of China's foreign business activities, the wording of a business letter should be accurate, appropriate and formal. The information of the original text should be accurately expressed in the process of translation, the tone of the translation conform appropriate to the style of the official letter.

Therefore, whether the translation of business letter is appropriate, rigorous and reasonable, is very important to foreign trade work. A slight difference often leads to trade disputes and economic losses.

It has been more than fifteen years since China officially joined the WTO on December 11, 2001. In recent years, China has become more and more involved in international trade. Business correspondence is becoming more and more important in international trade, and it is also important to read the letter correctly, which determines the success of trade.

English business letters are one of the main means of written communication in international business. It represents the company's image, the face of the company, and is an important way in the relationship of enterprises' public propaganda to the outside. English business letters are very important for the company to establish a good image.

Business letter involves all the links of business activities, throughout the business activities and has a wide range of contents. Usually includes establishment of business relations, inquiry, offer, counter-offer, contract, insurance, shipment, claim, etc.

The translation of business correspondence is the same as that of general literary translation. It needs to be based on fidelity. There are roughly three features. First, business letters are stylized in format. Secondly, business letters have a lot of jargon in them. Last but not least, business letter is concise in content expression, polite and friendly.

Most business English words are the same as common English words, but the business context gives them specific professional meaning and the professional meaning is different because of different business scope. Therefore, it is necessary to be familiar with these idiomatic expressions when translating professional vocabulary.

Business letters belong to a formal official document body, with good writing. Generally abide by the writing principle of business English, namely seven C principle: correctness (correct), conciseness (Concise), clearness (Clear), completeness (complete), Concreteness (specific), courtesy (courtesy), consideration (considerate)

On one hand, for formal foreign trade transactions, English letter translation has 3 aspects to note: professional vocabulary, ambiguous terms and British and American vocabulary differences. In other hand, translation of business letters for friendship and emotional communication in order to achieve the friendship between the two sides, the businessman will pay special attention to the

politeness, so there will be a lot of writings to exchange emotional letters. For this kind of letter, translators should pay attention to selecting suitable words, so that translation has the aesthetic sense of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". And one of the things to note is that it's a businessman who first considered the goods, quality and related issues and conditions, rather than politeness. The Chinese translation should highlight the key information, streamline the content, in order to achieve the purpose of strengthening the focus. In view of the structure and characteristics of the written language in foreign trade English letters, translators should choose the corresponding written language when translating.

Business English translation is a kind of method and skill that English and Chinese can use to express their ideas. Whether we can master English translation methods and techniques scientifically and whether they can be used rationally is the key to doing well in English translation. In many translation methods, the author focuses on the four most commonly used translation methods in modern business English letters, namely, amplification, provincial translation, translation conversion, division.

The English letter of international business focuses on documentation, but the translation is concise, rigorous and accurate. Ensure that terminology and abbreviations have commercial terms and the normative and accuracy of business formula transla-

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tion. For the general expression in the original text, the translation should be simplified and understandable in Chinese, and the simplicity and fluency of the original text should be preserved. And for the date, quantity, amount and so on the factual details of translation, must not be negligent. In addition, the formal style of the original text and the degree of politeness should be accurately grasped in the translation. In practical work, for the users of international business letters, it is unnecessary to translate the correspondence into full translation, which often requires selected passage.

Business letter synthesizing the relevant knowledge of letter and business, is a systematic, imitative, practical and operational application style. Only through systematic study, continuous practice, imitation and practices, can we consolidate the knowledge learned, and finally achieve the correct translation and can write the relevant business letter.

## **1. Chapter one Introduction**

Business English letter is a kind of letter in the international business environment, used to communicate with clients of different social background and cultural background. The application of business English letters is becoming more and more widespread. It is very important to recognize and master the characteristics of business English letters and translation skills.

Therefore, whether the translation of business letter is appropriate, rigorous and reasonable, is very important to foreign trade work. A slight difference often leads to trade disputes and economic losses.

Most business English words are the same as common English words, but the business context gives them specific professional meaning and the professional meaning is different because of different business scope. Therefore, it is necessary to be familiar with these idiomatic expressions when translating professional vocabulary.<sup>[1]</sup>

Translation must read through the full text and clear the facts to translate the important parts. In particular, it will include the time, place, conditions, requests and other provisions accurately translated. In view of the large scale of translation, the translator needs to carefully understand the intention of its users, and finally the most important part of the correspondence will be translated, to achieve the practical application of international business English letter translation.

## **2. Chapter Two The Characteristic of Business Letters**

Business letters belong to a formal official document body, with good writing. Generally abide by the writing principle of business English, namely seven C principle: correctness (correct), conciseness (Concise), clearness (Clear), completeness (complete), Concreteness (specific), courtesy (courtesy), consideration (considerate).

### **2.1 In the tone, the letter as the center should be polite and friendly.**

While the writer must state his or her opinion, the writer's tone often appears to reflect the feelings of the other and respect each other. So the writer will often use some first, second person pronouns, such as I, We, You, and so on. Try to be as positive as possible and avoid negative sentences which embody the politeness and respect of the writer to the reader.

For example: "We are enclosing a brochure outlining our company's goods available for export" is kinder and more polite than "enclosed to brochure this Company's goods available for export"; "Please let us know ..." better than "You fail to tell us ...".

### **2.2 In the choice of words, it should try to be precise and avoid using allegation, long word and repetitive meanings.**

The wording in Business English should be that must be clearly and accurately expressed in the information, and the use of exaggeration, metaphor, etc., and try to avoid using ambiguous words to avoid unnecessary controversy. Business letters are often used as a basis for determining the rights and obligations of the parties concerned. For example: "We regret to advise you we can't accept your offer" should be changed to "We are sorry to tell you, we can't accept your offer"<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **2.3 In terms of content expression, it should be concise, and able to convey enough information and be able to express it intelligently.**

Since business people are busy, pragmatic and efficient, so the letter is usually straightforward, and it is too much to be over dressed. It is usually segmented according to the central idea of the section expressed by the writer. The text of each paragraph will not be too long, especially the beginning and the end of the text, more often to brief. For example: "By this letter we would ask you to consider our proposal" is not as simple as "Please consider our proposal".

### **2.4 The language of business letter should be accurate, complete and contain all necessary information.**

The omission of important information can damage the company's image, and it should be tactfully expressed rather than stated directly. For example: "Thank you very much for your inviting me to speak at your annual get-together of your staff members and friends in the business circle. Much to my regret, I can't go because at that time I will be on a business trip in Europe". The writer is very tactful and polite to say that he can't participate in the invitation, so that the inviter reads it naturally, without any feeling of displeasure.

## **3. Chapter Three Business Letter Classification and Translation Skills 3.1 English letter translation for formal foreign trade transactions**

### **3.1 Professional vocabulary**

The translation of professional words in foreign trade English letters must be accurate and in line with the requirements of economic and trade majors. The term meaning of price terms in foreign trade English is fixed. Some are separate words, like inquiry and offer and some are composed of several words such as draw on somebody. The translation of these professional vocabulary errors will cause negative impact on the enterprise and even huge losses. There has been reported that a translator mistakenly "stainless steel" translated into "carbon steel", the difference between the two words to the enterprise caused losses. It is noteworthy that some foreign trade English vocabulary and its original meaning are very different. Document purports to be "file" and in foreign trade English "receipts"

### 3.2 Ambiguous term

English often presents a word which has multiple meanings, and these several meanings are just opposite. Therefore, the use of ambiguous words should be avoided in the writing or translation of foreign trade English letters. Such words in the face should be found in time, and immediately contact with the other party in order to correct timely, so as not to cause differences between the parties for future trade. For example, in a week can be referred to in within a week, can also refer to after a week (a week later), this must be discussed with the other side, in time to change the meaning of the words clearly.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3.3 British and American vocabulary differences

Foreign trade English letter translation should also pay attention to the difference between English and American meaning: in British English and American English, the same word may have different meanings. The typical example in this case is the difference between units, such as billion in American English meaning “1 billion”, and in British English, it represents “trillion”. Therefore, we must pay attention to the use of English and American English in translation.

### 3.4 English letter translation for emotional communication

Translation of business letters for friendship and emotional communication in order to achieve the friendship between the two sides, the businessman will pay special attention to the politeness, so there will be a lot of writings to exchange emotional letters. For this kind of letter, translators should pay attention to selecting suitable words, so that translation has the aesthetic sense of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”. And one of the things to note is that it’s a businessman, he first considered the goods, quality and related issues and conditions, rather than polite. When the Chinese translation, should highlight the key information, streamline the content, in order to achieve the purpose of strengthening the focus. In view of the structure and characteristics of the written language in foreign trade English letters, translators should choose the corresponding written language when translating.<sup>[4]</sup>

Here is a complete business letter about replying to the meeting time:

“Dear Ms, Jane

Thank you for your letter of September 26. We shall be very pleased to see you and discuss your new monitor, but October 6 is not suitable. We will be happy to meet with you at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, October 7, if the time is convenient for you.

We look forward to meeting you.

Yours faithfully

Jack

At the beginning of this case, the writer express their gratitude, and then express their happiness to understand the company’s products, very tactful but not without politeness say that they do not have time to meet on October 6, and discuss other meeting time with each other. “If the time is convenient for you” reflects the respect of the writer to the reader.

## 4. Chapter Four Business Letter Translation Method

Business English translation is a kind of method and skill that English and Chinese can use to express their ideas. Whether we can master English translation methods and techniques scientifically and whether they can be used rationally is the key to doing well in English translation. In many translation methods, the author focuses on the four most commonly used translation methods in modern business English letters, namely, amplification, provincial translation, translation conversion, division.

### 4.1 Amplification

In order to make the expression of the translation more complete, the content is more easily understood by the target readers, and in the translation appropriate to add some words, phrases or sentences. For example: “We are awaiting your favorable news.” means that waiting for good news. “We comply with your request and give for your lowest price.” means that we will give you the lowest price at your request. The above two examples in original translation, the first example increase the pronoun “your”, while the second example supplements the verb phrase “comply with”. If the pronoun “your” and the verb phrase “comply with” are not added, two sentence structures will have grammatical errors or do not conform to the English language expression habit. However, through the amplification, both the grammatical structures of the translation are guaranteed to be complete and the meaning of the translation is guaranteed.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 4.2 Provincial translation

The provincial translation is to delete the word which does not conform to the target language thinking habit, the language habit and the expression way. For example: “We shall be obliged if you could also quote your lowest price CIF Liverpool, starting earliest date of shipment.” means please quote us the lowest price CIF Liverpool and explain the earliest shipment. “Shall we meet each other half way?” means shall we compromise? The first example in the province translates the pronoun “your” which only plays the grammatical role but does not have the ideographic effect in the sentence, and the second example English phrase “meet each other half way” in the original translation province translates as “the compromise processing”

### 4.3 Translation conversion

In the process of translation, in order to make the translation conform to the target language, the methods and habits are translated into the words, sentence patterns, and morphologies of the original sentences. For example: “Payment by sight L/C is acceptable to us.” means we can accept payment by sight letter of credit. “We now take pleasure in placing the following order with you” means we are pleased to place an order with you. In the above two examples, the first example the noun “payment” which contains the action meaning is translated into the verb “payment”, and in the second example the noun “pleasure” is translated accordingly into the adverb “happily”.

### 4.4 Division

The translation method, which is to extend the words, phrases or clauses in the original text into several Chinese simple sentences in order to conform to the Chinese expression habit. For example: “Unfortunately the goods you ordered can’t

be supplied due to heavy commitments.” means unfortunately, the goods ordered are not available because of too much demand. “Although your price is below our level, we accept your order in view of our initial business.” means although your price is lower than ours, considering that this is the first transaction between us, we have accepted your order. In the above two examples, the first example the “unfortunately” extension of a single attributive noun in English is translated into a simple sentence “very unfortunate”; the second example the prepositional phrase “in view of our initial business.” is translated into “but considering this is the first deal between us” .

## 5. Chapter Five Conclusion

The English letter of international business focuses on documentation, but the translation is concise, rigorous and accurate. Ensure that terminology and abbreviations have commercial terms and the normative and accuracy of business formula translation. For the general expression in the original text, the translation should be simplified and understandable in Chinese, and the simplicity and fluency of the original text should be preserved. And for the date, quantity, amount and so on the factual details of translation, must not be negligent. In addition, the formal style of the original text and the degree of politeness should be accurately grasped in the translation. In practical work, for the users of international business letters, it is unnecessary to translate the correspondence into full translation, which often requires selected passage.

The importance of foreign trade English letters is becoming more and more important in our country’s foreign trade activities. Good foreign trade English translation can promote China’s foreign trade development. Translators should accumulate various professional words and abbreviations in the process of translation and learning, master various translation techniques, adopt different translation methods for various specific situations, and strive to be accurate and conform to the language habits and social and cultural customs of both sides of trade.

The business letter synthesizes the correspondence and the business related knowledge, is a system, the imitation, the practicality and the operability are very strong application style. Only through systematic study, continuous practice, imitation and practices, we can consolidate the knowledge learned, and finally achieve the correct translation and can write the relevant business letter.

To sum up, business letters in the vocabulary level show a lot of unique. Therefore, in translation, translators should not only have a high degree of language training and business English related expertise, but also to maintain a rigorous work attitude to ensure that business English letters accurate, rigorous and standardized.

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