

1. INTRODUCTION

The number of professions and job positions, such as an executive, a department manager, a salesman, a secretary or a specialist in business and technology, which are forced to communicate in other language than their mother tongue is continually increasing. And more, the use of spoken language is not sufficient enough; written language has gained its importance and is preferred by many users thanks to the time it gives for proper statement of the ideas and thoughts. Modern times, globalization and the expansion of the European Union markets have been forcing non-native English speakers to communicate via various written media.

Companies spend great amounts of money not only on business courses and management education but also on language courses aimed either or not on business. When adult students at the level pre-intermediate and higher are asked how much time was devoted to business correspondence in any of the courses they attended, their answer is: “very little if any”, which is a pity.

I wondered why this was so and asked some of my colleagues and fellow teachers about their opinion and experience. Some of the teachers think teaching letter writing is boring and makes students annoyed, some teachers said their students did not want to be taught writing because they do not need it; other teachers do not know how to teach it effectively and are not willing to study that beforehand. Only a few teachers I talked to really teach business letters writing but only marginally without any special focus and preparation. I myself can recall that I came across a detailed instruction and explanation of the rules for various writing skills at university if I do not take into account some written assignments at the secondary grammar school.

I cannot state that writing skills are neglected but I dare to say that in general more attention should be devoted to them and further attention might be devoted to specific genres, such as business letters, because there is not to be expected the decline of a need for skills of business letters writing in future, not only among professionals.

This diploma-work consists of two main parts: theoretical and practical, and additional appendices, namely graphs and sample letters.

In the theoretical part of my diploma-work I will provide definitions connected with formality and politeness, and definitions of the genre business letters. I will describe how formality and politeness features influence the communicative function of business letters. I will also provide a list of lexical and grammatical features of politeness and explain their influence on business letters. I will focus on salutations and complimentary clauses in different types of business correspondence. At the end of the theoretical part, I will discuss methodology issues connected with the questionnaire used in my research.

In the practical part of my diploma-work I will describe the structure of the questionnaire used in my research. I will offer the compiled questionnaire and explain the aims of the questions and hypotheses that were to be verified by them; then I will provide the results of the research and their evaluation. In the second part of the research, i.e. a stylistic analysis of sample letters, I will discuss the list of salutations and complimentary clauses that are practically used in in-company communication.

The diploma work undertakes the study whether students of English as a second language and non-native users of English, especially those who write business letters and emails, follow the existing stylistic rules for writing business correspondence. I will focus on the level of formality typical for particular letters, the social function and aim, and the use of stylistically relevant phrases in salutation, complimentary clauses and other formal elements.

The aim of the diploma-work is to offer a useful and interesting study based not only on authentic materials and sources, but also on personal comments and subjective evaluations.

2. THEORETICAL PART

In the theoretical part of my diploma-work I will provide definitions of the basic terms that constitute the theoretical preliminaries to the whole work. These are a definition of formality and a definition of politeness. I will suggest a list of lexical and grammatical features of formality and I will explain to what extent these features compensate the lack of T/V forms in Czech. Furthermore, I will provide a description of formality and stylistic levels of usage and I will demonstrate and compare the use of styles on examples. Finally, I will offer a description of formality in the forms of address and complimentary clauses, because these features form an essential part of the research.

I will also try to attract the attention to business letters by giving a definition and description of the genre, and by discussing business letters types, structure, content, style and presentation. Another type of written interaction, I will deal with, is electronic correspondence including faxes and emails, which concur and are interconnected with any kind of business correspondence nowadays and will be crucial and determining for the stylistic analysis of business letters I was provided with. I will summarize the recommendations for effective business letters writing, including business email etiquette and other basics.

I will devote careful attention to the description and explanation of In-company correspondence, because sample in-company letters are analyzed from the stylistic perspective in the practical part of this diploma-work. The genres I will be interested in are memoranda and reports.

In the methodology section I will states the aims and hypotheses for my research, I will justify the choice and formulation of the questions used in the questionnaire.

2.1. Definition of formality

Formality is usually described as variation in language according to the contextual factor tenor. Halliday (1989) represents tenor as the relationship between the participants, their statuses and roles and includes formality, politeness and impersonality as three variable features. These features often co-occur and this is signaled by the choice of vocabulary and syntactic structures.

Informality is preferred in simple, personal expressions. Informality typically co-occurs with a greater or lesser degree of familiarity and personal forms of expression.

According to *wordnet.princeton.edu* formality is explained as a requirement of etiquette or custom, a manner that strictly observes all forms and ceremonies, compliance with formal rules. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:9) analyses formality in varieties according to attitude: “We recognize a gradient in attitude between formal (relatively stiff, cold, polite, and impersonal) and informal (relatively relaxed, warm, casual, friendly). We also acknowledge that there is neutral English bearing no obvious attitudinal colouring and it belongs to the common core of English which is present in all the varieties”. Urbanová (2002) deals with formality in terms of a scale including formality, informality, solidarity and social conventions. She describes variation within this scale as a range of values on the axes formal vs. informal, polite vs. familiar and impersonal vs. personal.

Formality is viewed and dealt differently by many linguists but the principle remains the same. Formality is a means that people use to express their attitude, manners and mood. Levels of formality might be observed in any kind of communication and these levels indicate the relationship between participants.

Formality in business letters used to be essential and its importance is stressed even today, when business letters writing is continually undergoing simplification and modernization.

2.2. Definition of politeness

Politeness, according to Yule (1996:60) is related to variation according to the contextual factor tenor of discourse; the level of politeness of a social interaction is determined by various factors related to social distance and closeness. These factors indicate relative status of participants that are derived from social values such as age and power. In this case, address form with a title and a last name are often used. Other factors, such as degree of friendliness, which is present during an interaction, signal less marked social distance, which enables the use of the first name basis.

Social distance is typically associated with expressing respect, which might be viewed more as the opposite of familiarity, whereas social closeness involves friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity. It is typical that participants show the relative social distance in their interaction.

To be polite, as Yule (1996:60) assesses: “includes being tactful, generous, modest, and sympathetic towards others”. And further, he explains politeness by the use of a technical term *face*: “Face means the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Politeness, in an interaction, can then be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face.”

One of the most influential views on politeness is the Theory of politeness formulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), which analyses politeness in terms of strategies, which attend to the positive face and the negative face of the participants in an interaction. Brown and Levinson analyze two aspects: “Positive face, by which a person’s status as an autonomous, independent, free agent is affirmed; and negative face, by which a person’s immunity from outside interference and undue external pressure is stressed”. Deference might be viewed as the opposite of familiarity. Deference forms in English are addressed forms (Doctor) and honorifics (Sir). Solidarity strategy employs positive politeness forms, personal information, nicknames, dialect and slang. Deference strategy is, in other words formal politeness, including impersonal expressions, it emphasizes both participants’ independence.

According to *wordnet.princeton.edu* politeness is a courteous manner that respects accepted social usage, the act of showing regard for others. *en.wikipedia.org* adds that politeness is best expressed as the practical application of good manners or etiquette, it is a culturally defined phenomenon, and what is considered polite in one culture can often be quite rude or simply strange in another. Urbanová (2002) refers to politeness and politeness principle as an ability of the speaker to express respect, courtesy and goodwill to an addressee. She also mentions a manner of presentation and context-sensitive politeness.

Politeness in English is expressed in a different way and by other means of language so that an impressive polite message in English may seem exaggerated in Czech. English language does not have any T/V forms. In contrast to the language means available to signal formality and familiarity in English, in the Czech language, there is singular familiar personal pronoun *ty*, and a formal personal pronoun *vy*, to refer to a person in formal context, which clearly indicates the basic level of formality of the interaction and therefore, the role of the other language devices indicating formality or familiarity is not so crucial, and is used rather for fine-tuning the level of formality, so there is no need for other language means. The lack of these polite forms in English has to be substituted by other means of expression such as, among others, the use of specific nominal address forms and address pronouns. Since there are no special familiar pronouns or polite pronouns in English, familiarity must be expressed in other ways such as by the use of first name, short name or a nickname in an intimate relationship, whereas polite vocatives such as *Mr*, *Mrs* or *Ms* tend to be used in polite situations. Other linguistic markers of politeness in English concern the choice of form of address, the choice of social communication formulae, the use of indirect speech acts, the formula *please* and the use of any kind of register.

The other reliable and effective way of substituting the T/V forms in English is the use of so-called lexical and grammatical features of formality such as appropriate vocabulary, phrases and structures, which are dealt in great details in the section 2.3 below.

Tactfulness and tentativeness are other features of politeness. These features are present to avoid causing offence, when someone does not want to distress another person or when a piece of advice is to be given without creating the effect of commanding and overtopping. Tentativeness is also characterized as an indication of reluctance.

2.3. Lexical and grammatical features of formality

2.3.1. Polysyllabic international words, classical vocabulary vs. monosyllabic native vocabulary

There are many pairs of words in English, whose meanings are synonymous or near synonymous. These pairs of words differ in the level of formality. One group, which is considered less formal, is usually derived from Anglo-Saxon origin; the other, considered more formal, from Latin, Greek or French origin. Macpherson (1997: 151) foregrounds: “The sentence pairs mean exactly the same thing, but the sentences where these words of Latin origin occur sound somehow more formal and authoritative”. There is a tendency to use foreign borrowings especially in written language whose expressiveness is then noticeably enhanced.

2.3.2. Full verbs vs. phrasal verbs, idioms and collocations

Any English word but especially verbs can be appropriately used when the writer knows how they are related to other words or how they collocate. Many phrasal and prepositional verbs belong to informal English, whereas lexical (or full verbs) are more formal. When writing to non-native addressee, it is recommended to avoid phrasal verbs, idioms and collocations and use full verbs instead, because the word-by-word translation of phrasal verbs, idioms and collocations might be misleading and the whole content therefore misunderstood.

2.3.3. Respectful terms of address vs. intimate terms of address

Terms of address are dealt in detail in the part *Definition of formality: salutation*. The modern Internet communication brought great simplification in the use of respectful terms thanks to the frequency of exchanged mail. The policy of many international companies is to use neutral expression *Dear* and first name of addressed person even in some formal business correspondence.

2.3.4. Indirect requests vs. direct imperatives

Leech (2002:35) cites: “The main reason for using indirect speech acts is their effect on politeness”. Crystal (1987: 121) stresses: “...some speech acts directly address the listener, but the majority of acts in everyday conversation are indirect”. Indirectness in English has its grounds in the difference between what the sender writes and what they mean. The combination of *please* with devices of indirectness such as a question and the hypothetical *could* or *would* create a really polite impression. In the spoken language speakers have more possibilities to express their real intention but in written language thoughts should be placed carefully and discreetly in order to make the impression of respectable attitude of the writer and not a shouting message.

2.3.5. Passive voice vs. active voice

Passive voice in business correspondence gives writing an objective tone, it is used mostly to avoid the constant repetition of the subject *I*, *you* or *we*, and to avoid identifying the agent because they do not want to accept the responsibility, and the agent is unimportant or obvious from the context. Common features of the passive are that sentences begin with introductory *it*, and abstract nouns are used. Active voice is used more in neutral and informal in-company correspondence where impersonal passive voice is not so much required. However in general memorandums and reports formal passive constructions still preserve.

2.3.6. Third person noun phrases vs. first and second person pronouns

Another interesting feature of formality to be pointed out is the use impersonal third person noun phrases, where the subject *it* often replaces a person, who is responsible, but it is not necessary or intended to give a concrete name. As Greenbaum (1990:113) presents, when referring to “I” and other people, “we”, whose function is inclusive, is used. An inclusive “we” accompanies verbs implying shared knowledge. The counterpart to an inclusive “we” is an exclusive “we”, whose exclusiveness is expressed by not including the addressee of “you”. An exclusive “we” accompanies verbs of communication.

2.3.7. Complex sentences vs. simple sentences

Complex sentences with explicit clause and sentence linkers, subordination and non-finite and verbless clauses are formal markers of the language. Simple sentences with implicit sentence and clause linkers, coordination and finite clauses mark informal language.

2.4. Description of formality

It starts to be difficult to distinguish clear boundaries of the levels of formality in business letters. Modern communication media tend to be brief, polite and more personal but it cannot be said that their style is not formal; however, it is definitely not as formal as it used to be some years ago, when letters were written carefully, folded, put in the envelope and send by post. Modern emails and faxes do not require so many formal clauses because the frequency and pace of their exchange made them redundant and obstructing.

However contemporary stylistics and textbooks still distinguish three main writing styles: formal, neutral or standard, and informal. Each of them has its typical features and may be applied to nearly all the types of business letters. The level of formality destines the choice of language, standoffish approach, intimacy and closeness. Holmes (1992:13) characterizes the scale of formality as criteria of “the influence of the social setting or type of interaction on language choice“. Different language is used with strangers when there is a tendency to act in social distance and between friends and acquaintances. Formality is a sociolinguistic category, which is defined as “a level of language considered appropriate to socially formal situations“ (Crystal 1992:141).

2.4.1. Formal, neutral and informal style level of usage

Formal style presents information and ideas politely and carefully. Long, complex sentences with polysyllabic international words and classical vocabulary predominate. The impersonality of the language is acquired by the use of passive voice constructions and the third person noun phrases. The language used contains indirect requests, which sound very polite and respectful terms of address mostly in salutation. The correct use of grammar and punctuation is vitally important. Emmerson (2004:8) remarks: “This style is not common in emails, but you can find it if the subject matter is serious“.

Neutral or standard style is the most common one in professional correspondence. The language is simple and direct, information is expressed clearly thanks to the use of short sentences, the use of contractions is allowed to create more personal language style, but it differs from informal style in its still remarkable distance. The use of neutral style may be understood better when we substitute its name by synonyms originally used by Leech (1982:145): “posh talk, distance, familiar tone, spontaneous, informal chat, relaxed conversation“.

Informal style, in other words the style between friends, is the closest one to speech. Informality, according to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, means „a style of writing or conversational speech characterized by simpler grammatical structures,

more familiar vocabulary and greater use of idioms and metaphors“. Sentences used are simple; monosyllabic everyday words, native vocabulary and conversational expressions such as phrasal verbs are used. Personality is gained by the use of active voice and the first and second person pronouns, direct imperatives are markers of familiarity as well as the intimate terms of address in salutation.

2.4.2. Examples of styles

The term “style” is used with several different meanings and it is difficult to define this term accurately and with clear boundaries. A general definition of style, according to Verdonk (2002:5) is: “A style is indeed a distinctive way of using language for some purpose and to some effect. We need to consider what makes an expression distinctive, why it has been devised, and what effect it has”. There are more specific understandings of style, such as the one suggested by Halliday (1978): “We characterize styles as varieties of language viewed from the point of view of formality”. However, there is very little agreement among linguists on the division of the spectrum of formality, because variation in formality is connected with stylistic variation.

To demonstrate the differences, examples of all three styles are offered within both salutation and complimentary clauses.

Salutations

Formal: *Dear Sir*

Neutral: *Dear Mr. Brown*

Informal: *Dear John*

Complimentary clauses

Formal: *Yours Faithfully*

Neutral: *Best Regards*

Informal: *Yours*

2.4.3. Description of formality in salutation and complimentary clause

Salutation and complimentary clause present an essential part of every letter regardless its formality. Elliot clarifies: (1989: 40) “Thirty years ago, most letters passing between large companies began: *Dear Sirs* and ended *Yours faithfully*, but over recent years a more personal and friendly note has been introduced”. Salutation and complimentary clause should reflect the relationship between the sender and the addressee. Definitions and descriptions referring to formality in salutation and complimentary clauses are dealt with in various textbooks aimed on business letters writing, e.g. Ashley (1992) and Naterop (1997).

2.4.3.1. Description of formality in salutation

Salutations *Dear Sir*, *Dear Madam*, *Dear Miss* or *Dear Ms* is used in formal business letters, the sender and the addressee have never met before and most probably will never meet. *Dear Sirs* is considered to be old-fashioned but is sometimes used with the aim to address a company. *Dear Mr. Brown* is used when the sender knows the receiver’s name even if they never met before. *Dear Mr.*, *Dear Mrs.* or *Dear Miss Brown* indicates clearly the marital status of a person. When one is not sure we use *Dear Ms.*, which shows that the writer does not know or simply does not want to offend. *Dear Bob* may be used in less formal business correspondence. *My dear Bob* is used to express very close relationship and therefore is to be found mainly in personal letters. A salutation containing just the first name of an addressed person is gaining more and more popularity especially in email correspondence. *Dear Bob Brown* or *Dear Brown* is considered to be an old-fashion style and is not recommended to use at all. Salutation including a courtesy title is usually placed on the left below the attention line and above the body of the letter.

2.4.3.2. Description of formality in complimentary clause

Complimentary clauses are placed at the end of the letter and their function is to close a letter. There are a number of complimentary clauses but we cannot use them without knowing and obeying stylistics rules. Each salutation has its corresponding or recommended complimentary clause. *Dear Sir* or *Dear Madam* goes with the complimentary clause *Yours faithfully*. *Dear Mr. Brown* or *Dear Bob* require in business correspondence *Yours sincerely*. Phrases *Regards* or *Best regards* may be used in business correspondence but it is expected that the sender knows the addressee personally. The position of the complimentary clause depends on the style of a letter and the sender's preference.

2.5. Definition of genre: business letters

Business letters belong to the basic means of communication between companies. They might be sent externally outside the company or internally within a company. Business letters in general have a formal tone; they are sent to other professionals and therefore include a formal salutation and closing. The purpose of a business letter is to provide specific information, to persuade others to take action, to propose ideas etc. Writing a business letter might be a challenge within the meaning of keeping readers' attention, because readers receive enormous amounts of mail and do not have much time to read.

Dewitt (2006) summarizes: "Genres, once thought of as ways to categorize texts and therefore defined only by formal features, now are known in more complex ways, as ways of acting in specific social situations".

2.6. Description of business letters

2.6.1. Types of business letters

Literature dealing with the business correspondence offers several ways of the business letters' division (e.g. Ashley, Elliot). In my opinion, the best and most useful one is to be found in *Business letters for all* by Naterop (1977).

Types of letters:

Letters on business situations	Orders
	Offers
	Inquiries
	Payments, Reminders
	Complaints and adjustments
	Transportation and shipping
	Sales letters, Changes in business
Letters on social situations	Applications, Recommendations, Giving a notice
	Invitations
	Goodwill letters

2.6.1.1. Orders

Orders are very often simple letters because their layout is available as a form. When buyers need to make some points clear, they may write a letter or email to stress the vital instructions, regulations and other relevant matters.

2.6.1.2. Offers

Offers are sent when a businessman who is in the position of a supplier wants to introduce a new product or a range of products, or services. The main aim is to draw

the attention of the current as well as the new customers. Offers are usually sent without a preceding inquiry.

2.6.1.3. Inquiries

Inquiries (import, domestic, export, personal) are sent when business people need some information about the supply, availability and transport of goods; terms, discounts and deadlines; leaflets, catalogues and prices.

2.6.1.4. Payments and reminders

Letters of making and acknowledging the payments are polite means of conveying the information about sending and receiving money between the companies and business partners. When the transfer of money is not due, the first letter of reminder in a friendly tone is written. If the first letter is not effective and there is neither a reply with an appropriate explanation nor the sum of money is received, the second letter in a firmer tone follows. If there is a non-payment and no remittance again, a legal action might be taken.

2.6.1.5. Complaints and adjustments

Complaints and adjustments are written when misunderstanding or an error occurs. In handling complaints, a necessary tact is to be learnt and further carried out. It is important for the both sides to know the mistakes will be dealt with and remedied.

2.6.1.6. Transportation and shipping

Transportation and shipping documentation is used to inform the customer about the details connected with the packaging, when goods will arrive etc.

2.6.1.7. Sales letters and changes in business

Sales letters and changes in business might be any announcements about products and services to make them better known to the public and to attract buyers. The most important goal is to promote sales. These letters are to attract the attention of the customers and enhance their interest in the product; they should be convincing activating to place an order.

2.6.1.8. Applications, Recommendations, Giving a notice

Applications, Recommendations and Giving a notice are letters that are exchanged between an employer and an employee when applying for, or leaving the job. All of them have its particulars, which are recommended to follow.

2.6.1.9. Invitations

Invitations (formal, semi-formal, informal) are usually printed cards written in the third person and they require an answer in the same tone.

2.6.1.10. Goodwill letters

Goodwill letters (Congratulations, Introductions, Condolence, Get-well wishes) are intended to express good wishes, thanks, and pleasure, to show sympathy or offer help. They are written to show that people care for the others.

This well-organized list including short descriptions serves just for brief orientation. In my diploma work I deal in more details, both in the practical and the theoretical part, with in-company letters such as a memorandum and a report; complaints and adjustments, reminders, changes in business letters, invitations and goodwill letters. I gained these types of letters at my disposition.

2.6.2. Structure of business letters

The structure of business letters may more or less differ but we can say that there is a typical layout, which is recommended by many authors, such as Elliot (1989), Naterop (1977), Ashley (1992), and followed by many users.

At the top of the letter usually in the middle, there is a printed letterhead, which includes name, address and telephone number of the sender. Sometimes it may also contain trademark, fax or description of the business. A letterhead gives a lot of information about the company but its presence is not necessary in every business letter. Next feature is reference. “References are quoted to indicate what the letter refers to (Your Ref.) and the correspondence to refer to when replying (Our Ref.)“ (Ashley 1992: 8).

Sender’s address typically follows on the top right-hand side of the page. Then there is a date, the form of which is subjected to any strict rule but Ashley points out: “These are matters of preference, but whichever you choose you should be consistent throughout your correspondence“. Receiver’s address is written below the line with the date but on the opposite side of the page. Attention line is an alternative to give the receiver’s name or position but might be omitted.

Salutation opens the letter and addresses the receiver. It starts with a capital letter. There is occasionally a subject line, which also may be omitted. Body of the letter gives relevant information; it is divided into paragraphs, which should have an appropriate length. If the letter is longer, a line space is usually left between the paragraphs.

Complimentary clauses start with a capital letter and their use should be in concord with the use of the salutation at the beginning of the letter. Signature as Ashley (1992: 6) comments: “is, to some extend, a matter of choice. Whether you sign with your initials or your given name, and whether you include a courtesy title. It is safer, therefore, to sign with your given name, and safest of all to include your title“.

When setting out the letter, the simplest way might be blocking everything at the left-hand margin but other possibilities are available. Elliot stresses the importance: (1989: 37) "... a neatly laid-out letter gives an impression of efficiency which may have a good effect on the recipient".

2.6.3. Content and style of business letters

Content and style of business letters characterizes the plan, sort of style and sequence of ideas. It makes the effect of the letter. Commercial correspondence should be clear, provide information and be accurate. Letters should be as long as necessary to include the right amount of information but the vital information must not be left out. The other problem may appear when the sender adds too much extra information, which may cause the irritation of the addressee by having to read it.

Elliot advises: (1989: 30) „Avoid the impression of heaviness in your writing at all costs; sometimes the finest writers are intentionally heavy, but it does not improve an ordinary letter – in fact it will have the opposite effect”. Order and logical sequence, systematic linking, clear switching and referring back make the letter neat, readable and easy to understand.

Longer letters should be divided into paragraphs. The first sentence in the first paragraph is the most important one, because it sets the tone of the letter. Typically, the sender introduces themselves and/or their company and gives the subject and purpose of the letter. Middle paragraphs provide information, explain questions and ask new questions. Final paragraph closes the letter and encourage the addressee to reply, usually by a standard phrase, such as “We look forward to hearing from you soon.” This part essentially requires a clear logical sequence.

Simplicity of business letters is stressed nowadays more than it used to be. The reader wants to understand the language so it should not be too complicated. Even if the letter is simple, it should have its appropriate courtesy not to offend the reader or sound rude. Ashley (1992:20) warns: “Confusion in correspondence often arises through a lack of thought and care”. Any ambiguity present is not needed; accuracy

and careful attention should be devoted to names and titles, references and enclosures, figures and prices and any other details including personal data.

2.6.4. Presentation of business letters

Presentation of the letter has its importance in creating the impression of the sender and their company. The use of salutation and complimentary clause should be in agreement and all the information should give the reader information he/she needs to know.

2.7. Electronic correspondence

2.7.1. Fax

The word fax, used either as a noun or a verb, means an exact copy or reproduction, a duplicate of a document. It is a kind of communication via fax machine. A fax may be formal or informal, and is kept brief and clear. The structure is the same as of a common letter. At the top of the fax should be stated clearly the name of the addressed person. Fax enables people to receive messages and important information immediately.

2.7.2. Email

Email is a modern means of business correspondence serving for sending and receiving messages. The messages may be sent internally, nationally, or internationally. Before a person wants to use an email they need a valid address in the form of *user_name@your_domain*.

2.7.2.1. Business email etiquette

Business email etiquette or in other words netiquette means network etiquette. In personal one-to-one communication an impression is created immediately and many factors are involved, such as appearance, manners, tone of voice etc. It is similar with cyberspace interaction, only with the difference of factors involved. A person or people who communicate with each other judge and are judged by course of their online professionalism, courtesy and ethics.

To be able to lead an email communication effectively and with an appropriate decorum requires being aware of some rules and practice. Netm@nners.com offers many interesting and useful advice on writing emails, one of those by Kallos (1996) underlines: “If you are online for commercial gain, lack of proper netiquette may very well deter those who otherwise may have considered doing business with you”.

2.7.2.2. Top 10 Business Email Basics

Kallos (1996) suggests a list of ten features, which she considers to be the most important in writing business e-mails:

1. People who do not respond to business emails promptly may seem disorganized and the sender might feel ignored and unimportant. To prevent this negative impression try to respond promptly.
2. It is recommended to write the subject with proper upper and lower case to avoid misleading especially by the first contact.
3. “Never assume a position of informality in your business e-mail. Only time and relationship building efforts can guide when you can informalize your business relationships. And, in some cases that time may never arise. If for commercial/business reasons, one should communicate as if e-mail is on their company letterhead at all times. This is your business's image you are branding.”

4. It is safe to keep the highest level of courtesy till the time the less formal relationship is stated. All the professional business correspondence should have salutation and complimentary clause as a sign of common courtesy.
5. *To, From, Bcc, Cc and Reply to All fields.* Both in *To* and *From* space, a contact's and sender's name should be written formally with proper upper and lower case to avoid the impression of limited education and experience. *Bcc* is used when a person writes to a group of people who do not know each other personally. *Cc* is to be seen when a group of business people involved know each other and do not care if their address is exposed to other users on the same page. *Reply to all*, it is advised that this phrase should be used when the comments of the sender are appropriate to all.
6. The font size in the email program should be standard to create a professional impression.
7. When sending attachments one should take into account that the receiver might not have the same software in their computer and therefore may not be able to open it.
8. It is not advisory to use previous old emails for new correspondence because it may show laziness.
9. Responses to emails are to be edited diligently and carefully, all the relevant information should be reflected and clarified to minimize the misunderstandings.
10. The signature files should not be longer than six lines if a person does not want to be viewed as an egocentric.

Kallos (1996) states: "When it comes to your business, regardless of mode of communication used, professionalism and courtesy never go out of style".

This set of advice by Kallos may seem simple and natural but only after reading them and thinking about them for a while, one realizes, that there are not many people, who strictly follow all of them.

2.8. In-company communication

2.8.1. Memorandum

In-company communication sometimes called internal communication uses written language as the interactive medium when the spoken language is impossible and/or inappropriate. Stašková summarizes: (2007) “The communication medium can be traditionally pen and paper (handwritten, typewritten or computer written) letters, or electronic mail (e-mail) messages whose main communicative purpose is to forward information to an individual or disseminate information to different distribution lists respecting the organizational structure and hierarchy of levels of community members”.

A relatively new genre of in-company communication is the memorandum or memo. According to Yates (1989) it is: “something to be remembered; an informal record of something; a note to help or jog the memory”. Memo came into existence from the informal business letter on the basis of expansion and departmentalization of companies as well as the new need of replacing oral communication for more effective e-mail mass communication. (Viz. practical part, stylistic analysis of in-company emails)

Yet in 1912, four innovative changes in internal correspondence were recommended by Scovill: *eliminating the salutation and complimentary clause, simplifying the recipient's title and address, standardizing the format, and reducing unnecessary words*. All these features were adopted and are frequently followed nowadays. Stašková adds: (2007) “The main objective was to secure readability, clarity and easy retrieval of information”. It is recommended to be clear, direct and complete but the

courtesy definitely did not lose its importance, the need to establish personal relationship continues with the less consideration received.

The subjects that might be dealt with in memos usually have the character of advice or information aimed to employees of policies and procedures their company is adopting. These may range from informing staff of a retirement or a promotion, a visit of a VIP customer, to announcing important structural and administrative changes in the department or company such as an introduction of automation, redundancies or the take-over of the company.

As for the layout, a special letter heading giving less information about the company is used. In the memo, there is who is it to, who is it from, the date and the subject, which may also be introduced in the opening paragraph, statement of the company or any responsible person including the date when the policy becomes effective and the signature. Memos are addressed either to one individual or to a group of employees within a company. Messages may differ as well as the layouts but the aim to inform or announce preserves.

2.8.2. Report

The other frequently used type of in-company business letters is a report. Reports are useful in fields of administration, export, finance, general business, marketing, production, personnel etc. They may announce, explain or recommend policy, initiate a sequence of events that need investigation and explanation or introduce fresh approaches.

Whereas the aim of memos is to remind, draw attention and instruct clearly and briefly, the length of reports is not limited; it depends on the complexity of the subject, which often deals with statistical data, figures and forecasts or research using graphs and descriptions of statistics. The standard pattern is to be followed, beginning with a title including the subject, writer and date of the report, table of contents, summary or abstract, terms of reference or introduction giving details about the subject, person or company who it was written for and what its scope and

limitations are. Then there is the main part consisting of findings, facts, evidence, conclusions and recommendations. At the end of each report an appendix (sometimes called “Annex”) and bibliography should be listed.

2.9. Methodology

2.9.1. Aims and hypotheses of the research

The present research is based on a questionnaire, which is one the most frequent methods used in monitoring language habits and the level of language awareness of the users. I decided to formulate mostly close questions, which prevent unfavourable variations in the results. I expect to get a measurable conception of types of letters used in business communication, the frequency they are used with and the representation forms of address and complimentary clauses. Another type of question I use is scale questions. I expect to collect information that evidences the preferences of the respondents in the use of indicators showing the level of formality and familiarity in business communication.

Firstly, I compiled five voluntary-data questions ascertaining job position, sex, age, general education and language education. When formulating the questions, I wanted offer a range of job positions involved in writing business letters and show the representation of the male and female sex in these occupations. Age-class distribution should reflect whether young, middle or senior generation prevails. The question about education should demonstrate the importance and usefulness either of having a degree or not and it may also draw attention to the ability of informants to apply the language gained at the certain level of the Czech educational system. The last question from the voluntary-data part of the questionnaire was included in order to confirm or disconfirm the needs of informants to further language or management education.

Secondly, I created the main part of the questionnaire which consists of eleven questions that might be divided into five sub-topics or sub-data areas, each of them having common features of intention. These questions are discussed in detail in sections 2.9.3. – 2.9.7. below.

2.9.2. Language awareness of the participants

The questions of the research are aimed to people whose level of English is at least pre-intermediate and higher and therefore it might be assumed that they have some awareness of the appropriate use of salutations, complimentary clauses and other features of formality and politeness questioned in the questionnaire. The level of English that they use actively is not the most important; the passive knowledge might be valuable as well. Schmidt (1990) suggests the term “awareness” when he refers to whether the learners of the second language are conscious of acquiring and using language knowledge. He claims: ”Learners can achieve long-term storage of complex material through implicit learning. That is, they can learn without awareness and without consciously testing hypotheses. It is also clear that learners may have explicit knowledge about the language but be unable to use this knowledge in performance without conscious attention”. The aim of this research is to study the level of language awareness of the informants concerning the appropriate level of formality and politeness in business correspondence.

2.9.3. General informative questions

Question no. 1) *How often do you write business letters in English?*

Question no. 2) *Which form of correspondence do you use?*

Question no. 3) *What type of business letters do you write?*

The purpose of all general informative questions is to give background information about the topic. They are aimed to illustrate how frequently the informants write business correspondence. They should also illustrate means of communication and modern-times transmitting media, and preferred types of letters, that people working in business surrounding exchange.

2.9.4. Formality and politeness in salutation questions

Question no. 4) *Which salutation do you use when communicating with business partners you do not know personally?*

Question no. 5) *Which salutation do you use when communicating with business partners you know but your relationship is purely professional?*

Question no. 6) *Which salutation do you use when communicating with business partners you consider to be your business friends?*

This group of questions is composed to show the tendency in the use of one of the features of politeness, which is the form of address. I made an offer of four choices of salutations, which are suggested in most textbooks and also gave space for an open answer. I would like to prove that the rules for writing letters one may read about in all kinds of brochures, textbooks and other teaching materials has nowadays completely changed and I dare to say that this process has not finished yet. In her article, published in *The Guardian* (2001), Rawsthorn addresses a problem of the maze resulting from the lack of strict regulations: “We have all heard anecdotes of friends’ elderly relatives ...who write emails like letters, with their address at the top-right hand corner, the recipient lower down to the left, followed by the date and Dear Whoever. That’s the elderly emailer. I used to think that everyone else wrote emails like me: in grammatical sentences with capital letters for businessy emails and flurries of lower case letters to friends. Now I realize that my style of emailing is very bit as aging as Dear Whoever’s school”.

2.9.5. American vs. British Standard English question

Question no. 7) *Do you distinguish salutation and complimentary clause, which you use with British and American correspondence partners? How?*

This single question should address mostly informants at higher knowledge of English language or people doing business with both countries because these people

might have noticed differences not only in the form of the layout of the business letter but also the use of polite phrases, salutations and complimentary clauses.

2.9.6. Indicators showing the level of formality and familiarity question

Question no. 8) *When writing business letters I use polysyllabic international words and classical vocabulary vs. monosyllabic native vocabulary, full verbs vs. phrasal verbs, respectful terms of address vs. intimate terms of address, indirect requests vs. direct imperatives, passive voice vs. active voice, third person noun phrases vs. first and second person pronouns, complex sentences vs. simple sentences.*

This scale question consisting in fact of seven sub-questions is organized to enable the informants to choose from the scale of nine degrees whether they are inclined to use in their writing more or less formal expressions as well as more or less polite means of language because both factors are included.

2.9.7. Formality and politeness in complimentary clause questions

Question no. 9) *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you do not know personally?*

Question no. 10) *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you know but your relationship is purely professional?*

Question no. 11) *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you consider to be your business friends?*

The last three questions are aimed to demonstrate whether the informants are aware of the matching pairs: salutation and complimentary clause. Again, as with questions no. 4, 5, and 6, four options are offered, the fifth is an open-answer space.

The questionnaire *Formality in business correspondence* in general terms is intended for working adults, whose knowledge of English is at least pre-intermediate level, and who are in touch with business correspondence in their jobs. All the questions and other supplementary information such as introduction and ending are written bilingually in order to prevent misunderstanding that might be caused by not knowing the opposite translations and to provide all the informants with the same conditions.

I would like to administer this questionnaire to at least 20 informants, minimally in three different companies so as the private policy followed in one company cannot influence the results of the research to be considered subjective, one-sided or distorted.

The research itself, however, never gives 100% reliable results. Each question has its limited validity, which might not be clear before the questionnaire is administered. The informants understand the questions from their personal and professional point of view and a subjective attitude is involved as well.

The second method used for a fulfillment of the research is the stylistic analysis of sample letters. The focus is aimed especially on indicators of formality and familiarity, politeness and the use of forms of address and complimentary clauses.

3. PRACTICAL PART

In the practical part of my diploma work, which consists of two sub-parts, I will discuss the responses to a questionnaire on the level of formality in business correspondence, and stylistic analysis of sample business letters. I will try to uncover whether the level of formality has an influence on non-native users of English. I will investigate whether and when they are engaged in business correspondence, whether they distinguish different formality levels as well as what kind of relationships it signals or may signal for them.

I decided to do research on the level of formality in business correspondence among people, whose first language is not English but who write business letters in English. The first impulse for the research came from the need to compare the advice the textbooks offer and the real usage of the people involved. There is not a tendency to put stress on writing skills especially when teaching adult learners, whose major need is to be able to communicate using spoken language so the second reason for the research was to get an outline of peoples' knowledge of using foreign written language.

Mainly in-company correspondence, formal as well as informal became the second important piece of the practical part of my diploma work. I will focus on the usage of email jargon in business correspondence, its propriety, function and frequency of occurrence. I will devote attention to the differences between British and American variants of language use. I will investigate whether non-native users of English are aware of an aspect connected with the use of British and American expressions and the language itself. In the chapter *Foreign Mail*, Elliot analyses: (1989: 150) "In England, for example, we call an *apartment* a *flat*, and *pants* are *trousers*. Unfortunately, both these words mean entirely different things in America! In that country, for instance, sweets are called *candy*, and biscuits *cracker*".

Letter writing is a kind of art that provides a lot of information and has individual impact on the reader, as Malkoç defines it: (1991: 6) "A good letter must be clearly

thought out ... Its message should be understandable to the reader and its appearance on the page should be well-balanced, like a picture in the frame. A letter, remembers, carries the writer's unspoken thoughts and silently reflects the writer's personality. Each letter is a personally creative act of real communication".

3.1. Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was compiled according to the principles, which are described in a reference manual *Metoda dotazniku pro pedagogy* (1989).

3.1.1. Basic principles in making up a Questionnaire

The questionnaire is the most frequent method used for data finding which is due to the seemingly easy preparation and structuring of a questionnaire. Sometimes, the result may be inaccurate and misleading, especially when the preparation is underestimated and all the relevant facts are not taken into account.

3.1.1.1. Basic Terminology

A person asked to complete a form is called an informant. The single items in the form are called questions. A distribution of a questionnaire is called administration.

3.1.1.2. The aim of the questionnaire

The basic condition for an efficient conception of a questionnaire is based on an accurate formulation of the concrete aim. All the items must be clearly defined within the content of the topic.

3.1.1.3. The questionnaire structure

The structure of a questionnaire is well considered. When preparing the questionnaire, the main problem should be divided into smaller areas, which are

further expanded with other items. The questionnaire usually consists of several parts: entry part, questioning part, final part.

The entry part gives the name and the address of the institution that administrates the questionnaire and/or the name of the author. Furthermore it explains the aim and emphasizes the importance of the informant's answers. It should give motivation to completing the questionnaire and it should increase the rate of return. An illustrative example may be added.

The questioning part consists of self-questions. The organization of the questions does not have to be logical or systematical. The reason for breaking the order has its psychological grounds. It is advised to place easier and more attractive questions at the beginning not to discourage the informants. More difficult and less interesting questions are placed in the middle; the least demanding and more confidential questions have their position at the end.

The final part is usually the shortest including the thanks for informant's cooperation.

3.1.1.4. Variability of the questions

The use of the same type of questions leads to stereotype and may reduce the interest of the informants. Therefore, to increase the informant's attention, various types of questions should be covered such as closed questions, half-closed questions, open questions, and scale questions.

3.1.1.5. Scale questions

Scale questions use various kinds of scales in order to find out the rate or quality of a feature or its intensity. The raters define their evaluation by stressing the place on the scale. The scales usually have three, five, seven or nine grades. The odd number of grades creates more symmetric scale.

3.1.1.6. Validity of the questions

The validity of the questions and the questionnaire itself is closely connected with the subjectivity of the informants' approach to the completing of the form. In general, anonymous questionnaires tend to higher degree of validity than the non-anonymous questionnaires, and the most reliable type of questions is a factual one.

3.1.1.7. Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability depends on more factors such as the consistence of the questionnaire and the number of the questions; the more questions asking about one problem the higher the reliability is.

3.1.1.8. The length of the questionnaire

The length should be considered carefully; the researcher should get all the essential data, but should not get the informants tired. The researcher is often forced to a compromise between their needs and informants' interest and capability. The recommended length of completion should not take more than 30 minutes. Questionnaires administered by post should be filled in within 15 minutes.

3.1.1.9. The rate of return of the questionnaire

The rate of return is a term identifying the relationship between the number of administered questionnaires and the completed and returned questionnaires. It is usually given in percentage. The rate of return never reaches 100 per cent. The minimal required rate of return is 75 per cent (Wiersma 1989: 157)

3.1.2. The diploma-work questionnaire

The questionnaire to my diploma-work is divided into four sections. The First part addresses the informants and explains the aim of the diploma-work research in a standard formal way. The second part focuses on voluntary data that help to reflect the importance of education, language education, use of modern means of communication at different age, and not the last the importance and influence of the job position and sex. The third part, the questionnaire itself, consists of eleven questions including a scale. The last part provides the formulation expressing thanks and the affirmation that all the data the informants provide are intimate.

3.1.2.1. The potential addressees

The questionnaire is addressed to people, who are working and cooperating by written channel with people from different, not only English speaking countries, but whose language of communication is English. Therefore, the questionnaire is bilingual, i.e. written in Czech and English. To increase the addressees' motivation, I underlined that filling in the questionnaire would not take more than 15 minutes but the final experience showed that the maximum time do not exceed five minutes.

3.1.2.2. The structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire itself consists of eleven questions, questions number 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 9; 10; 11 are multiple choice types, questions number 3; 4; 5; 6; 9; 10; 11 cover an open question type item for "other" answers, question number 7 is an open type, question number 8 is a scale type. Each question has its particular aim concerning the research.

3.1.2.2.1. Question no.1)

Question no.1 should reflect whether the respondents write any kind of business correspondence and how often they are faced to its use.

3.1.2.2.2. Question no.2)

Question no.2 asks about the means of communication. Several years ago only written letters were considered to be appropriate documents but with the onset of modern technology and computers, emails gained an important position and popularity within business correspondence not only in many companies but individuals as well. The question covers the use of letters, emails and faxes.

3.1.2.2.3. Question no.3)

Question no.3 gives a wide choice of the most common letter types, described in various available exercise books, and the respondents are given possibility to complete the choice of some other letter types, because I was aware of the fact that it may be difficult to name them all.

3.1.2.2.4. Question no.4)

Question no.5)

Question no.6)

Questions no. 4; 5; 6 should elicit formality features in the use of salutation with the business partners of different relation degree.

3.1.2.2.5. Question no.7)

Question no.7 is the only open question. It should prevent alternation of the data, because many authors, who are engaged in stylistics, distinguish formality features between British and American correspondence.

3.1.2.2.6. Question no.8)

Question no.8 uses the method of scaling. I chose seven stylistically relevant categories of features that clearly show formality and informality. For better illustration and understanding, examples were added to most of them.

3.1.2.2.7. Question no.9)

Question no.10)

Question no.11)

Questions no. 9; 10; 11 should elicit formality features in the use of complimentary clause with different business partners as it is mentioned in questions no. 4; 5; 6.

All the questions in the questionnaire were carefully thought out, the aim was to offer clear questions that do not cause problems to people involved in business letters writing. Closed questions, which offer five or more possibilities to choose should be the most reliable indicators in the research. These questions include the use of salutation and complimentary clause, which are vital elements of the whole diploma-work.

3.2. Questionnaire: Formality in business correspondence

3.2.1. Entry part

Vážení respondenti,
Dear respondents,

Dovoluji si, jakožto studentka 5.ročníku PdF Masarykovy Univerzity, obrátit se na Vás s tímto stručným dotazníkem, jehož vyplnění Vám nezabere déle než 15 minut. Tématem mé diplomové práce je: „Stupeň formality v obchodní korespondenci“. Veškeré údaje jsou anonymní a budou sloužit pouze pro výzkum mé diplomové práce.

I am a final-year student, who is writing her diploma work at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University and I would like to ask you to fill in this brief form, which will not take more than 15 minutes at all. The topic of my diploma work is: "Formality in business correspondence". All the data are anonymous and will be used for the diploma-work research only.

Děkuji
Thank you

Hana Míčková

3.2.2. Questioning part

3.2.2.1. Dobrovolné údaje/ Voluntary data:

- Pozice v zaměstnání/ *Job position:*
.....
- Pohlaví/ *Sex:* žena/ *female*
muž/ *male*

3. Jaké obchodní dopisy v angličtině píšete?/ *What type of business letters do you write?*

- a) Žádost o informace/ *A letter of inquiry*
- b) Nabídka/ *A letter of offer*
- c) Propagační dopis/ *Sales letter*
- d) Objednávka/ *A letter of order*
- e) Platba/ *A letter of payment*
- f) Upomínka/ *A letter of reminder*
- g) Stížnost/ *A letter of complaint*
- h) Pozvánka/ *An invitation letter*
- j) Doporučení/ *A letter of recommendation*
- k) Dopis dobrozdání / *A goodwill letter*
- l) Domluva schůzky/ *Arranging appointments*
- m) Žádost o práci/ *Application letter*
- n) jiné, uveďte jaké/ *other, name them:*
.....
.....

4. Jaká oslovení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, se kterými se **neznáte osobně**?/ *Which salutation do you use when communicating with **business partners you do not know personally**?*

- a) Dear Sir/ Dear Madam
- b) Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Miss Brown
- c) My dear Brown/ My dear Mr. Brown
- d) Dear George
- e) other, name them:
.....

5. Jaká oslovení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, které **znáte, ale Váš vztah je čistě profesionální?** *Which salutation do you use when communicating with **business partners you know but your relationship is purely professional?***

- a) Dear Sir/ Dear Madam
- b) Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Miss Brown
- c) My dear Brown/ My dear Mr. Brown
- d) Dear George
- e) other, name them:

.....

6. Jaká oslovení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, které **považujete za profesní přátele?** *Which salutation do you use when communicating with **business partners you consider to be your business friends?***

- a) Dear Sir/ Dear Madam
- b) Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Miss Brown
- c) My dear Brown/ My dear Mr. Brown
- d) Dear George
- e) other, name them:

.....

7. Rozlišujete oslovení a loučení, jednali se o korespondenční partnery britské nebo americké? Jak? *Do you distinguish salutation and complimentary clause, which you use with British and American correspondence partners? How?*

.....

8. Když píšete obchodní dopisy, používám/ *When writing business letters I use :*

mnohoslabičná mezinárodní slova/ <i>polysyllabic</i> <i>international words,</i> <i>classical vocabulary</i> <i>e.g. receive, occupation,</i> <i>assistance, requirements</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	krátká, jasná slova běžné slovní zásoby/ <i>monosyllabic</i> <i>native vocabulary</i> <i>e.g. get, job, help, needs</i>
významová slovesa/ <i>full</i> <i>verbs</i> <i>e.g. investigate, postpone</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	frázová slovesa/ <i>phrasal</i> <i>verbs</i> <i>e.g. look into, put off</i>
zdvořilostní oslovení/ <i>respectful terms of</i> <i>address</i> <i>e.g. Sir, Madam</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	přímé oslovení/ <i>intimate</i> <i>terms of address</i> <i>e.g. John, Love</i>
zdvořilostní žádosti/ <i>indirect requests</i> <i>e.g. Would you be so kind</i> <i>as to...</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	přímý rozkazovací způsob/ <i>direct imperatives</i> <i>e.g. Give me...</i>
trpný rod/ <i>passive voice</i> <i>e.g. The document was</i> <i>sent...</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	činný rod/ <i>active voice</i> <i>e.g. PA sent the document...</i>
třetí osobu/ <i>third person</i> <i>noun phrases</i> <i>e.g. the reader, customers</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	první a druhou osobu/ <i>first</i> <i>and second person pronouns</i> <i>e.g. I, you</i>
dlouhá souvětí/ <i>complex</i> <i>sentences</i>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	jednoduché věty/ <i>simple</i> <i>sentences</i>

9. Jaká loučení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, se kterými se **neznáte osobně**?/ *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you do not know personally?*

- a) Yours faithfully
- b) Yours sincerely
- c) Yours truly
- d) With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards
- e) Yours
- f) jiné, uveďte/ *other, name them:*

10. Jaká loučení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, které **znáte, ale Váš vztah je čistě profesionální**? *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you know but your relationship is purely professional?*

- a) Yours faithfully
- b) Yours sincerely
- c) Yours truly
- d) With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards
- e) Yours
- f) jiné, uveďte/ *other, name them:*.....

11. Jaká loučení používáte s korespondenčními partnery, které **považujete za profesní přátele**? *Which complimentary clause do you use when communicating with business partners you consider to be your business friends?*

- a) Yours faithfully
- b) Yours sincerely
- c) Yours truly

d) With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards

e) Yours

f) jiné, uveďte/ *other, name them*:.....

3.2.2.3. Final part

Závěrem bych Vám ráda poděkovala za obětování Vašeho volného času. Vážím si Vaší ochoty dotazník vyplnit a ujišťuji Vás, že informace Vámi poskytnuté, jsou pro mě velice cenné a užitečné.

Let me thank you for devoting your free time to filling in my questionnaire. I really appreciate your willingness and would like to assure you that all the information is helpful and valuable for my research.

S pozdravem

Best Regards

Hana Míčková

3.3. Results of the research

The questionnaire was administered to three companies and eight individuals. The total number of the fulfilled questionnaires is 23.

The first company is international; the languages used are English and Czech. The company specializes in information technologies, its branch is situated in Brno, but the parent company has its headquarters in Germany, i.e. English is used mainly as a lingua franca by non-native speakers with different mother tongues.

The second company has its headquarters in Brno, the official language is Czech but the knowledge of English is required at management positions, because the main business partners are the Americans, i.e. English is used in communication between native and non-native speakers of the language. The company specializes in assembling machinery parts.

The third company has its headquarters in Prague, the official language is Czech and the knowledge of English is necessary for communication with business partners, i.e. English is used both as a lingua franca by non-native speakers with different mother tongues and for communication between native and non-native speakers. The company specializes in financial matters.

The individuals, who responded the questionnaire, were the students of the intensive English courses led by the language school, which has its branches in many cities in the Czech Republic. Their level was from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate.

3.3.1. Voluntary data

There were 23 informants altogether, 15 men and eight women. The highest age-class distribution forms the 30-45 years old informants, the age under 30 years follows with eight informants and only three informants were over 45 years.

Job positions of the informants included: a bank analyst, an assistant of the director, an HR resourcing analyst, a lower manager, a production master, an executive manager, an affiliated branch manager, a sales supervisor, an economist, a brewer, an IT administrator, an IT specialist, a marketing specialist, a sales manager, a director, a Learning and Development – HR Service Analyst, and an airfreight manager.

Fifteen of the informants were people with university education of different specializations, the rest were people with secondary education.

Fourteen informants responded that they either attended or still attend further language or management courses. Some of the informants are offered free language courses at work, or they get an allowance to attend language schools, some of them attend individual language lessons. Seven informants studied English abroad for two to four weeks.

The findings show that the younger generation, around the age of 30, seems to be involved more in modern communication technologies. Job positions that are continually developing their language education are mostly leading managers and directors. Nearly two thirds of the informants are people with university education. All these factors suggest the conclusion that most of the people taking part as informants in the research are young, perspective, and successful people who use at least one foreign international language at work actively.

3.3.2. General informative questions

All the questions, except for question no. 7, are presented in the visual form of coloured, described pie charts, bar graphs, and line graphs, which are to be found in the appendices to the diploma work.

3.3.2.1. Findings - question no. 1

The first pie chart (Appendix 1, 60) shows that 13 per cent of the informants write business letters every day, 44 per cent every week, 13 per cent every month, and 30 per cent occasionally. The number of people who write business letters every day prevails, which means that they should be aware of the use of formal and polite expressions in writing.

3.3.2.2. Findings - question no. 2

The second pie chart (Appendix 2, 61) gives information about the written medium used. None of the informants uses only letters for communication. The highest number 53 per cent of the informants chose the option of writing only emails and faxes. 13 per cent of the informants write mostly letters and emails and fewer faxes, 30 per cent of the informants write mostly emails and faxes and letters fewer. Four per cent of informants admitted that they write all of them; emails, faxes and letters equally. It may be confirmed that letters used to be important but according to the current research more and more people are getting used to writing emails and faxes. This acknowledges one of my hypotheses that the use of modern communication media for business communication is constantly growing.

3.3.2.3. Findings - question no. 3

The bar graph (Appendix 3, 62) to question three offers a listing from the most often to the least often used type of a letter. The first and the most frequent type is the letter of inquiry, which is used by 16 informants. The second most frequently used type of letter (eleven informants have indicated they write appointment letters) is the arranging appointment letter. A letter of order occupies the third position since it is indicated in eight responses. The letter of offer is the fourth most frequently used with seven answers, other letters including requirements on installation or other services, or letters to advertisement agency are in the fifth position with six answers and further on the invitation letter, the letter of recommendation and the letter of

reminder, the letter of payment, the sales letter and the application letter, the goodwill letter and the least frequent is the letter of complaint. It might be concluded that people communicate via letters mainly in order to get information, deal with orders and offers and arrange their meetings and appointments.

3.3.3. Formality and politeness in salutation questions

Another three pie charts show the most favorite and the most common used salutations. One may observe that there is a certain tendency to be rather formal or neutral, but very formal salutations are preferred rarely. On the other hand, the use of the quite familiar salutations *Hello* or even *Hi* in business correspondence is steadily increasing in frequency, which demonstrates the decline of strict formality.

3.3.3.1. Findings - question no. 4

In the first pie chart (Appendix 4, 63), where the expected level of formality reaches the maximum, the use of *Dear Sir/ Madam* represents 33 per cent, which is the most frequent, *Dear Mr. / Mrs. / Miss Brown* is the second most frequent salutation with 27 per cent *Dear George* with 24 per cent stands for the third biggest cut and the tiniest proportion with 16 per cent represents other salutation options, such as *Dear Sirs*, *Hello + first name*, *Dear all*, *Dears* and *Good morning*. The salutation *My dear Brown* remained unmarked.

3.3.3.2. Findings - question no. 5

The second pie chart (Appendix 5, 64), which reflects the cline from formal to informal relationship between business partners, the salutation *Dear George* gained 52 per cent over the more formal *Dear Mr. / Mrs. / Miss Brown* with 32 per cent and the most formal *Dear Sir/ Madam* with four per cent. The salutation *My dear Brown* was indicated by any of the informants again. *Twelve per cent* stand for other salutations, such as *Hello*, *Hi* and *Dear all*.

3.3.3.3. Findings - question no. 6

The third pie chart (Appendix 6, 65) is divided in three parts only, because the salutations *Dear Sir/ Madam* and *My dear Brown* were not marked by any of the informants. *Dear Mr. /Mrs. / Miss* was indicated in twelve per cent of the responses, *Dear George* reached 61 per cent and finally other salutations, such as *Hi, Wazzup man, Hey* or *first name*, count for 27 per cent of the responses.

The salutation *My dear Brown* was not chosen by any of the informants in any of the three questions and that confirms that the use of this salutation is old-fashioned and definitely outdated. Comparing all three graphs, it is clear that *Dear George* is the top one salutation for nearly all the occasions and *Dear Mr. /Mrs. / Miss Brown* is still considered as the standard. The interesting fact to be noticed is surely the increasing number of other salutations that exercise books on writing letters and websites recommending the effective strategies for business letters writing do not deal with. The real life experience has not entered the world of scholars yet.

3.3.4. American vs. British Standard English question

3.3.4.1. Findings - question no. 7

The results clearly show that all the informants make no distinction and probably are not aware of the differences between the British and the American Standard in the use of salutation, complimentary clause or other formality features in business letters writing. The explanation provided by the informants indicated that most of them do not have any American business partners, or their business partners are non-native speakers as well, while only a few of them stated that they communicate entirely with British business partners.

3.3.5. Indicators showing the level of formality and familiarity question

The next seven line graphs reflect the inclination of the informants to the use of more or less polite phrases and formal and informal expressions. The range of the scales offers nine degrees; number one represents the maximum formal or polite use, number nine represents the opposite minimum formal or polite use, number 5 stands for neutral attitude.

3.3.5.1. Findings - question no. 8A

Line graph 8A (Appendix 7, 66) pictures the tendency of the informants to use rather monosyllabic and native vocabulary; the highest point is reached at grade 5. It is possible to explain this result by the fact that the level of English of the most informants was pre-intermediate to intermediate and long international words belong to their active vocabulary in their mother tongue but they are not used actively in their English although these words belong to their passive vocabulary.

It is difficult to state whether the informants are aware of the role of Latinate words as indicators of formality but the fact is that they preferably use them.

3.3.5.2. Findings - question no. 8B

Line graph 8B (Appendix 8, 67) stands for the preference of the informants to use full and phrasal verbs and the same reason seems to provide a possible explanation for this result, i.e. the informants use more full verbs in their writing because of their level of English. In my opinion, phrasal verbs are part of the most difficult grammar for English learners, and more, most exercise books start dealing with them at higher levels. Another reason was provided by the informants in personal communication – some informants considered that it is not advisable to use phrasal verbs because their business partners are non-native as well, and the goal of their business communication is not to write a perfect letter but to make a deal.

3.3.5.3. Findings - question no. 8C

Line graph 8C (Appendix 9, 68) displays the usage of respectful terms of address and it shows clearly that that the informants use all suggested variants. Only after evaluating the questionnaires I realized that this question should have been formulated in more specific terms. The former aim was to elicit either polite or less polite phrases in terms of address but the question does not categorize the mode of business letters, whether the participants in the communication are on professional or friendly terms. The findings gathered from the answers to question 8C are not very beneficial for the research.

3.3.5.4. Findings - question no. 8D

On the other hand, line graph 8D (Appendix 10, 69) excellently depicts the use of polite indirect requests predominates over the impolite direct imperatives. This proves that the informants are aware of the importance to be humble and polite in English. Grades one and two were marked by the majority of the informants, which definitely elevates the appropriate use and knowledge.

3.3.5.5. Findings - question no. 8E

Line graph 8E (Appendix 11, 70) pictures the frequency of use of passive and active constructions. The informants marked nearly all the grades and there are not any great differences among the numbers of informants for a particular grade, except for grade number five, which is the neutral one, so it indicates a clear preference for neutral level of politeness, which is a valuable result.

3.3.5.6. Findings - question no. 8F

Line graph 8F (Appendix 12, 71) illustrates the tendency to use personal and impersonal phrases expressed by the first and second person pronouns for personal style of writing and third person noun phrases for impersonal style of writing. It

might be observed that the informants prefer personal style, which is reflected in the graph by rising values.

3.3.5.7. Findings - question no. 8G

Line graph 8G (Appendix 13, 72) represents the use of complex and simple sentences. The result is clearly visible; the line is gradually rising, with only a tiny inequality between the grades seven and eight. It may be concluded that the use of simple sentences prevails. Sentence linking is another grammatical feature, which causes some problems to the English learners, and also is not dealt at early stages. Many authors (e.g. Ashley or Elliot) recommend avoiding writing long sentences in order to prevent misunderstanding and confusion.

Question no. 8 and all its sub-parts acknowledged that the results of the research have their limitations. The question *When writing business letters I use...* focuses on the use of indicators of formality and familiarity, but in contrast to questions no. 4; 5; 6 questioning about the salutation and questions no. 9; 10; 11 questioning about the complimentary clause, the kind of relationship presupposed to be existing between the participants is not specified. Therefore, each informant had the possibility of a subjective choice. It may be assumed that the informants chose the expressions they normally have in their active language use.

3.3.6. Formality and politeness in complimentary clause questions

The last three pie charts show preferences in the use of complimentary clauses. As was mentioned above in the part on salutation questions, very formal phrases are used seldom, some expressions are viewed as universal and here as well, there is a strong tendency to use a range of informal expressions for closing a letter while others are nearly vanishing.

3.3.6.1. Findings - question no. 9

The first pie chart (Appendix 14, 73) presents the most formal point of view. The complimentary clauses *Yours faithfully* and *Yours sincerely* both gained 18 per cent whereas *Yours truly* and *Yours* were left unmarked. The highest percentage is to be observed at *With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards*. Eleven per cent stands for other complimentary clauses such as *Thanks and regards, Warm regards, or Kind regards*.

3.3.6.2. Findings - question no. 10

In the second pie chart (Appendix 15, 74), only three of the six options are represented. *Yours faithfully, Yours truly* and *Yours* were not marked by any of the informants. *Yours sincerely* and other complimentary clauses, such as *Regards* and *Thanks and Regards* reached the same percentage of 17. The highest number of 66 per cent is represented by *With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards*.

3.3.6.3. Findings - question no. 11

The third pie chart (Appendix 16, 75) shows the use of complimentary clauses when writing between business friends. Formal phrases *Yours faithfully* and *Yours sincerely* were left unmarked, *Yours* acts as the least favorite with six per cent, and *Yours truly* with 19 per cent. Other complimentary clauses, such as *Regards, Thanks and Regards, Have a nice day, Take care* or *Bye* were chosen by 22 per cent of informants and the highest number of 53 per cent stands for *With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards*.

Since all complimentary clauses were marked by at least some of the informants, no phrase can be considered useless and out-dated among the informants, most of whom are involved in everyday business letters writing. *Yours truly* and *Yours* seems to be used the least. The most popular and frequently used are *With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards*. This complimentary clause reached the highest percentage

in all three pie charts. It might be concluded again that the use of formal means of language is decreasing, less formal and neutral expressions keep the first position in popularity and the use of informal phrases are is growing up.

3.4. Discussion of the findings

Most of the informants who fulfilled the questionnaire write business letters every day, which means they are in contact with a foreign correspondence and therefore are aware of the phrases typically used and business letters writing is a kind of a routine for them.

It is not a surprise that the most often used medium of communication is emails and faxes, and other means of communication are left behind. It is a proof that typical letters written on a sheet of paper are disappearing. Modern communication media, such as the Internet are taking the main position in communication between the companies as well as the individuals when leading business communication.

The most frequent type of letters that the informants write are the inquiries and arrangements of meetings, other types of letters that are exchanged are e.g. orders, offers, requirements on installation etc. Many different types of letters are written, send and received, and there is no important variation between the particular numbers of the results.

Most of the informants are aware of the use of salutation and according to the research they are aware of the different degrees of formality that the different forms of address may express and use them appropriately when they communicate with their business partners. Some of the informants do not perceive any difference in the use of different forms of salutation and they use *Dear + first name* on every occasion, which, on the other hand, may be also interpreted a signal that this expression is gaining the universal status for the use.

The responses to question no. 7 show that none of the respondents is aware of, or distinguishes the British and American varieties of English. Further study or analysis of this feature was useless, the result did not offer any basis for wider investigation.

As for the lexical and grammatical features of formality, the use of monosyllabic native vocabulary and full verbs prevail, which is preferable for better understanding, especially when the two communicating sides are non-native users of English. The informants tend to use polite formal phrases in indirect requests, which might reflect the effort of the teachers, who teach them English. Personal style is closer to most of the informants; they prefer to use the first person noun phrases. The use of complex sentences is dispreferred; the informants tend to use of simple sentences. The reason for not using complex sentences might be clarified by the explanation that it is easier for them to use simple sentences to keep their thoughts in the letters clear. The most often used complimentary clause in all the letters without distinction of the level of formality is *With best regards/ wishes/ Best wishes/ Best regards*. This result is perfectly acceptable, this phrase might be used nearly as a universal phrase, although the use of *Yours faithfully* and *Yours sincerely* is still appreciated by many stylists as the most appropriate in impersonal business letters.

Some results are not representative and may be regarded as inaccurate or even misleading. This is due to some insufficiencies in the. These results were caused by the indefinite formulation of the questions. For instance, question no. 8 and the related sub-questions, namely 8C and 8E, are formulated in a rather indefinite and the results obtained show the most visibly their limitations. A Better formulation of the question should cover the specification of the relationship between the participants involved in the communication.

The research shows that most of the informants are aware of the appropriate use of forms of address and complimentary clauses when they write business letters to their business partners, and they are able to distinguish these formality features when they communicate on purely professional terms with business partners they do not know personally, with business partners they know personally and business partners they consider to be their business friends.

It is not possible to say the same about the knowledge and experience of the informants in the use of lexical and grammatical features of formality. The awareness of the appropriate use of these features is not so evident as with the awareness of the appropriate use of salutation and complimentary clause. Moreover, some interesting aspects are to be observed. The majority of the informants prefer to use grammatically easier constructions and vocabulary, such as monosyllabic native vocabulary, full verbs, active voice, and simple sentences. Impolite direct imperatives are not favoured by the informants, which show the knowledge of the importance to use polite language in this grammatical feature.

The results of the research provide information about the real usage of the phrases associated with formality and politeness in English. The results show that the English language is continually changing. Phrases that used to be common ten years ago are now a little weird and old-fashioned, and their use is decreasing e.g. the salutation *My dear Brown* or the complimentary clause *Yours truly* were not marked by any of the informants, although Naterop (1977) recommends these changes.

3.5. Stylistic analysis – sample letters

The second part of the research consists of a stylistic analysis of sample letters. The aim is to show what the real language used by the informants in business correspondence is. The analysis focuses especially on the salutations and complimentary clauses.

3.5.1. Sample letter no.1

Sample letter no.1 (Appendix 17, 76) is an example of in-company correspondence, namely a report. The letter is sent by a HR (human resources) Director Europe and is addresses HR Teams. The function of the letter is to inform, to summarize the achieved results and to motivate to further effort.

There is no salutation at the beginning of the letter; it starts with a direct term of address, which is a group of employees, *HR Teams*. There is a complimentary clause, whose function is to express politely thanks. The writer uses the rather informal expression *Thanks very much*, her full name and her status in company, each on separate lines.

Both features of formality and informality are present. The features indicating formal level are polysyllabic international words (*performance, absenteeism, effectiveness, requirements, recognition*), full verbs (*implement, announce*), polite requests (*I would like..., If you want to... ..please ask..*), third person noun phrases (*...all HR teams use..., ...the winning team will be proud...*) and complex sentences. Features indicating informal level, such as active voice (*I took, we have*), direct terms of address (*HR Teams, as you may know...*), the use of first and second person pronouns with an inclusive meaning (*...we will see..., ...we will be able..., If you want..., As you may know...*) and the rather informal complimentary clause (*Thanks very much*).

There is an interesting politeness feature in this letter; it reflects the so-called positive politeness and consists of the use of personal pronouns *I* and *we*. The sender uses *I* at the beginning of the letter to show her leading position and responsibility, then she refers to *we* as a team, which may be regarded as a positive politeness strategy which indicates common ground and solidarity with the people the letter is aimed to. These two personal pronouns are alternatively used in the whole letter. As far as politeness is concerned, there are also some words with positive connotations, which indicate positive politeness as well, such as *effectiveness, effort, proud*.

3.5.2. Sample letter no.2

Sample letter no.2 (Appendix 18, 77) is an example of in-company correspondence, namely a memorandum. The subject is a warning on a breach of discipline. The letter is addressed to employees from the management of the company and its character is very formal, since it represents an official document reflecting legal regulations, the aim of which is to prepare the conditions for a possible future termination of a contract of employment.

There is no salutation, only the place and date are indicated, and there is no complimentary clause at the end of the letter, the letter ends with a space for signature of the sender. The language used is very direct, without any polite indirect requests. There are formal lexical and grammatical features, such as the use of passive constructions (...*all measures should have been commenced...*), classical vocabulary (*requirement*), full verbs (*qualify*), and complex sentences. The letter is short and brief, and its function is informative. The letter is very formal, the impersonal constructions prevail, and there is a reference to the law and the results of possible breach of discipline.

3.5.3. Sample letters no. 3 – 16

Sample letters no. 3-16 (Appendix 19, 79-92) belong to in-company correspondence and were provided by an international company, where English is an official language used by non-native speakers. Salutations *Hello*, *hi* and *dear + name* are used, which signals rather familiar language. It is similar with the use of complimentary clauses, only few of the wide range of possibilities are used: *Thanks and Regards*, *Kind Regards* and *Best Regards*. These complimentary clauses signal less formal or neutral language. The most important aspect is that the degree of formality of salutations in the sample letters corresponds to the degree of formality of complimentary clauses.

The results in the chart (Appendix 20, 80) show that salutations from sample letters are very informal, only three salutations from the total 16 are rather formal thanks to the use of *Dear*. Four of them do not have a greeting at all. Complimentary clauses are less formal or neutral as well, the use of phrases with *Regards* prevail.

When these results are compared to the results of the questionnaire, there is a conclusion that the language awareness of informants is higher with salutations, concerning passive knowledge, because they marked that they use salutations beginning with *Dear* (52 and 61 per cent, Appendices 5, 6). But the language awareness of the informants and the real use of complimentary clauses seem to be in

concord. The complimentary clause containing *Regards* is the most frequently used in sample letters and gained the highest percentage in the results from the questionnaire (66 and 53 per cent, Appendices 15, 16).

4. Conclusion

This diploma-work studies formality, politeness and their features in business correspondence. It is based on the research consisting of the questionnaire and in-company sample letters. The main focus is devoted to the use of salutations and complimentary clauses by non-native users of English.

I have gathered some interesting results from the questionnaires as well as from a stylistic analysis of sample letters. The findings of my research have shown that traditional printed written letters are sent only rarely, the most frequent means of communication used are the ones offered by modern communication media. This supports my hypothesis that means of communication are continuously developing and changing and that modern electronic communication is gaining more and more importance.

My findings further suggest that language of salutations and complimentary clauses used in business correspondence by non-native speakers is rather limited. The results from the questionnaire are in agreement with the results from the analysis of sample letters and show that very formal salutations as well as very formal complimentary clauses are not very frequent. On the other hand both the results from the questionnaire and the analysis of sample letters indicate that neutral and familiar expressions are more popular among people involved in writing business letters.

These findings suggest that more attention should be devoted to teaching writing skills in business English courses for the adult learners, especially to business letters, because the awareness of the informants about the formality and politeness features still has some gaps, namely the use of passive, third person noun phrases, and some formal salutations and complimentary clauses. The language awareness of the informants of these features is more passive than active.

This investigation has also proved that questionnaire writing is very demanding and the formulation of the questions must be thought out carefully before the administration of the questionnaire. I consider that more than two thirds of the

answers to my questionnaire might be considered rather reliable but the rest of results is limited by the subjective understanding and assessment of the informants.

The topic under investigation in the present diploma thesis has proved to be really interesting and it is evident that it offers suggestions for further study. English used by non-native speakers tends to be simplified, especially in email communication, which has the same simplifying tendencies. As stated in the theoretical part, language used in business correspondence ten years ago seems a little old-fashioned nowadays; the findings of my research are valid now but as the real use of language is continually changing and developing every month and year, research on this topic will be still necessary. Furthermore, it is important to compare the tendencies in the use of formality and politeness features in business correspondence as used by non-native speakers and native speakers of English.