

Language and Identity in Business Writing

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Abstract

Writing is more than a medium of expression. It reveals not only the thoughts and feelings but even the identity of the writer. Therefore, understanding the approach, style, and nature of writing is understanding the writers. In the business world, the entry point is via application letter. Therefore, how do applicants present themselves? How does their writing reveal their identity? In this study, the researcher tried to uncover the features and language used in business application letters and the identity reflected in the research partners' writings through qualitative discourse analysis. Findings reveal that although writers followed the conventional format of writing, their style of expression has changed. Moreover, the respondents exhibited careless use of words and boldness in expressing intentions, which leaves an arrogant personality to those who do not understand their nature as Generation Z. On the other hand, the same communication style depicts an attitude of hopefulness, openness and willingness to learn, patience and politeness. The study recommends that the writing teachers' pay close attention to the content and embedded messages in the students' writing, considering that writing is both technical activity and a social representation.

Keywords— business correspondence, discourse analysis, linguistic identity, writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is probably the single most important human achievement. Language plays a premium role in communication. It makes or breaks the process and may transmit different messages depending on how it is delivered [1]. Language is the primary identifying attribute of ethnolinguistic groups. Language is experienced as a marker of identity. It also serves as a distinct attribute of each group. From this, language could be said to play an essential role in forming culture [1]. Language mirrors the culture of a race. The idea states that by studying language, certain characteristics of a culture are revealed.

Linguistic identity is not an inevitable fate compulsory to all but, although at least, a social construct is a matter of choice [2]. Language is closely tied to identity since it is connected to individuals. Language is used to give shape to images of identity [3]. Language serves as a 'site of identity construction' [4]. Identity, therefore, constructs and is constructed by

language. It represents the individual identity as a member of the whole group.

Writing is the reflection of the writer. The language of written communication is one of the media used to express identity. In the study of [5], the youth were identified to have a deeper understanding of their realities by being active participants, keen observers, and concerned individuals. Their writing exposes a unique power to affect change. While for [6], writers' experience and uses of writing practice are sites for identity construction, documentation of identity. Furthermore, as adolescents move from one phase to another, they find and construct several identities to which expressing identity in writing becomes a strategy of documentation and expressing a developing sense of self.

In the business world, the primary means of communication is through correspondence. Business letters are conversations between the writer and the reader [7]. The K to 12 graduates who are now in the University as first-year

students can engage themselves in the workforce as expected by DepEd after their 12 years of basic education.

This generation of applicants, Generation Z, is the first to have grown up in a wholly digital era and are expected to join the working force in the 2020s. However, despite the advancement in technology, it was observed that these Generation Z or student- applicants are constrained in expressing themselves in their application letters in the second language or L2. This study aimed to determine the language used by the students in transacting business, specifically in writing application, and eventually uncover the identity reflected through their way of communication. Specifically, this study tried to explore the features of the students' business correspondence, figure out the language was used by the students in their business communication and extract the identity constructed in the students' business correspondence based on the features and language used.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Method

The study is dominantly qualitative, in which discourse analysis was used as the method of analysis. Discourse analysis [8] is a commitment to analysis on how language is used and is focused on the social actions accomplished by language users communicating within social and cultural contexts. Thus, the study highlighted the writing output of the research participants.

In the conduct of the study, the researcher activated text analysis which is the core of discourse analysis. Text analysis involved investigating how the writers composed their content using various devices to convey meaning.

Source of Data

The application letter writing samples of the respondents from SY 2016 to 2018 was the prime data source. The writers were students from the College of Business and Entrepreneurial Technology (CBET) for their Business Communication course and the

College of Education (CED) for their Purposive Communication course. Both groups of student-writers were in their first-year level during the time of the study.

Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis

In the conduct of the study, the learners were required to write an application letter as part of which they should exhibit competence in writing communications for work purposes. The 230-sample correspondence was collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented.

In the treatment of data, data analysis was activated. In order to discuss the features of the students' business correspondence and uncover the language used by the students in their business communication, the researcher identified all the distinct topographies available in the study. After they were identified, the researcher traced their patterns and devised a coding system to account for them. After all the patterns were coded, themes were developed as a representation of the features. The developed themes were then categorized based on the classification they belonged to.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Features of the students' business correspondence

The business letters disclosed between 1-3 paragraphs in which the first paragraph is about the reference for a vacancy. The second paragraph is considered the main paragraph since it contains much information like applicants' profiles, skills and experiences, and application intent. In comparison, the last paragraph contains the applicants' contact information and the willingness to go for an interview. Furthermore, the business correspondence contains the following parts: **salutation, body, complimentary close, and signature.**

The data disclosed that the parts have specific features. In the *addressee section*, instead of specifying the recipient, it could be gleaned that the respondents wrote: *Sir/Ma'am, Ma'am/Sir* while some wrote *Good morning Sir, Dear Management.*

The data revealed an *unclear acknowledgment of the addressee*, which is discouraged in

formal writing. Some letters included the **introductory greetings** such as *Good day Maam/Sir, Good day! A day of peace! Good day family of Jollibee, Boni!, A pleasant day to you, Maam/Sir!*

In the **body** of the business letters, it could be gleaned that the **self-introduction** was written in the usual mode. However, note that in... *I am willing to go at your available branch to apply in person so that you may know me better and I can give you the other details about me.* The respondent did not directly detail the information about him/herself but informed the employer of his/her willingness to divulge information in person. While other respondents: *If you want more information about me, just contact me in my number XXX or just pm me through Facebook at XXX; if you want to visit my resume just look for my Gmail account that is written at the upper right corner of this letter, in case you want to contact me and have listed some personal information like my contact no. and my address.* Instead of writing information about themselves, they directed the employer to communicate via electronic communication or social media platforms.

It could also be noticed that part of the **body** is the **intention for application**. The data showed that the respondents' reason for applying is dominantly because of **financial constraints**. One respondent even wrote a detailed explanation of the need to have a job and was even **imploring help** from the company: *Good day, Ma'am and Sir. I XX is about to apply to your company and to this branch as a service crew because I want to support my education not to stop also if you hired me as a service crew this job is really help to me and to my parents because they do not give me an allowance and tuition fee. I am suitable for this position, because I'm a hardworking person, jolly, energetic, trustworthy and also I always greet people who come in these fast-food restaurants., I hope you understand me and give consideration to this application letter also I hope you will help me.*

On the other hand, note that one respondent would like to apply because of the company's

environment and qualities. Such in: *I would like to apply to one of your branches for I was informed that the environment you have is friendly and has the qualities of a good company*

The business letters also contain **background information on the vacancy**. The majority of the respondents also included their **background work experience** in the body of the letter: *I have an experience being a cashier, ... I've learned how to handle money and how to accommodate customers, I have a experience in the N. Domingo Jollibee for 5 months.* Thus, most of the first paragraphs of the letters include the respondents' **outlining of their excellent personality traits towards work** such as: *Having a patience and be happy person ..., I am hardworking, patient and I have a problem solving skills...which showcased skills in the job applied for as their assets.* Thus, statements like: *I've been indifferent fast-food chain before as service crew that's why I am confident that I can do my job responsibly., I have a experience on being a service crew/ cashier* exposed their prior job experiences. Hence, their work attitude and experiences, which was illustrated in the: *Good day Ma'am! Sir! I would like to submit my application letter for a position as a cashier. I have enough experience and more skills to show to you that you'll not getting disappointed if you will hire me. I worked for almost 5 years as a cashier, and I do hope that I'm qualified for a job you've looking for* were supported by **their skills certification** related to the job they are applying for: *I'm a passer of NC II Bookkeeping.*

The body of the business letters also contained **promises of accepting/ taking responsibility after being hired**: *I'm not going do anything to ruin the name of the company, ... I will do my best to serve what our customer deserve to have. I will be patient and polite on whatever the customer is complaining and lastly I will love my job., I promise to do my job properly and responsibly., I will not do anything to disappoint you.etc.*

One could surmise that majority of the respondents **declared promises of responsible**

and best performance once hired. One even offered help by contributing to the company's performance: *I would want to help improve for the betterment of the company contributing my knowledge and skills learned from my past job experience.*

The last paragraph of the body of the application letters is composed of three kinds: **(1) availability for interview/ call, (2) contact information for notification of hiring, (3) closing statements.**

It could also be noticed that the application letters included **complimentary close**, which is identified right before the signature. However, notice that some respondents departed from this typical complimentary close writing by inscribing: *Your applicant, Applicant*

The language used by the students in their business communication

English language as the medium of communication

In terms of the medium of communication, it could be gleaned that the majority of the respondents utilized English in their written communication.

Presence of enclitic "po" as a form of tag switching

The business communications also disclosed the use of enclitic "po" in their communication. Notice that the respondents utilized formulaic expressions in English in the statements and added the Filipino enclitic **po** such as *I will wait for your text or calls. God bless po., Thank you so much po., Good morning po.*

The enclitic **po** reveals that the respondents show the culture of **PO** as Filipino politeness in their communication. The use of **po** is a term used to address and acknowledge authority and respect for elders. Since 'po' do not have equivalent English, the respondents resorted to using it despite the medium of communication which unveils an acknowledgment of superiority.

Presence of Philippine English

Although the respondents utilized English as the medium language, it could be noted that the kind of English used was Philippine English as shown in the following samples: *Actually, I have an experience on being a service crew in..., I just want to apply..., I just want to work in your company...*

Actually, and **just** are English markers but are Filipinized in the way they were used in the letters.

Grammar lapses and Grammatical errors

The samples: *I 'am interesting to apply in your Jollibee Corporation branch to be a cashier because I am good in interacting in the clients, I am also good in English communication., I would like to apply to your organization to be part and serve to the X., I introduce myself I can do to be respected of each customers and delivered friendly and fast service, answer question about menu selection accumulate recorded orders to some food., If you given me a chance to hired on your company, I 'am very pleasure to accept that. I will give my best to become great your company, I assure you I 'am obedient and I 'am so very industrious to my work and so very loving applicant because my work and love., I was working before in one of the fast-food also but I already endo., if you hire I will a platform to showcase my skills, I surely my skills is very good like how to speak in our customer revealed the grammatical lapses while in the samples: The undersigned is applying..., ...that there is a lot..., I was working before in one of the fast-food also but I already endo., This is to showcase my interest, I hope that this letter would be noticed., I am trying my luck for applying as a cashier..., I'm very pleasure to accept that..., I'm hoping that your calling me and fill the position., Thank you for understand me. Grammatical errors expose the poor language command of the writers, which was even strengthened by their wrong choice of words:*

Moreover, it could be detected that the respondents **loosely used language**: *If you given me a chance to hired on your company, I*

'am very pleasure to accept that., I 'am about to apply for the position of service crew in your branch, near Boni. I have some skills when it comes to handling customers, ...if you want to visit my resume, just look for my Gmail account that is written at the upper right corner of this letter, I 'am XX...So far, I'm still finding a perfect time to approach your company to apply for some position. But to let this application as your priority..., I 'am hoping for our fast response for this matter., You should hire me because I'm dedicated person towards my work., If you want to visit my resume just look for my Gmail account that is written at the upper right corner of this letter, ... I hope you to accepting me., I am hoping that you will read my letter..., I am willing to wait for your reply no matter what..., I've already sent my resume and class schedule so you could be able to check if I will be hired or not., and I'm hoping for your fast response...

Notice that the respondents did not filter the contents of their letters. The unrefined use of language manifests a failure to observe decorum in letter writing. It was even perceived that the communications were **informal, too personal, and direct** to the point. The respondent stated a literal but indirect statement highlighting the quality of service and its equivalent salary. Although it could be seen that there were respondents who could come up with well-written letters, one could observe that the application letter turned out to be **creative writing** material through the excessive use of adjectives and the nature of the structure of the communication.

Constructed identity as manifested in the students' business communication

Confident and polite applicants

Data revealed that the respondents are confident applicants displaying their personality, skills, and experience. The respondents also revealed strong qualifications, which are not only skills-based. Their passion for taking responsibility and performing at their bests is apparent in their letters.

Moreover, the communications of the respondents exhibit three forms of politeness.

The use of **please** as in **Please** contact me..., **Please** do consider my application..., **Thank you/ thank you very much** in: Thank you and god bless, Thank you very much, have a nice day. Enclitic **"Po"** in: I will wait for your text or calls. God bless **po.**, Thank you so much **po.**, Good morning **po.**

Please, thank you/ very much and "po" are markers of politeness. The concept of politeness aims to signal a positive or 'feel good' connection with the hearers [9]. While the formulaic expression: Good morning Mam/Sir, Good morning/ Good afternoon, Good day! also signal positive politeness.

Hopeful

The statements: *Hoping for your consideration., Hope you accept me to be a part of your team, I would be grateful if you consider me as your employee, I hope I can get a positive response...Im hoping that I will get the position...* establish a sense of optimism and aspiration from the applicants. Furthermore, their being hopeful is fortified by their being **presumptuous**. The statements: *...Thank you for accepting me., ...I'll call you in the week of November, I will look forward as one of employee. Thank you in advance and consideration, ...Im excited to work with you..., Hoping for this skill and experience are good enough for this position and you will pick me.* generates an assuming impression on the part of the employer.

Patience

Notice that the respondents displayed a patient character. The given samples: *I am willing to wait no matter what, I am willing to wait for our reply* reveals that they are willing to wait for the application result.

Openness and willingness to learn

One of the many characteristics of business communications is the openness and willingness of the applicants to venture into the chosen field of work experience. The applicants are determined to be part of the company and

welcome growth in any career opportunity as manifested in the *I am willing to*.

Bold and Straightforward

The students' communication also exposes conduct of **straightforwardness**. Data shows that the respondents are **too direct** to the point in communicating with the applicant. Their unrefined language use displays an **unconscious boldness** that creates an **impolite impression** of the reader, specifically the prospective employer. Hence, their communications also sound **demanding**, which leads to **impertinence** as in *If interested please call me at my no. XX, For my information, you may contact at XX or text or call me in my no. XX, I' am looking forward to meet you and I glad to come on your office. You name the day and time then I'll be there...If you want more information about me just contact me in my no. XX or just pm me through fb at XX, I would like to hear soon from you*. The data unveils the distinct identities of the respondents were found to be confident, polite and hopeful. However, their being straightforward leads to their being audacious and demanding which eventually creates an impression of impertinence.

It could be noticed that the communications' general structure includes the **salutation, the body** which contains the reference for the job application, the applicants' background and the contact information for a possible interview, the **complimentary close** and **signature** reveal a conventional part of writing. However, it could be detected that the acknowledgment of the names and titles of addressees were missed out. Hence, it could be spotted that the addressees were accredited in general terms. At the same time, the opening salutation is no longer the conventional way of greeting but is informal. One could sense the shifting of the tone from a modest appeal of hiring to a demanding application. The application letters unveiled sentential and segmented ways of writing letters. Though the letters are coherent, the majority failed to show the cohesiveness of the sentences—the respondents' style of writing

moves off from the presumed intent of the job application.

Language is a social practice. The language style is intimately connected with who the individuals are. On the contrary, as a linguistic resource, style-shifting is socially motivated [10]. The choice of style is based on the suitable range of linguistic means to convey a particular message effectively [11]. 'Style' and 'stylistic variation' in language assumed a similar content available in more than one linguistic form " [12]. Thus, linguistic style is undoubtedly accustomed to its social meaning.

The English language was used as the dominant medium of communication in which tag-switching, the use of two codes in a statement, and Philippine English were used. Hence, the data revealed that there are grammatical lapses in the use of the language. Moreover, the business application writing was diverted to a seem-to-be creative writing material, if not informal communication.

It could be viewed that based on the language used, the respondents crafted the letters divergent of the norms. It appears that they lacked training in business communications in their previous level of academic experience. When they were asked to validate the findings, they confirmed that they had the subject on letter writing, and they were even asked to write sample letters. According to [13], style-shifting is based on the levels of social awareness of a linguistic variable by the community members. [14] in 2007 mentioned that speakers could do things with linguistic variations. Hence, these Sociolinguistic variations are socially meaningful" [14]. Style is the product of the negotiation of social meaning [15]. As such, language becomes an essential tool in establishing, maintaining social relationships while conveying social information.

The data unveils other characteristics of the applicants, which were manifested through their style of writing. Despite the straightforwardness which seems to appear impertinence, their confidence, patience, hopefulness, openness, and willingness to learn are attitudes becoming of employees. In comparison, the use of loose

language implicates an interactive communication on the part of the writers despite the grammatical lapses, which are even manifestations of trying to communicate in the prestigious [English] language. Thus, it entails an attitude of customer service.

Their use of *please, thank you, "po", Good morning/afternoon*, exhibit not only familiar, conversational words and expressions but also polite formulas. Politeness in business correspondence creates an atmosphere of respect and illustrates a willingness to cooperate, promoting communication and expanding trade [7]. *Please, thank you, "po", Good morning/afternoon* are forms of styles that serve as mitigating devices that reduce the imposition of the imperative forms [16].

According to [17] approach, identity is a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that is never stable. It arises, develops, and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction through social categories. Generation Z or those born in the mid-1990s to mid-2000 are less patient because of the instant gratification caused by technology. Their language in their correspondence reflected they are *confident applicants, hopeful yet presumptuous, polite yet bold*, and *straightforward* to the point of *assuming* in communicating. It means that they created an impression that identifies them socially through language [18]. Generation Z, or the digital natives, communicates confidently; hence, without reservations, expect the workforce to conform to their needs. Thus, it could be understood that their being personal and direct to the point is part of their nature as digital natives who are knowledgeable enough to speak to anyone anywhere and anytime, which they have been doing for their entire lives. Hence, being tolerant of the diversity has always been the default position of Generation Z. Thus, Generation Z is a very diverse generation [19].

IV. CONCLUSION

Language expresses more than what the words mean. Language allows the individuals to situate themselves in various settings, project some power both to the audience and

themselves. Thus, the style and nature of writing reflect the writer's identity.

Findings reveal a dominant three-paragraph correspondence in which parts such as Salutation, Body, and Complimentary close are illustrated. The body is divided into the reference of the vacancy, applicants' profile, and contact information.

Writing letters requires a good command of the language, excellent written language, uses language clearly and effectively. Hence, writers must learn how to be brief in expressing thoughts and ideas; writers must have knowledge of grammar, good command of vocabulary, knowledge, and understanding of form and style because language at its utmost form of expression reveals the writer's personality. However, data disclose the applicants' grammatical lapses and loose use of words, leading to misinterpretations.

It could be gleaned that while the writing of letters evolved drastically, the language of business communication has changed. The respondents exhibited a careless use of words and boldness in expressing intentions, although unconscious, which leaves an arrogance personality to those who do not understand their nature as Generation Z. Although, the same style of communication depicts an attitude of hopefulness, openness, and willingness to learn, patience and politeness.

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