# Persuasive Discourse Strategies Used in Persian and English Business Letters

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**Abstract**
Understanding differences in communication styles is becoming much important in intercultural business communication. This study aims to report the result a contrastive study of rhetorical differences between Persian and English "For Your Information" (FYI) letters and investigate how information is presented in business correspondence and what rhetorical strategies are used to illicit compliance by a given readership in a given culture. (FYI letter is a kind of business letter informing the addressee about something (change of address, management, prices, etc) that will affect the way of the future business interaction (Vergaro, 2005).  A corpus of forty letters (20 in Persian and 20 in English) was examined at the macro-textual level and micro-textual level. At the macro-textual level, the analysis focused on rhetorical structure, mainly drawing on the notion of move. At the micro-textual level, the analysis concentrated on the pragmatic use of mood and modality. The results revealed that Persian letters share some similar persuasive discourse strategies with English letters. Moreover, differences in communication patterns between these letters were identified.
**Keywords**: Persuasive Discourse Strategies, Macro-textual Level, Micro-textual Level, For Your Information Letter

**Introduction**
It is generally accepted that different cultures structure discourse in different ways. Research has shown that cultural differences affect discourse generally considered as standardized, ritual, or even formulaic. Some studies such as Jenkins, & Hinds, (1987); Vegaro (2004, 2005); Arvani (2006); Jalilifar & Beitsayyah (2011); Xu (2012) have pointed out that different languages and cultures shape discourse based on its discourse communities.

The identification of generic structures of business letters makes the identification of the specific content, organization of thought, ideas, and references much easier and possible. This generic structure can be observed in several recent studies (Ghadessy, 1993; Santos, 2002; Cheung, 2007) on different letters in just one language, 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. As Paltridge (2005) states users' needs and contexts affect the genres and text organization is also affected by the context in which it occurs. 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 as Gunnarson (1997) points out.

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 Iranian and English 'For Your Information' letters (henceforth FYI letters). An FYI letter, as Vergaro (2005) defines, is a part of a business communication sequence, appearing typically at the central or sometimes final stage of business dealing. Its social role is that of informing the addressee about something (change of address, management, prices, etc.) that will affect the way in which the business transaction will be carried out in the future. The addressee is therefore required to 'record' the information contained in the text and to use it in future.

At the macro-textual level, the analysis focused on rhetorical structure, mainly drawing on the notion of move. At the micro-textual level, the analysis concentrated on the pragmatic use of mood and modality. This article focuses on the cultural preferences that Iranian and English writers show – both at the macro- and micro-textual level – when engaged in 'For Your Information' letter writing. To this end, the present study intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any macro-textual differences between English and Persian FYI letters?
2. Are there any micro-textual discourse differences across English and Persian letters?

Since Swales' study (1990), increased attention has been given to "genre analysis" in discourse studies as well as in language teaching and learning (p. 83). In his 1990 study, Swales defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes (Swales, 1990, p.58). Following Swales (1990), other researchers such as Bhatia (1993); Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995); Cross and Oppenheim (2006); Paltridge (2008) have highlighted the importance of the communicative functions or purposes of the "genre". These communicative purposes are influenced by many factors such as the content and the purpose of the genre, as well as the social and cultural context in which the genre occurs (Paltridge, 2008). However, this does not mean that genres and subgenres are either static or typical in nature.

Vergaro (2005, p.113) defines move as a meaningful unit demonstrated in linguistic (lexical-grammatical) forms and related to the communicative purposes of the activity in which members of the community are engaged. Studying the move structure of a text would mean assigning a pragmatic function to a stretch of language and building the schematic structure through which its communicative purpose is achieved. This schematic structure is widely influenced by cultural differences of each discourse community members.

Mood and modality can be used to interact with the macro-textual level. The term mood has been traditionally defined either in semantic term, i.e. focusing on the features that distinguish, for example, declarative sentences from imperative sentences, or in structural terms, i.e. as a set of contrasts expressed in the verb morphology.

As for modality, it is widely accepted that it is the expression of the speaker's stance towards the truth value of their utterances. Traditional approaches to the analysis of English modality (Perkins, 1983; Palmer, 1986) have investigated on semantics not pragmatics.

Each English business letter should have different elements and parts. They should contain essential inner qualities such as accuracy, simplicity, completeness, clarity, relevance, and neatness as well as outer qualities such as color and the size of the paper as Jalilifar & Baitsayyah (2011) state.

There are some simple recommendations for the general structure, content, and the size of paper used in Persian business letters. According to Safi (2005); Mortezapour (2008) Persian business letters should have purpose, frankness, explicitness, politeness, coherence and they should be clear and concise. Generally, a canonical Persian business letter as claimed by Norgostar (2005) comprises five parts: (1) epigraph (2) sender, receiver, and subject (3) body of the letter (4) signatory (5) references.

English business letter has been inspired some studies since its conception. Ghadessy (1993) investigated 60 English business letters at micro-element level and found out that letters have in common a number of obligatory elements which establish the generic structure potential of this discourse genre.

Santos (2002) studied 117 commercial English letters exchanged between Brazilian company and two European companies and found that each one follows its own culture.
Vergaro (2002, 2004, 2005) compared the English and Italian business letters within a framework of Swales' (1990) model and found that both letters share some similarities in terms of moves but distributed differently in money-chasing, sales promotion, and FYI letters.
Wang (2007) also studied 156 business letters within the framework of Bhatia's (1997) cognitive structuring model and pointed out that business correspondence as a genre shares the conventional cognitive structuring.
Cheung (2007) compared 160 Chinese and English sales letters and found that Chinese letters included more frequent references to social issues and less frequent use of pressure tactics.
Along with growing interest in this area in anglophone and european contexts, iranian scholars have started to investigate generic features of business letters both at macro and micro levels of analysis (Arvani, 2006; Jalilifar, 2009; Jalilifar & Baitsayyah, 2011).
The limited number of studies conducted in this area has shown that there are some basic moves and variations in the use of macro and micro-textual level in non-western communities. With the paucity of research in this area, the current study compare Persian and English business letters of FYI to see if there are similarities and differences of move analysis and micro-textual analysis of business letters.

## Methodology
To investigate the generic structures of business letters as well as the micro-textual level, 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.

## Text Selection
The corpus comprised 40 FYI letters obtained from Qazvin, Iran 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 FYI letters.

**Findings**
**Macro-textual level: move analysis**
The communicative purpose of eliciting compliance is obtained in the English corpus through the following structural moves which are the most common ones found in the texts:

| | |
|---|---|
| Move1: SUBJECT | Move2: OPENING SALUTATION |
| Move3: **Information** | Move4: END POLITELY |
| Move5: CLOSING SALUATTION | |

The differences between the two corpora of letters can be illustrated by discussing mainly (1) the number, type and frequency of moves realized; and (2) their order of presentation. As far as (1) is concerned, English writers tend to write more extensively and in a more thorough and detailed way, on the other hand, Persian business letter writers tend to write rather short and very simple as Table 1 shows. As for (2), there are differences in the way in which the information is organized around the core move.

As Table 1 shows the overall ranking clauses in English business letters (156) are more than double clauses in Persian set (70). It can be concluded that English business letters are more informative than those Persian letters in terms of communicating comprehensively.

In both corpora there is a main move – INFORMATION- that contains what the receiver is expected to record some points to be used in future business communication. However, whereas in the Iranian corpus this move is generally rather simple, it tends to be more highly structured in English with details being introduced within the move itself.

In English the INFORMATION move is introduced in 80 percent of the corpus by other moves that give the reader additional information. However, in Iranian only in 20 percent of the letters in the corpus is the core INFORMATION move preceded by other moves. Instead, it tends to be situated immediately after the SUBJECT or, where there is one, the OPENING SALUTATION.

It is worth to mention that 16 of the letters in the Iranian corpus have a SUBJECT + INFORMATION + END POLITELY and CLOSING SALUTATION and four have an INFORMATION + END POLITELY and CLOSING SALUTATION move structure without any much information in their moves. Given the type of moves that are to be found before the INFORMATION move in the English corpus (THANKS, ADDRESS THE ISSUE, REFER TO PREVIOUS CONTACTS/COMMUNICATION, GIVE REASONS), indicate that they are introduced for reasons of positive politeness. The English writer tends to seek agreement and cooperation from the beginning of the letter and to share whatever is possible with the reader. Nothing that can be useful is left out in English set.

Both letters in the corpus have an END POLITELY move before the CLOSING SALUTATION. However, whereas in the Iranian corpus this move appears in 80 percent of the letters, the percentage for the English corpus is 60 percent. This is not surprising given that the END POLITELY move is a polite and formal way to close the letter.


**Mood and Modality in English and Persian Business Letters**
One of the main purposes of language communication is to interact with other people: to establish and maintain appropriate social links with them. This paper will investigate how persuasive discourse strategies realized under the heading of mood and modality between the writer and receiver in English and Persian contexts.

Persian is a language that relies on verb mood to help express modal meaning. In English, on the other hand, the chief exponents of modality are the modal auxiliaries *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *ought*, *need*, *dare*; the other lexical items

such as *perhaps*, *possible*, *certain*, *sure*, *allow*, *willing*, etc. are much fewer in number and less universal.

In order to understand the role relationships in English and Persian business letters, forty letters are analyzed in terms of mood. Based on classification of mood types put forward by Thompson (2000); Halliday (2000), an analysis of mood components is made by authors of this paper at clause level to decide types of mood used in English and Persian business letters. Table 1 illustrates the result in terms of frequency of each mood type in the forty samples.

As is shown in Table 1, there are altogether 156 ranking clauses in English business letters. It is obvious to find out that declaratives take up 90%, imperatives 9%, exclamatives are found .64%, and no Yes/No interrogatives are found in English business letters. In Persian letters declaratives take up 100%, imperatives 0%, Yes/No interrogatives 0% and no exclamatives are found in Persian business letters.

Table 1
*Mood in the Forty English and Persian Business Letters*

| Mood Types | English Letters | Persian Letters |
|---|---|---|
| Declaratives | 141 (90.36%) | 70 |
| Exclamatives | 1 (.64%) | 0 |
| Imperatives | 14 (9%) | 0 |
| Yes/No Interrogatives | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 156 | 70 |

Most of the mood classes are declaratives in both languages which provide information for the letter receiver. The function of declaratives in both languages goes beyond its unmarked function to give information. In this study the types and frequency of modality as an element of micro-textual level analyzed. Table 2 shows the types of modality in the forty English and Persian business letters.

Table 2
*Modality in the forty English and Persian business Letters*

| Type | Clause No. in English | Percentage | Clause No. in Persian | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| probability | 2 | 4% | 13 | 42% |
| Usuality | 3 | 7% | 0 | 0% |
| Obligation | 6 | 13% | 15 | 48% |
| Inclination | 34 | 76% | 3 | 10% |

As can be seen from Table 2, it is apparent that probability accounts for 4% in English letters in the twenty EBLS; usuality accounts for 7% in the twenty EBLS; obligation takes up 13% and inclination takes up 76% in the twenty EBLS. However, in Persian business letters probability accounts for 42% in twenty PBLS; obligation takes up 48% and inclination takes up 10% in PBLS.

**Discussion and Conclusion**
In order to answer the first research question whether there are any similarities or differences between English and Persian business letters in terms of complying the move analysis of

Swaeles, (1990) model, the results show that in both corpora the use of move analysis is evident but distributed differently.

The differences between the two corpora of letters illustrated mainly through (1) the number, type and frequency of moves realized; and (2) their order of presentation. As far as (1) is concerned, English writers tend to write more extensively and in a more through and detailed way as the numbers of clauses indicate. English letters were consisted of more than double sentences than Persian corpora. As for (2), there are differences in the way in which the information is organized around the core move.

In both corpora there is a core move called INFORMATION that contains what the receiver should record to guarantee the future business interaction. However, in the Persian corpus this move is generally short and rather simple. It tends to be more highly structured in English with great details. This conclusion is supported by the results of the study of Vergaro (2004) that English business letters are more writer responsible; whereas it tends to be that Persian letters are more reader responsible.

After the core information is communicated, sometimes a REQUEST move is introduced into the Persian corpus. This is the move in which the sender asks the receiver to make some changes as a consequence of the information given, and is the move in which most of the negative politeness strategies are concentrated.

Both letters in the corpus have an END POLITELY move before the CLOSING SALUTATION. However, whereas in the Persian corpus this move appears in 80 percent of the letters, the percentage for the English corpus is much more than Persian letters and this is in contrast with previous studies where they found much lower than 60 percent.

In conclusion, we might say that an underlying, universal macro-schematic structure of the FYI letter genre is shared by the two cultures. It usually consists of a SUBJECT, an OPENING SALUTATION, INFORMATION, an END POLITELY and CLOSING SALUTATION. However, the move structure analysis shows that different organizational strategies are employed by Persian and English writers, based on different textual practices observable in the two cultures. The English writers tend to construct the text with the addressee in mind. The information is more through and detailed and ancillary components of the subject matter are mentioned. The aim of such a strategy is that of creating a relationship, of achieving closeness with the reader.

In order to find answer to the second question whether there are any similarities and differences between English and Persian business letters in terms of using micro-textual level, the results show that English business writers tend to use more modal verbs to indicate the positive relationship with the reader from the beginning of the writing process.,

Persian writers tend to go straight to the point and to rely much more on the reader's cooperation for the interpretation. They tend to be essential. In agreement with Hinds (1987), we might say that English texts are more writer-responsible, i.e. the person primarily responsible for effective communication is the writer, whereas Persian texts are more reader responsible, i.e. the person primarily responsible for the communication is the reader. It can be concluded that Persian enjoys high- context culture through conveying the message covertly and English language seems to be characterized as low- context culture since tries to convey the meaning overtly based on Hall's (1977) classification.

As for the English corpus, the results of the present research study are in line with the results of the other analyses that have been carried out by other researchers mentioned in review of literature.  It is important to note, however, that not much has been published on this subject. Persian business language is little studied, and this is particularly true of

comparative studies. Nonetheless, the analysis of the present corpus seem to suggest that uniformity of expression in the business community is generally limited to the conventions imposed by the genre used and cultural variables still influence the writing system and style. The generic structure choices made both at the macro- and micro- textual level demonstrate these variables.

The findings of this study have some implications for second language practitioners since they would be aware of different kinds of moves in English and Persian business letters. Moreover, the results of this research can have implications for students to take into accounts different styles in writing business letters. However, there are certain delimitations in this study. First, this study is limited to For Your Information letters. There can be more in investigations for other kinds of business letters. Second, in this study at micro-textual level - mood and modality were analyzed. There are some other micro-textual level analyses that can be considered in such investigations. Third, the corpus was only forty letters ,so any generalization should be done cautiously.

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