

An Analysis of 'Tongzhi' or 'Circular Letters' Genre in Chinese Business Communication

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1 Introduction.

This paper explores sales 'tongzhi' or 'circular letters' employed in business communication in China today. 'Tongzhi' literally means to inform, but 'tongzhi' as a genre in business writing represent more speech acts than informing. According to Liang et al (1992:230), 'tongzhi' is mainly used as 'xiangxing' (↓) genre from the superior to the subordinates; and it can be also used as 'pingxing' (↔) genre equals writing to each other. In business communication, these two types are both employed. However the 'pingxing' genre is more frequently used, which reveals a fundamental change in the language development with the change of society towards the market economy. On the other hand, government owned enterprises are still exercising control over the management of subordinate companies. The higher-level enterprises or organisations will use 'tongzhi' to give instructions or orders to the subordinate companies. On the other hand, the enterprises or companies who do not have a superior-subordinate relationship will also employ the 'tongzhi' genre to express requests. *According to Searl (1969), different speech acts may be governed by different rules or strategies.* These two types of 'tongzhi' employ different strategies in writing practice. But the focus of the discussion will be placed on the 'pingxing tongzhi'.

1.1 The descriptions of 'tongzhi'. In the composition guide books, 'tongzhi' is always an important genre. Every text book gives description as to how to write 'tongzhi'. To sum up, there are two kinds of descriptions:

Description 1: Tongzhi is composed of four parts: the heading, which describes what kind of 'tongzhi' the letter is concerned, the salutation, the body of 'tongzhi', and date. The heading also expresses the main purpose of the 'tongzhi'. The main body of the 'tongzhi' begins with the situation, the reason for issuing the tongzhi, the purpose of tongzhi, such as the items to be notified. (Liang et al, 1992:230).

Description 2: The language of 'tongzhi' has to be straightforward and solemn. It represents the authority's voice. The writer is supposed to notify the reader in a clear way (Chen, 1991: 220).

Description 1 talks about both the formula and rhetorical structure of 'tongzhi'. Description 2 talks about the use of language in 'tongzhi'. Being straightforward is to express the idea directly, not in a roundabout way. Being solemn is to represent the authority's voice. These two descriptions give a general picture about what 'tongzhi' should be like. Take the 'tongzhi' below as an example:

The Document of Ministry of Foreign Trade

Tongzhi of Prohibiting Importing Second-hand Clothes

April 29, 1985.

In recent years, companies in some districts and departments have imported large quantities of second-hand clothes from Hong Kong and other foreign countries regardless of the people's health and the danger of contagious disease. They have made profits out of selling these clothes but have brought about harmful effects to society.

In order to protect the health of our people, and vindicate national prestige, after studying this matter with some of the departments concerned, we have made the following decisions. When this document is received, all the districts and departments must stop immediately importing second-hand clothes through any business channels. If anyone violates this decision, he is to be investigated and punished as a smuggler by customs, and the responsibility of the importing company has to be investigated. As to those who have made an order but have not received delivery of second-hand clothes yet, they should negotiate with the exporters to cancel the order or sell them where they are ordered, and should not ship them to our country. As to those who can neither cancel nor sell the clothes, their delivery has to be suspended and investigated by the customs, and quarantined and sterilised by medical departments, and handed over to commercial managerial departments.

This letter is a very typical 'xiang tongzhi'. The formula, following description 1, has a heading, the body of the letter and date. The heading with the character 'tongzhi' written in it, represents features that distinguish this types of letters from others as 'tongzhi' genre. The heading is about the main point or purpose of this letter, which is 'prohibiting importing second-hand clothes'. It is important in that it tells the reader what the letter is all about. At the same time, it also reveals that the speech act in the letter is an order, because the reader does not have any choice but to follow what the letter says, which is not to import second-hand clothes. In this aspect, the reader is controlled by the writer who is the superior.

In content this 'tongzhi' has four parts:

- 1 the background situation: the selling of second-hand clothes (lines 7-12)
- 2 reason for the decision: in order to protect the people's health and maintain the country's prestige (lines 14-16)
- 3 order: prohibit importing second-hand clothes (lines 17-19)
- 4 methods taken for the order to be carried out: (lines 19-29)

In language, this 'tongzhi' is consistent with description 2 as the language is straightforward and solemn. Since the relationship between the writer and the reader is the superior and subordinate, the language reflects this relationship in that it follows the controlling principle in both speech act verb and lexis. The order is brought about in the first sentence of the second paragraph:

wei baohu renmin jiankang, ... jue ding: cong wenjian
in ord to protect people health decide from document
daoda zhiri qi, ge diqu, ge bumen bixun
arrive GNE date begin every district every unit must
liji tingzhi yi renhe maoyi fangshi jinkou
immediately stop in any business channel import
jiu fuzhuang.
secon-hand clothes

In order to protect the health of our people, ... (we) have made the following decisions. When this document is received, every districts and departments must stop immediately importing second-hand clothes through any business channels.

In this long sentence, there are two speech act verbs. The first is concerned with the making of the order, which is the verb 'juejing' (decide). Those everybody can make a decision, this verb used in 'tongzhi' has a special connotation. It is used in 'tongzhi' as a special verb to indicate the superior's order or decision. 'Juejing' is acting like a symbol word where the reader can find the order immediately. The second speech act verb is related to the order itself: 'bixun liji tingzhi' or 'must immediately stop'. It is

composed of a modal 'bixun' (must), the adjective 'liji' (immediate) and the verb 'tingzhi' (stop). 'Bixun' indicates imperativeness, and modifies a verb. But this modal is usually used by a superior to issue an order or instruction. In this example, the authority of the order is strengthened by the lexicon, the adjective 'liji' (immediate), which indicates that the order is not only imperative, but also urgent. Similar modal verbs are also found the part four, line .

So the employment of modal verbs of imperativeness is a typical characteristics in the language of the 'xiaxing tongzhi'. In order to express the meaning in this type of 'tongzhi' clearly, the method of script is employed (Wierzbicka, 1991). The implication can be expressed in the script below:

If I decide this,
I will say this to you.
You have to do what I say.
I will see to it that you do this.

In this script, the writer has all the control over the reader. The reader does not have any control over the order. All s/he has to do is to take the order and do what the writer requires.

However, many tongzhi related to business communication are not written in such a consistent manner with the two descriptions, because the text books mainly focus on the discussion of 'tongzhi' as 'xiaxing' genre. The 'pingxing' genre is seldom touched upon. The following discussion will focus on the 'pingxing sales tongzhi' genre. Even the 'pingxing sales tongzhi' is a mixture of 'tongzhi' and sales. It can not really be labelled as 'pingxing sales', because of its 'tongzhi' elements. In these letters, traces of 'xiaxing tongzhi' can still be found. But on the whole it represents a 'pingxing' relationship with the reader.

2 The Data. I have selected 30 'pingxing sales tongzhi'. The selection of these letters is based on the following criteria:

First, all of the 30 letters are written in the 'tongzhi' genre and have the character 'tongzhi' in the headings. This rules out the letters which are sales letters.

Second, in order to present a picture about the range of use of 'tongzhi' in sales, I try to include as many kinds of products as possible.

3 Sociolinguistic Variables. As to sociolinguistic variables, there is very little difference in social distance among the 30 letters, because they represent an equal relationship

between the writer and the reader. Only in the aspects of the use of salutations and readers' references, there are some differences.

3.1 Salutations. According to description 1, 'tongzhi' should have a salutation as in the form of a letter. But this is only partly true. Among the 30 letters, 21 letters have salutations, 9 do not have any salutations. Among the letters that have salutations, there remain some differences as well. Most of the letters have the name of the company as salutation. But there are letters that uses other forms of salutations. The uses of the salutations are shown below:

Table 1: the use of salutations

No salutation
Names of the companies
Leading comrade

In the above table, the 'xiang sales tongzhi' does not follow description 1 in a strict manner. In fact, they have more options in the salutations. The 'pingxing sales tongzhi' can not only address the reader in the company's names, but also address the reader as individuals. In addition to this, the 'pingxing tongzhi' can be written in a no-salutation manner, treating the letter as an advert.

3.2 Readers' References. As to the readers' references, they vary from letter to letter. But generally speaking, the following references are used in 'pingxing sales tongzhi'.

'Pingxing Tongzhi'
your (H) company
the company concerned
title + gexia or Excellency

Some of the letters use very formal reader's references such as the companies' names. But others are using respectful references such as the honorific 'your company', and the individual's titles. The 'pingxing tongzhi' addresses the reader in some letters in a more polite or respectful way by referring to the reader in the honorific terms. Even 'gexia' or 'your Excellency' is used to address the reader. This term is mainly saved for the supreme leaders of the country. But today in business letters, when the writer wants the reader to feel the respect, s/he uses this term of high respect. It is appropriately used to make the reader feel good on this occasion when the writer tries to sell the product to the reader.

In both salutations and readers' references, the 'pingxing sales tongzhi' use respectful terms. The reason for this can be sought by referring to the function of this

type 'tongzhi' as 'pingxing', in which the writer tries to be cooperative with the reader, instead of controlling the reader as in the 'xiaxing tongzhi'. 'Pingxing sales tongzhi' are a specially kind of sales letters in which equals are writing to each other to promote sales. The letters function as adverts of the products. The writer keeps in mind the real nature of the relationship with the reader is seller and buyer. So s/he tries to be more respectful to the reader. In the 'xiaxing tongzhi', the writer is the superior to the reader and calls on the reader to take the order. The relationship between the writer and the reader is complicated in a double layer: seller and buyer; superior and subordinate. So the writer does not have to be respectful to the reader. At least, the writer does not have to strive to be more respectful than this to influence the reader's behaviour.

4 Findings. This section deals with general findings in the 'sales tongzhi' in formula, speech acts, rhetorical structure and linguistic features of the letters.

4.1 Formula. The formulas of all the 60 letters can be classified into the following two groups:

More Formal	Less formal
Heading 1	Heading 2
Document number	Salutation (optional)
Heading 2	The body of the letter
Salutation	Date
The body of the letter	
Date	

These letters are written in either of the above formulas. The more formal formula letter has two headings. Heading 1 is the name of the organisation or company of the writer, indicating who the issuer of the 'tongzhi' is. The document number is composed of the year and the number of the document. The number is not a very important feature in this genre. Heading 2 is the most important part which are related to the purpose and the order of the 'tongzhi'. Take the following letter as an example:

(1) Chinese Technology Association
Chinese General Import and Export Corporation of Technology
[1994] Chinese Tech Letter No. 019

(2) Tongzhi about "Eastern International Show" in Italy

However, there seems to be an ongoing formula change: there are both formal and informal forms of 'tongzhi' in practice. To a certain extent, the writer has some freedom to choose between the two forms when writing a 'tongzhi'. The less formal formula only has heading 2, indicating what the 'tongzhi' is about. Most of the 'pingxing tongzhi' (23 of the 30 letters) are written in the informal form, only 7 letters

use the formal form. The forms these two types of 'tongzhi' employ are consistent with the salutations and readers' references. The more formal 'tongzhi' all have salutations, addressing the reader by the names of companies. The readers' reference is mainly the company concerned. The less formal 'tongzhi', on the other hand, seem to be flexible with salutations and readers' references, though most of the letter have salutations, quite a few do not have. The letters can use the companies' names, individuals' titles, etc. as salutations or even without any salutations. As to readers' references, they are more flexibly used too with both the honorific and other respectful address terms.

4.2 The Speech Acts. As to the speech acts of the letters, I am trying to answer the following questions:

- 1 What speech acts are there in each letter?
- 2 What is the major speech act?

1 What speech acts are there in each letter?

All of the 30 letters have something in common --- the communicative purpose which is to sell or promote products. This mutual factor will bring about something in common for speech act as well for this group of letters. That is all of them try to advertise some products in the letter. The products in sales 'tongzhi' are mainly books, computer softwares, etc. Advertising is a mutual speech act in all the letters.

Another mutual speech act is the request. Since these letters are sales letters in nature, all of the letters call for action in the letter, asking the reader to contact the writer or buy the product at the end of the letter.

2 What are the major speech act in the letter?

The major speech act of the letter is the advertising of the product, because these letters are 'sales tongzhi'. They have to promote sales first, then ask the reader to respond to the letter. Compared with the 'xiaxing tongzhi' which has the order as the major speech act, the 'pinxing sales tongzhi' has advertising as the major speech act. The writer tries to advertise the product instead compelling the reader to buy the product.

Requests are another speech act in the letter. After the advertising, the writer calls for action from the reader. The calling of action is not expressed as an order, but as a request. The reader has to choice to decide whether to take the action or not. So the order scrip does not word here. A new script is required:

I tell you this (the product)

I think you might want to buy this
 I ask you to buy this
 But you don't have to buy this
 You can decide by yourself

Some letters also have requirements related to requests. Some also have the thanking of the readers. These speech acts are regarded as minor speech acts.

4.3 The Rhetorical Structure. In talking about the rhetorical structure, I am trying to answer the following questions:

1. What is placed at the beginning of the letter?
2. Where is the advertising placed?
3. Where is the request placed?

4.3.1 What is placed at the beginning of the letter? Many letters, in fact 21 out of the 30 begin with the background situation and reason for the offer of products. This part functions as the persuasive factor to convince the reader of the need and the importance of the offer. Some letters even have both situation and reason before the offer is mentioned. In one word, the situation or reason, or situation + reason is supposed to convince the reader of the authority. Take the summary of the situation and reason in the following sales 'tongzhi' (letter 9) as an example:

Situation: World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be established in 1995.

Reason: The WTO will influence the economy of our country. It is urgent to study international trade theory and practice.

Advertising: Therefore we establish an editing committee to compile

An Introduction to International Trade Organisations.

In this letter, the reader, who is the manager of a foreign trade company, is called upon to have his company's name included in the book. In this example, the writer tries to convince the reader why it is important for him to respond to the reader first by introducing the international situation of WTO. In fact, the situation functions as the background for the reason and it can be regarded as a composing part of the reason. Though the situation is somehow remote from the reader, it could represent a need to publish the book which is related to the international trade. It could also be a convincing factor to persuade the reader to join in and make donation to the publication of the book, because the reader might think the company benefit from the publication of the book by means of making the company known to the world.

So the writer of sales 'tongzhi' has to know something about the particular market of the related products. After the study of this market, s/he will find the problematic situation related to the products. In the letter s/he can provide the situation to the reader, and offer the products as a unique solution to the problematic situation. For example, letter 4, in addition to the general reasons, explains the difficult situation in this way:

(1) Encouraging and supporting the export of machinery and electronics products is the long-term developmental strategy in our international trade of our country. ...

(2) In the recent years, the businessmen from abroad wanted to buy the Chinese products and cooperate with the Chinese corporations. But they has to contact us through outdated means of communication. It often happened that when they spent a lot of time contacting us, and selecting the products; but the market situation changed. In this way, both of us lost the opportunity. (3) At the age of information, (you) will land into a passive potion without modern means of communication.

(4) Therefore, promoting products by means of CD Roms have been accepted widely in the developed countries.

The writer provides the general situation of the country in (1), then move on to the specific situation related to the promotion of CD Rom, thus circling around getting closer and closer to the offer. The specific situation, composed of 2,3, and 4, follows a problem solution pattern in which the writer raises the problem in (2), and provides basis of evaluation in (3), and offers the solution in (4).

- (1) general situation: strategy of our country
- (2) problem: lost market
- specific situation <
- (3) negative evaluation: passive position
- (4) solution: CD Rom

This part functions as the major part to convince the reader of the need for the offer and the authority of the writer. The problematic situation also functions as the reason to make the offer proceeding the offer of the CD Rom.

4.3.1.2 Where is the advertising placed? Nine letters are advertising-fronted and begin with the advertising of the product. The other letters place the advertising part after the background information part.

4.3.1.3 Where is the request placed? Generally speaking, the request is placed after the advertising part at the end of the letter.

Sales 'Tongzhi'

Situation / Reason for offer (optional)

Advertising of the product

Request

The letters seem to include situation and reason first if there is any. Then they sequence from the advertising to the request.

4.4 The Language of 'Tongzhi'. Since the 'tongzhi' concerned here are sales 'tongzhi'. They not only have the characteristics 'tongzhi' in, but also reflect the characteristics of language of sales. These two aspects will be discussed separately.

4.4.1 The authority of 'tongzhi'. As to the first point of 'tongzhi' language, most of the letters are consistent with description 2 and represent the authority's 'solemn' voice that differ these letters from the ordinary sales letters. The authority voice is expressed in the following ways:

1) The distant but important situations. In the letters with situations and reasons, most of the letters start with the important situations of the country or of the world, which is very distant from the content of the letter, but are indirectly related to the content of the letter. Take letter 5 of sales 'tongzhi' as an example:

In order to meet the needs of the current opening-up situation, and the needs of developing the cause of foreign trade, the Ministry of International Trade and Economics Cooperation and the Department of Economics and Trades Development and Policy, and the Computer Centre decide to revise 1994-1995 The Encyclopaedia of the Chinese Foreign Trade Corporations on the basis of the 1992-1993 edition.

In this example, the book of foreign trade corporations is indirectly related to the foreign trade, at least in the same profession or business. But it is very distant, because one thing is the publishing of a book, the other thing is the situation in the foreign trade. But perhaps in the long-run, the publication of the book will contribute to this business. So the introduction of the very distant situation implies the deep meaning of the letter concerned. The implicature is that the advertising in the letter has far-reaching significance. We will leave the issue as to how convincing of this part as a reason for the offer for later discussion. But the introducing of distant but important situations is a common practice among the 'tongzhi' letters.

Two situations are mentioned briefly and generally: the opening-up and the cause of foreign trade. The writer does not go into the details of these situations, for the writer just wants to relate the relationship between the important situation and the revision of the book. In another word, the writer indicates that the 92-93 version is not coping up with the new situations. There might be very practical reasons why the book is a bit out of date. But the writer would not include these reasons in such details. The general mentioning of the reason is the acceptable way the letter is written. There is no need to go into any details of the reasons for the writer.

The general situation and reason part is required as in the writing of 'tongzhi'. In linguistic forms, if the situation is brief, it will be indicated with the reason in one sentence as in the above example, introduced by 'wei' or 'in order to' as in the above example. The preposition 'wei' here plays two functions, to introduce the situation and purpose at the same time. It has a combining power to include both the situation and reason in one sentence.

But if the situation is complicated or the writer wants to provide the situation as information for the reader, it can not be included in one sentence, no matter how powerful the 'wei' or 'in order to' is, the writer usually explains the situation in details in separate sentences.

2) The authority's names. A common way of expressing the authority's voice in 'tongzhi' is to mention the important people's names or organisations. Letter 5 goes on explicating this point:

The deputy director of the National Committee of China autographed the name for the book. The vice premier Li Lan Qing wrote the following words of appreciation, "Hope The Encyclopaedia of the Chinese Foreign Trade Corporations will become a good medium to promote the Chinese and foreign communication and the development of economics and trade cooperation.'

Two important people are mentioned. They are the deputy director of the National Committee of China and the vice premier of China. The important people are mentioned with the full official titles, indicating the influence these people have.

Similarly, the voice of these people can also be quoted to exercise the authoritative influence. In the above example, the vice premier's words are quoted. What the writer quotes from the authority's voice depends on the needs of the writing. In this example, the writer quotes the vice premier's general expectation related to the international business situation. This hope does not relate to any academic value or professional standard of the book, because the premier may not be the professional in

this book of foreign trade. However, the premier is invited to write these words of general expectations. Perhaps what the general expectations are not very important, the important thing is that the premier pays attention to this book. Nowadays it is a common practice in China to invite important people to write a few words of encouragement on newly published book. This authority's influence is employed in the publishing circle as a very good means of promotion. Another evidence can be found in sales 'tongzhi' 6. In this letter of promoting the book related to registered brands, 13 important people's words are provided in the enclosed page of the letter. These thirteen people represent various levels of superiors from the vice premier to the Chairman of the Chinese Enterprises Association. This shows that authority at various levels all give support to the publication of the book. Sometimes the writer can also quote from an important document, such as the document of the people's conference, etc. All these quotation function to indicate the authority of the letter. The writer intends to use the authority to influence or convince the reader.

The third way of expressing the authoritativeness is by means of mentioning the approval or support of some important people, and mentioning the name of the writer's organisation, the experts in the area related to the products. Take another letter, letter 3 in the exhibition 'tongzhi' for example. This letter, which is to promote the informational computer software, introduces the authority in this way:

(1) With the support of economics and trade office from the State Council, and the promotions office of the informational system of the State Council, (2) the Chinese Enterprises Management Association, the Chinese Enterprises Information Exchange Centre organised the (3) famous experts and scholars of our country and successfully created the computer software CEMACOM, ...

In this example, No.1 is the authority who backs up the production of the software, who also represents the highest authority in this area, so it is mentioned in the first place. No.2 is the authority who writes this letter, so it is necessary to write the whole name of the organisation in the letter, so that the reader will figure out the authority the writer represents. No.3 is the professional authority in this area, it is also necessary to mention it as a convincing factor, but only after all the higher administrative authorities are introduced.

4.4.2 The language of advertising reflected in the 'tongzhi' letters. Besides the authority as an advantage mentioned in 4.4.1, these 'tongzhi' are also influenced by advertising language. The sales 'tongzhi' try to praise the products mentioned in the letter in one way or another. The following aspects are the common ways for the praise.

a) The use of a series of adjectives. The writers of sales letters tend to introduce the quality of their products by using a series of adjectives. For example, one book promotion letter writes:

ben shu de bianzuan yuanze shi, liqiu quanmian,
 this book compile principle is strive comprehensive
xinying, jingque, quanwei, shiyong.
 original exact authoritative practical

The compiling principle of this book is as follows: strive to be comprehensive, original, exact and authoritative.

In this example, five adjectives are listed in parallel to describe the quality of the book. The number of the adjectives in the list may vary. But normally the writer would include as many as possible. This linguistic phenomenon owes to the flexible use of the adjective. In the above example, the adjectives are objects to the verbs of 'liqiu' (strive). Adjectives can also be used as modifier to verbs as in another letter:

jishi, zhengque, quanmian de zhangwo shichang xinxi.
 timely correct comprehensive grasp market information
 timely, correctly, and comprehensive grasp the market information.

In this example, three adjectives are brought together to modify the verb 'zhangwo' (grasp) by the particle 'de'. However, this 'de' (的), different from attribute marker de (的), is an adverbial marker modifying verbs. This 'de' makes it possible for the adjectives to function as verb modifiers.

b) High evaluation of the products. The writers tend to give high evaluations to their products. Some letters use the superlative degree, while some use the comparative degree of adjectives to evaluate the products. Examples are as follows:

benshu dou jiang shi chao yiliu de jingpin.
 this book all will be surpass No.1 exquisite product
 This book will be the best of its kind.

Tongshi yie ju you jiao gao de zhiliang.
 same time also have higher quality
 At the same time, (the product) also have higher quality.

In the first example, the writer uses the superlative degree. In the advertising language, people tend to use the extremity of language to describe the good quality. The second

example uses the comparative degrees. Perhaps we can not judge that the writer of the first example is more sure of his or her products. It is only a matter of making comments in different manners. The writer does not really follow the reasoning for the best or the second best. It is only a subjective comment to mean that the product is really good. The adjective degrees may not be very convincing, because neither the first or the second example is provided with any facts to prove the 'best' or 'higher quality'. The native speakers do not like those kind of unsupported evaluation about the products. However, it is an acceptable writing practice in advertising language.

c) List of advantages or good points of the products, prizes, and the popularity of products, etc. they have. Perhaps a product can not have all of the above advantages, so the writer tries to include as many advantages as possible in the letter. It is easy to seek advantages for the writer if the product won a prize, or the product is very popular. For example, letter 1 of sales 'tongzhi' describes the popularity of the computer information network by providing statistical data:

Since the setting up five year ago, these three computer networks have been developing rapidly with more than 1,500 customers and about 1,000 information providers, ...

These kind of advantages are related with facts. Especially the statistical seems to be a convincing factor. On the one hand, it indicates that the product is popular. On the other hand, it shows the writer is a professional marketing person and has spent some time investigating the market. But nobody can stop the writing including other things as an advantage, if the book does not have the above facts as advantages. For example, letter 5 describes the uniqueness of the book:

This book is the first introductory book to foreign trade organisations edited by the government department responsible for the book since the establishment of our people's republic.

It seems that this book does have a prize or the popularity mentioned above, so the writers tried to include the uniqueness when writing this letter. However, the uniqueness is very hard to prove, especially as books, for there are so many books and publishers in China. But the writer tries to seek for the uniqueness of the book, and has been successful with the finding. The uniqueness of the book is the editor, who is from the 'the government department'. The writer seems to have had a hard time searching for something as an advantage for the book. But the advantage he found may not be very convincing for all the readers. It may be convincing for some readers, if they intend to find out what the government voice is like in writing this book. In this aspect, it can also be treated as an advantage of the product. This interesting combination of government department and editing will lead to the following topic of similar combinations.

4.5 The Linguistic Features of the Speech Acts.

4.5.1 Offers in the advertising. In sales 'tongzhi', the offers are raised in the affirmative sentence, such as 'the XXX company collect and compile the ... map'. This offer does not seem to be an offer. It will be much easier to recognise it as an offer, if it writes this way:

Would you like to buy the map?

or:

We are offering the map for you.

Unfortunately, the offers in the sales 'tongzhi' are very often written in the sentence such as 'XX Co. is doing / has created something' formula. The offer mainly constitutes a statement, in which in reader is not called for to accept the offer. This kind of writing practice is just the opposite of the recommended attitude in writing guide books as to how to write sales letters. The writing guide book often stresses that the writer of sales letters should pay attention to the reader and arouse the reader's interest (Chen, 1991,260). However, in sales 'tongzhi', this aspect is ignored because of its special sales letter nature. The major reason to raise the order in this way is that the writer wants to include the information of authority at various levels behind the offer. At the same time the writer's company's has also to be mentioned to represent another level of authority for the reader. In addition to this, the writer has to establish a relationship between the authority and the product. And the settlement for this combination is to raise the offer and authority in the same sentence as a statement. There is hardly any space left for the reader to be addressed directly in the sentence. There is another reason to refer this kind of statement as an offer, because later on, the writer will call for action in relation to this. Therefore this statement about the plan or decision of the writer can not have another name except for an offer.

Generally speaking, there are two ways in raising offers in sales 'tongzhi'. One way introduces the offer by using the verb 'shi' or 'be', such as:

Under the care of the National Science Committee, the Chinese enterprise and corporation database is established by the Chinese Technology Information Institute with the help of the national and international information organisations.

Products are offered indirectly in these letters through this kind of statement. This sentence does not seem to carry any offer in it. If it is taken out of the 'tongzhi' context, it is very much like an informational statement of how the database is established. However, when it is placed in this 'tongzhi' sales context, it is more than informational, in fact, it has two functions: an offer and an item of information about

the database. This long sentence can provide the reader an offer on the one hand, and information about the authority who helps and takes care on the other. This offer is not really separated from the authority language.

Another way of introducing the offer is by means of using the schema of reason + offer. Before the detailed discussion of this schema, it is necessary to introduce the preposition 'weile' or 'in order to'. These offers are very often introduced by the prepositional phrase 'wei(le)', or 'in order to'. The unmarked sentence structure is:

wei + reason(s) / purpose(s)

main clause

'Wei(le)' can be followed by a noun phrases: and verbal phrases.

weile haizi, ta bixu nuli gongzuo.

for children he must hard work

For the children, he has to work hard.

'Wei(le)' can also be followed by verbal phrases:

weile yangjia hukou, ta bixu luli gongzui.

in order to feed family he must hard work.

In order to make a living for the family, he has to work hard.

In both of the above examples, 'weile' functions as a signal indicating the purpose or reason for what the person does. In sales 'tongzhi', 'weile' is also a signalling word introducing purpose and reason for the offer. And 'weile' clause is often followed by the introduction to the offers. Furthermore, 'weile' is a powerful phrase that can introduce or combine a series of reasons. The letters, making good use of the phrase 'weile', usually include more than one reasons for the offer. For example:

weile cujin gaige kaifang, hiying Zhengzhou
in order to promote reform open meet need zhengzhou
jingji fazhan, manzu guangda qishi yie danwei ji shihui
economy develop meet broad enterprise and society
yongtu suyao, kaituo ditu xinpinzhong, you Henansheng
use map need open up map new variety by Henan province
Siwei kaifa fuwu gongsi zhengji bianhui chuban zuixin
Siwei open-up service Co. collect compile publish most new
Zhengzhou Shiqu Tu
Zhengzhou district map

(1) In order to promote reforming and opening-up, and (2) meet the needs of the Zhengzhou economy development, (3) meet the needs of the use of maps by the broad enterprises and society, and (4) create new varieties of maps, Zhengzhou Siwei Opening-up Service Co. will collect materials and compile the most recent Zhengzhou district map.

There are four reasons altogether in this example:

- 1) promote opening-up
- 2) meet the needs of economy development
- 3) meet the needs of the use of maps
- 4) create new varieties of maps

The first two reasons have nothing to do with maps, but it is necessary to mention them in a 'tongzhi' to relate the far-significance to the map. There is a common phenomenon in 'tongzhi' and other formal documents that the writer includes some reasoning after the 'weile' phrase. It seems some of the reasons are not direct reasons. But the writer likes to make some association between the purpose of the letter and the current international or national situation. This association will be included as an important reason for whatever the writer wants the reader to do, thus indicating the offers made in the sales 'tongzhi' are very important, because it is related to the promotion of current situations. In the superior writing to subordinates genre, the writer usually talks about the general situation, indicating the importance of the letter. S/he can include as many reasons as necessary. But sometimes, 'weile' clause can be very redundant with so many distant reasons bulging up. In fact, in the above example, there is some repetition in No.1 and No.2, for both of them talk about the same thing. If the writer really wants to include this information of opening-up, s/he may as well condense the two into one phrase. No.3 and No.4 are the real reasons for drafting the map. But they are placed at the end of the reasons. The reasons are written following the sequence from the general to specific. If the reader really wants to know the specific purpose of writing the letter, s/he has to focus on the latter part of the reasons.

The offer is introduced after all the reasons are fully explained in the above example, which is:

Zhengzhou Siwei Opening-up Service Co. will collect materials and compile the most recent Zhengzhou district map.

Similar as the 'shi' or 'be' sentence introducing offers, this sentence does not sound like an offer either. Instead, it sounds very much like the writer's plan about what s/he is going to do. This plan indirectly indicates what the offer is. It mainly constitutes a plan of the writer, which is to compile a map. The offer has to be associated with the

heading of 'tongzhi'. So when the plan is introduced, it stands out as an offer, an indirect offer. The schema for the offer is:

- (1) reason or purpose for the offer
- (2) the indirect offer.

4.5.2 Requests. In the sales and 'tongzhi', the writer calls for action in one way or another. I classify the callings for action part in the letters as request on the basis that the reader has the freedom to choose to buy the product or not. This request is not compulsory for the reader. The request is expressed in a cooperative way in which the writer tries to ask for the reader's opinions. The requests are usually expressed in imperative sentences by using the word 'qing' or 'please' and 'wang' or 'hope'. These two words are also used in 'pingxin' or 'equals writing to each other' genre expressing requests. In the 'pingxing' genre, these two words show politeness. Perhaps, the writers like the implicit form of 'tongzhi'. Second, it is very much encouraged in writing theories that writers should use polite language as described by Xu (1987:34):

No matter writing to the subordinate or the superior, the writer should pay attention to the use of polite language. Even when writing to the subordinate, the writer should use polite forms, such as 'qing' ('please'), 'xin' (hope), and 'wang' (hope) to reflect an equal relationship between the superior and the subordinates.

qing ge danwei zhuajin banli ruwang ji
 please every Co. seize time transact enter network and
 jingyue shou xu.
 subscribe procedure.

To sum up, the 'tongzhi' letters use affirmative sentence expressing an offer in a implicit way. But many of the offers are written in the same sentence together with the reason for the offers. Requests are written in the imperative sentences with the polite forms such as 'qing' or 'please', or 'wang' or 'hope'.

5. Native Response.

Five letters from the 30 letters were given to 100 native speakers. These native speakers are students learning to write business letters, but they all had some word experiences writing these types of letters before. They were purposely chosen, because on the one hand they had writing experiences, on the other hand they also had some proper training in business letter writing. Five letters were selected to be rated. These five letters represented the 30 letters in length, variety of products, and writers' levels of organisations, etc. The native speakers rated these letters according to the following scale:

1 2 3 4 5
 ----->

least successful

most successful

The native speakers had to provide reasons for the best and worst letters they would score. The most successful letter was to be rated score 5, the least successful score 1. All the scores of each letter were added up to find out the most and least successful letters. As a result, letter 6 is judged the most successful letter. Out of the total 1,500 points, letter 6 won 440 point, which is about 38% of the total points. Limited with the space in this paper, only this letter will be analysed below:

6. The Analysis of An Individual Letter.

Letter 6 of Sales 'Tongzhi'

Urgent Revision 'Tongzhi'

For members who entered the English edition of CECDB'93 CD-ROM database to enter CECDB'94 CD-ROM database of both Chinese and English editions

Responsible comrades:

The Chinese Enterprises, Corporations and their Products Database (CECDB) is, with the support of the Chinese Science Committee, established by the Research Institute of Chinese Science and Technology Information (The Information Centre of the National Science Committee). This database is distributed computers, networks and CDs. CECDB constantly offers information for those who entered this database, and offers indexes for the customers in the world, with exact indexing system and quick distribution function. As a means of effective advertising and reliable business information, CECDB has forcefully promoted the business of both international and national products, and various cooperations. This database won the third prize of technology progress of the National Science Committee, and the first prize of information achievement of national science and technology. Your (H) company's information, translated and processed by us, has already entered the English edition of CECDB CD-ROM database; and it is published by the joint effort of both the world biggest information publishing group Reed-Elsevier and the Sino-Asia Group who is specialised in Asian affairs; and it is also distributed publicly world-wide, and it has also been connected to the American network through AsiaInfor Inc. which is jointly established by the BDI Group and our institute.

Now the revision of the Chinese and English edition of CECDB has already begun, (please) all the companies who receive this circular letter (who are already admitted into the various editions of the CECDB'94) go through revision procedures according to the following requirements:

1 Pay special attention to the revision of mailing addresses when revising the Chinese and English database. Please your (H) company appoint people to contact us about this. And fill in the column of 'database contacting person'.

2 Please fill in the form in both Chinese and English. If you have any difficulty with the English translation, please send to us the revised data. We will do the translation for you.

3 The database entrance fee is 500 Yuan in a package. Those enterprises who have already entered our database are exempt of the fee for the revision every year. Apply for defer payment if (you) have any difficulty with expenditure.

4 The form of revision must (please) be sent to our institute before Dec.30, so that the data your (H) company provides will enter in time various versions of the CECDB'94 edition.

5 (We) hope that all the companies who receive this circular will seriously revise their data (with fees paid or unpaid), so that your (H) enterprises can provide the most recent information to the customers of the world, and the broad customers can contact you accurately (H) regarding to various kinds of business.

Thank you for cooperation!

Send the form to the address ...

The account No. ...

The Research Institute of Chinese
Science and Technology Information
(The Information Centre
of the National Science Committee)
October, 1993.

The Macro-Structure

Heading

Salutation

Offer: a) CECDB database

b) the good points and
the benefit brought to you

284 characters

The request

51 characters

Requests or requirements: 1-5.

251 characters

Thanking

4 characters

Seal of the writer.

Altogether the letter has 590 characters

The diagram of this letter:

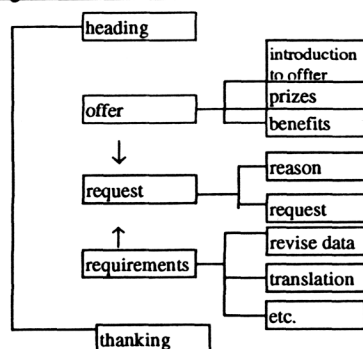


Diagram 1: sales 'tongzhi' letter 6

This diagram shows the relationship among various parts of the text in the letter. The letter is mainly composed of four parts: offer, request, requirements, and thanking. In these four parts, the main idea or purpose of the letter is the request to enter the database. This idea is supported by the offer which functions to explain what the request is and to convince the reader of the reliability of the software product. The offer in fact paves the way for the reader to accept the request. The requirements are things the reader has to do in order to enter the database. The thanking functions to make the order polite. All the three parts of offer, requirements, and thanking contribute to bringing about the request in an acceptable way.

Background situation. This letter is written by the superior of a national research institute to the subordinate at the local business company in Zhengzhou. When the letter was written, this local company was already the member of the CECDB database organised by this research institute. However, the major purpose of this letter is to call on the reader to enter the revised version of this database as expressed in the heading as 'urgent revision tongzhi'.

Comments.

1 This letter is rated the most successful sales 'tongzhi' for several reasons. First, it is offer-fronted. As a sales letter, making the offer as early as possible seems to be a good point so the reader will know what the writer intends to sell. Second, though the letter has the authority and influence over the reader, the writer still tries to present detailed offers and as convincing factors for the reader to enter the database. That means that the writer does not rely on authority only to push the products onto the reader. These two points will be discussed in details in the following part.

2 The letter starts with the offer of product: name of the software --- CECDB. The introduction to the offer of products is composed of four parts: a. the company making the offer, b. what the product is and the good function, c. the advantages of the product, d. the benefit the product has brought to the reader. In offer A, the product is mentioned together with two other companies' names: the name of the supporter and the name of the producer. Both of them are superiors to the reader, so it is necessary to mention the full names of them. The supporter is introduced naturally with the phrase 'with the support of the National Science Committee'. Though the sentence does not say how the committee supports the product, the mention of the name of the committee implies the authority who is backing up the production of the software and has influence over the selling of it.

In part B, the first sentence of part B is the general introduction related to the range of service to the software:

CECDB constantly *offers* information
 for those who entered this database,
 and *offers* indexes
 for the customers of the world,
 with exact indexing system and quick distribution function.

There are two parallels in this sentence to get the rhythm of the language: the verb 'tígong' or 'offer' appears twice to describe the two kinds of services the software offers, the preposition 'wei' or 'for' is used twice to refer to different group of

customers. The second sentence of part B represents a general evaluation for the product:

As a means of effective advertising and reliable business information, CECDB has forcefully promoted the business of both international and national products, and various cooperations.

The force of evaluation is signalled by the two adjectives 'youxiaode' or 'effective' and the 'youlide' or 'forcefully'. 'Youlide' is used in Chinese as an adjective modifying a verb with an adverbial modifier 'de' (的). In Chinese adjectives can function to modify a verb. For example:

<u>youli</u> de cuoshi	<u>youli</u> de cujin
forceful method	forceful promote
forceful method	forcefully promote

In the above example, both of the underlined words are used as adjectives. They express the writer's general evaluation of the products. Though these general evaluations are not supported by any facts, they seem to be necessary to attract the reader.

Part B also includes further introduction to the products: various means of distributing information such as networks and CD; and efficient functions of the software. This part is strongly influenced by advertising language. A series of adjectives are used to describe the reliable function. For example:

zunque de jiasu fanshi sunsu de chuanshu gongneng
 exact index means quick distribute function
 with exact indexing system and quick distribution function (line 16-17)

yuanyuan buduan de chuanshong zhe xinxi
 flow flow not stop convey (A M) information
 constantly offers information (lines 14-15)

youxiao de guanggao shuoduan kekao de shangqing laiuyan
 effective advert means reliable business source
 as a means of effective advertising and reliable business information (line 17)

youli de cujin
 have force promote
 forcefully promote (line 18)

These six adjectives belong to the emotive language, expressing the writer's evaluation of the product. They are trying to create a feeling for the reader that the product is something good and reliable.

Part C is the list of two prizes the product has won. This is also a frequent strategy adverts like to include if there is any prize. These are related to the facts or merits the product has achieved. So this part does not employ any emotive language, the writer simply relates to the specific prizes the product has won.

Part D is related to the benefits the reader has already gained by entering the database. The three benefits are linked by three connective 'bing' or 'and':

Your (H) company's information, translated and processed by us, has already entered the English edition of CECDB CD ROM database; and it is published by the joint effort of both the world biggest information publishing group Reed-Elsevier and the Sino-Asia Group who is specialised in Asia affairs; and it is also distributed publicly world-wise, and it has also been connected to the American network through AsiaInfor Inc. which is jointly established by the BDI Group and our institute.

'Bing' means 'and' or 'in addition to'. It has the function of combining two or more verbs and sentences into one sentence.

With verbs:

wo tongyi bing zhichi ni de yijian.
I agree and support your opinion
I agree with and support your opinion.

With sentences:

wo tongyi ni de yijian, bing zhichi ni de yijian.
I agree your opinion and support your opinion
I agree with your opinion, and support your opinion.

In written language, even more sentences and verbs can be connected into one sentence. The writer uses this connective to list the three benefits the reader has already gained from the software. Perhaps this is the most convincing factor, because this is what the reader has already benefited from the database. So the offer reaches its climax at this point.

In this part, the advertising elements stand prominent too by mentioning how the information is distributed and connected. All the three information groups have something to be proud of. The joint effort is made by two groups: one is the 'biggest', the other is specialised in 'Asian affairs'. The writer tries to find and make the reliable features of each group stand out by using various strategies. For Reed Group, the superlative degree of 'big' is used to indicate the uniqueness. For the Sino-Asia Group, 'specialise' is used to show the professionalism. As to the third group:

American network, only the name of the network is mentioned. There is no need to advertise anything about this network, because it is common sense knowledge that America represents an advanced level of information. If this product is connected to the American group, that means the product is good enough to reach the world standard to be connected.

The introduction to the offer develops from the least to the most convincing: evaluation of the product → prizes → benefits. The evaluation is what the writer thinks about the product, so it is a judgement made by the writer. The prizes represent fact, which is more convincing than the writer's evaluation. The benefit is what the reader has already proved about the product. Therefore, it represents the most convincing factor to the reader.

2 Five specific requirements are made after the request. These requirements are related to how to meet the request --- enter the database. At the same time, the writer accompanies the requirements with other elements such as offer of help, etc. thus making the requirements less heavy and sound more polite. There requirements are written in five numbered items:

- Item 1: requirement 1 --- pay attention to the change of address
- Item 2: requirement 2 --- both English and Chinese
+ offer of help for this requirement
- Item 3: requirement 3 --- fees
- Item 4: requirement 4 --- deadline + explanation of purpose
- Item 5: requirement 5 --- revising data + explanation of purpose

The writer can write the requirements only without anything added to them. In item 2, the writer offers help for the reader to make the requirement more acceptable if the reader has any difficulties. In items 4 and 5, the writer mentions the requirement first, then goes on explaining the purposes of these requirements:

4 The form of revision must (please) be sent to our institute before Dec.30, so that the data your (H) company provides will enter in time various versions of the CECDB'94 edition.

5 (We) hope that all the companies who receive this circular will seriously revise their data (with fees paid or unpaid), so that your (H) enterprises can provide the most recent information to the customers of the world, and the broad customers can contact you accurately (H) regarding to various kinds of business.

In this quotation, all the underlined parts are the explanation of purposes for the requirements. The writer can do very well without these explanations. They are included there for two purposes. First, the writer wants to give a reason to support the requirement. The requirement is not raised for no reason, the reason is not only for the sale of the product, but also for the reader's benefit. Second, they also function as a strategy to arouse the reader's desire. Because if you (the reader) want to obtain these benefits, you'd better hurry and follow the requirements. Otherwise, these benefits can not be obtained. Notice this is also the right time for the writer to arouse the reader's desire in the last two requirements. When the reader is about to finish reading the letter, s/he is well on the way to response to the letter not as a subordinate but mainly as a buyer.

3 The linguistic realisation of the offer is indirect. Instead of telling the reader what s/he is going to offer, the writer expresses who establishes the database. It is written in a affirmative sentence:

The Chinese Enterprises, Corporations and their
Products Database (CECDB) is, with the support of the
 Chines Science Committee, established by the Research
 Institute of Chinese Science and Technology Information.

The offer is introduced with both the producer and the supporter of the production. In fact, two things are offered: offer of the product, and offer of the influence from two levels of authority. In sales 'tongzhi', the selling of products is not really separated from the influence of the authority. But we can not say that the authority is forcing the subordinates to buy the products. But definitely the authority's influence is working in the process of this transaction.

4 The request (line39-42) is made after the offer is fully expressed with the above convincing factors:

Now the revision of the Chinese and English edition of CECDB has already begun, please all the companies who receive this circular letter (who are already admitted into the various editions of the CECDB'94) go through revision procedures according to the following requirements:

The request is written in an imperative sentence signalled with 'qing' or 'please':

qing jieiao ci tongzhi de danwei an ruxia
 please receive this circula Co. according to below
 yaoqiu banli ruku gengxin shuxu.
 requirement go through enter database revise procedure

(please) all the companies who receive this circular letter (who are already admitted into the various editions of the CECDB'94) go through revision procedures according to the following requirements:

In this imperative sentence, the subject 'all the companies who ...' is mentioned. Normally in imperative sentences, the subject can be omitted. But here the subject is mentioned because the writer wants to make clear who will be included for the request.

7 The requirements are detailed steps related to how to carry out the request. Requirements can be written in the form of imperatives without 'qing' or 'please'. But the requirements in this letter most of the time are written with 'qing' or 'wang' (hope). The reader is mentioned in the honorific address term. They do make the requirements more polite than pure imperatives. Here is an example of requirement 4:

gongzuo dan wu qing zai 12 yue 30 ri qian jizhi
work form must (please) on Dec.30 before send to
woshuo, yibian guidanwei tigong de shuju jishi jinru 94
I institute so that your (H) Co. offer data timely enter 94
nian faxing de CECDB'94 gelei xinban.
year publish CECDB'94 all kind edition

The form of revision must (please) be sent to our institute before Dec.30, so that the data your (H) company provides will enter in time various versions of the CECDB'94 edition.

In this requirement of deadline, there is an interesting combination of 'wu' or 'must' and 'qing' or 'please'. These two words are not normally combined. Here they are combined to achieve the effect of politeness. This requirement is also followed by the explanation clause introduced by the connective 'yibian' or 'so that'. The unmarked clause of 'yibian' follows the main clause offering explanation and purpose for the main clause. For example:

nimen yao duanlan hao shenti, yibian genghao de gongzuo.
you must train well body so that better work

You must have physical training and keep fit so that you can work better. 'Yibian' in this example offers the purpose for doing the training. So this connective can justify the sentence preceding it. In the letter, this connective plays very similar function to justify the requirement, and make it convincing and acceptable to the reader.

The connectives 'yibian' or 'so that' is used twice in both item 4 and item 5, indicating the reason or purpose. Usually a requirement is something that must be

done. So no matter there is any explanation of reason or not, the reader is required to accomplish it. However, 'yibian' can provide some convincing reason why there is such a requirement.

The whole requirement can be simplified as: The form must be sent to us before Dec.30. But the writer prefers to add to the sentence 'qing' and the unmarked clause of 'yibian'. Both of them contribute to making the requirement more polite and acceptable.

7 Conclusion.

To sum up, sales 'tongzhi' has to combine two elements in this special kind of sales letters: the influence of the authority and the advertising of the products.

First, the authority has to be included in the letter as a background situation only, and should not be emphasised too much as in some of the letters. If there is a strong need to include situation part, the situation has to be brief. Quotations are not playing a very effective role in the letter. The writer should be discouraged to use this strategy unless there is a strong need. In one word, the main purpose of the letter is to advertise the products, not the authority influence. The authority influence is necessary to help this advertising, but not to force the buying and selling of products. Second, the writer has to mainly rely on the quality and facts of the products to convince the reader. The advantages of products and the detailed information about the products are what the readers interested.

Third, the register of the letter seems to be an important factor too in judging the letters. The native speakers like the speech acts written in the right register to avoid the misunderstanding of the letters.

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