

Effective multilingual communication based on English and German business letters

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Abstract

The increasing importance of business communication has been widely discussed in recent years. English and German have become the languages of international communication. The mastering of languages, which are the definite means of communication with the peoples of other countries is getting a greater significance in our modern society. This work aims to study the architectonics of English and German business letters, identify the function of "black" and "white" spaces in business correspondence, and a comparative analysis of English and Russian business letters.

Key words: business correspondence, business letter, business text, business style, international communication

Introduction

Modern culture is characterized by increasing rates of social and economic development, globalization processes, and constant enhancement of digital technologies (Krainskiy & Spiridonova, 2020), it requires "highly qualified specialists able to interact with counterparts worldwide on a professional basis", that reveals a demand to develop their professional, communicative competence" (Oblava et al., 2020). "Another important aspect of upgrade in the modern Russian higher education, which is embodied in the educational standards, is a focus on independent students' research" (Boyko & Koltsova, 2023). "There is a demand for specialists capable of integrating successfully the international professional community" (Varlakova et al., 2023). Besides, "creativity is an integral characteristic of every specialist in whatever area of professional sphere it is" (Vinogradova et al., 2021).

The relevance of multilingualism as a sociocultural phenomenon is that the operation of several languages is a necessary condition for the successful life of individuals and communities in the epoch of globalization processes because the interpenetration of material and spiritual aspects of different social cultures is undoubtedly essential. Therefore, one of the most important conditions for a successful professional is mastering foreign languages.

Multilingualism is the use of several languages within a certain social community, each of which is chosen in accordance with a specific communicative situation, and business correspondence is one of the areas of its application.

The phenomenon of multilingualism is the phenomenon of our time. It is inherent in all regions of the world in different forms and different ways. Mastering languages, which are the means of communication and information exchange with the peoples of other countries, is becoming increasingly important. Languages of interethnic communication fulfill an international mission, spiritually and morally, bringing people of different nationalities together.

Thanks to the Internet and many companies, there is a potential opportunity to work worldwide. It leads to the need for employees to speak several languages and to be able to deal with business communication and correspondence in several languages. Multilingualism has become a "daily bread" for many businessmen and official workers. Let's remember the outstanding German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and his quotation: "He who doesn't know a foreign language nothing knows about his own". When you know more than two languages, your mother tongue and a foreign language, the skills in your own language increase and become more profound. Besides, the knowledge of extra languages will help you avoid making common mistakes concerning calquing and "false friends" of a translator.

Our research was conducted to help people from Russia and other cultures for whom English and German are not their native languages to clarify some rules of effective business correspondence. The knowledge of the norms of these languages is necessary and essential for their successful business communication. It is evident that the representatives of the Russian-speaking culture know the norms and rules of their native language very well, and business correspondence in Russian is not a problem for them. However, the peculiarities of organizing and conducting business communication in English and German can provoke some difficulties. Thus, our research can help the representatives of both the Russian-speaking community and the members of other cultures for whom English and German are not their native languages to master important letter rules.

We cannot imagine the business world today without business communication "The most convenient way to get in contact with people in the business environment comes from sending messages or any type of written communications, which are commonly known as business correspondences" (Hammad, 2022: 5). The objective of communication is to exchange information, ideas and concepts used by two or more participants. Most interpersonal communication has moved to the field of written communication (Koltsova & Kartashkova, 2022), and future specialists should cope with "essential grammar and vocabulary necessary to communicate within the international professional community" (Borisova et al., 2021) and "vocational oriented foreign language reading" (Kharlamova et al., 2023: 480). The effect of multilingualism as a sociocultural phenomenon has become an everyday reality worldwide. Multilingualism is a fact of the overwhelming majority of the population. It increases the interconnection of economic, scientific, cultural and political interests. Besides, multilingualism acts as a means of socialization of the individual and forms the attitudes of empathy and tolerance due to the socio-communicative process.

The term "communication" itself is used in various contexts and senses. This term's meaning is key to the numerous elaborate theories of communication that define and describe different aspects of the communication process. "Written professional communication is one of the main components of language competence for professional interaction" (Murzo et al., 2021: 144), therefore any qualified specialist should know methods for writing professional documents and be able "to write business-format documents applying the analysis of professional sources" in native and foreign language (Goman, 2017: 195). So, "the need for international integration in the issues of training and continuous professional development of mining specialists" (Kazanin and Drebenstedt, 2017: 369) has emphasized the necessity of a detailed analysis of the issues of written business communication.

Business correspondence means two-way communication (English *feedback*, German *gegenseitige Verbindung*) between the addressor and the addressee because, without feedback, no act of business communication can be considered complete. It also exists within a specific sociocultural environment that determines the communicants' status in society and business. This, in turn, depends on the style of business writing or communication. It was observed business partners of a higher status tend to write shorter texts that sound more persistent and energetic.

Graphic means are expressed through *paragrapheme elements* formed through specific typography options underpinned by extralingual or intralingual factors. The extralingual factors include typeface, color or layout/ spatial options, which in a business letter mean the use of italics, bold type, or letter spacing. The intralingual side is represented by grapheme units that convey their distinctive meaning within the written language. In business writing, this implies phatic expressions and clichés.

One of the main tasks of highly skilled specialists is the ability "to think systematically and independently" (Goldobina et al., 2020: 803). Nowadays, business writing is impossible without the Internet, which has facilitated and streamlined business communication. "It is necessary to have an in-depth knowledge of the search for and implementation of the advanced technologies" (Litvinenko et al., 2020: 435); it goes without saying in our modern world, the Internet has become "an integral part of social communication of a modern person"

(Teneva, 2021: 127) and "digital intelligent technologies" are commonly used (Nikonova et al., 2023: 578). Specifically, there has developed a certain etiquette, or code of conduct, pertaining to electronic business correspondence. Normally, a business person is more likely to answer letters with easily recognizable structures, that comply with accepted standards.

A very important role in maintaining the features of business writing mentioned above is given to the rigorous architectonics of a business letter aimed at saving the effort of the communicators. Its essential components (requisites) in a business letter, namely the company logo, date, details of the sender and the addressee, form of salutation, date, body structure, phatic constructions used, signature and print name, form the set of elements that are compulsory for business communication.

According to Kukharensko, the style of official documents is the most conservative, retaining conventional structures, including syntactic ones and archaicisms (Kukharensko, 2011).

Business letters are narrative by nature; the style of writing involves nominal sentences expanded with listing, as well as direct word order as the underpinning principle. When the subject goes before the predicate, the attribute comes before the main noun, and parenthetical words are used at the beginning of the sentence.

Literature review

Gelb was one of the first to initiate the development of dedicated science dealing with writing, introducing the term *grammatology* as its name (Gleb, 1952). He developed the framework for the scientific study of writing, seeing its aim in establishing the general comparative typological principles in the use of writing for different purposes (Amirova, 1977). In business writing, the basic principle, as considered by Ren & Liu is politeness as it embodies "different transmitting ways of positive information and negative information" (Ren and Liu, 2020: 64). "The politeness strategies should be used in business letters both by native and non-native English speakers" (Kovács and Sopon, 2022: 3).

In *Stylistics*, Galperin noted that, like other language styles, the official style is characterized by a distinctive communicatory focus and, hence, the related language and stylistic means (Galperin, 1981). The communicatory focus in this style is the mutual consent of the parties. Another observation concerning business writing made by Kozhina is that there is no reasoning (Kozhina, 1993). This makes the difference between official and scientific prose style, which is most evident in syntax with a low ratio of compound sentences, especially ones containing clauses of reason, and with a third as many tools intended for making the text logical and coherent. On the other hand, business writing is characterized by expanded sentences with absolute structures or homogeneous members that often form long rows listing goods and/or services.

Today, we can also see changes in the syntax of the official style, which is gradually becoming simpler, less formal, and reserved. Kuznets and Skrebnev stated that its distinctive feature was a multiple sentence that covered the entire content of the document. Now, the sentences in business letters tend to be short, meaningful and informative (Kuznets and Skrebnev, 1960).

Methods and Procedures

The conducted research involved about 100 British and German modern business letters (requests for information, responses to inquiries, various letters – requests and offers, letters – summaries, letters – offers, letters – messages, letters – confirmation, etc.). The research uses observation, analytical, comparative and descriptive methods, and contrastive-descriptive methods.

Our longitude observation research lets us identify some peculiarities and special features in English and German correspondence's style, vocabulary and grammar. We have conducted a detailed analysis of both the language peculiarities and the structural architectonic features of English and German letters. The following methods were profoundly used to carry out our experiment and research. Thus, analytical, comparative and descriptive methods helped us to identify the similarities in English and German business correspondence. In addition,

contrastive-descriptive and comparative methods allowed us to describe and compare the differences in English and German business correspondence.

Findings

Business writing actualizes most consistently and accurately the so-called nonverbal scientific tools of conveying the meaning, such as paragraph arrangement and order, figures, charts, diagrams and drawings (Plotnikov, 1989). The structured graphic layout of a business letter and its content are underpinned by societal requirements for this form of communication, which implies a business relationship. Thus, business writing is supposed to be writer- and reader-responsible concerning every written (or printed) word; at the same time, the layout and structure of a business letter, as its required characteristics that remain unchanged to maintain the correspondence, become, as the time goes, a "parasitic mechanism" (Barthes, 2001).

The text architectonics bears, first, on the coherent arrangement of the paragraphs that represent the content of the written piece, and, second, by the standard frame of the initial and closing details. These two components reflect the bilateral character of the spatial-semantic composition pertaining to business writing today.

In its appearance, business writing, to some extent, resembles pictography, which has always been regarded as an explicit visual stimulus that captures the attention of the addressee and provokes certain actions on their part (Titova, 2022).

Word separation in a letter, introducing borders between sentences, use or absence of punctuation marks, writing lines all across the whole page or just to the middle, the advent of free space that is not filled with text but allows for seeing it better, single, double or triple line spacing between substantial blocks of the letter (*paragraphs*) – these are the changes that the external side of business writing has seen over time (Kuznetsov, 2022).

The act of communication between the sender and the addressee involves both verbal and non-verbal features. The *verbal features* are manifested through the key principles, namely brevity and clarity of the content, and are represented in a business letter by the "black" domain (the text itself). The *non-verbal features* are represented by the "white" domain (paragraph indents, break lines, paragraph spacing, document margins). The combination of verbal and non-verbal means forms the matrix-like layout of "black" and "white" domains in business writing (Radchenko, 2005).

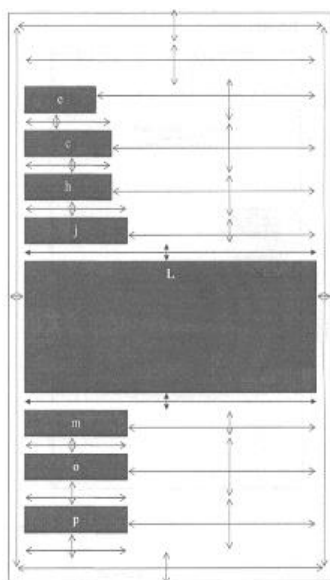


Table 1. Diagram layout of a business letter written in English

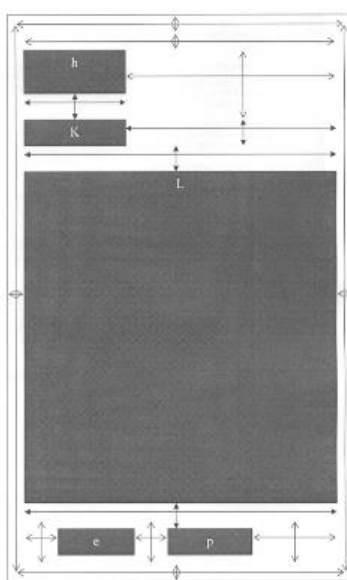


Table 2. Diagram layout of a business letter written in German

Note: In the diagrams, the "black" domains are represented by black colour blocks, while the "white" domains are marked with arrows.

According to the analyzed business correspondence, the main requisites of English letters are the following:

- (c) – the addresser / sender,
- (e) – dates of the letter,
- (h) – addressee,
- (j) – greeting,
- (K) – title to the text,
- (L) – the main text of the letter,
- (m) – completion of the letter,
- (o) – signature,
- (p) – signature transcription.

The analysis of German business letters allowed us to draw the following conclusion regarding the important requisites of the studied correspondence. These are:

- (h) – addressee,
- (K) – title to the text,
- (L) – the main body of the letter,
- (e) – date of the letter,
- (p) – signature deciphering.

Thus, the isomorphic (integral / similar) requisites of the presented English and German business letters of the first mode are:

- (H) – addressee,
- (L) – the main text of the letter,
- (E) – date of the letter,
- (P) – signature deciphering (name, surname).

Allomorphic (differential/different) requisites are:

- (C) – addresser / sender,
- (J) – greeting,

(M) – completion of the letter,

(O) – signature.

These requisites are present in English letters.

(K) – header to text – present in German letters

Isomorphic requisites include the position of the following ones beginning at the left edge of the page:

(H) – addressee,

(L) – the main text of the letter.

Allomorphic location refers to the following requisites:

(E) – date of the letter,

(P) – signature deciphering (first name, surname).

In the presented English letters (E) – date of the letter starts the letter and (P) – transcription of the signature finishes the letter. These details are printed from the left side of the page.

In German letters the requisites (E) – date of the letter and (R) – signature transcription end the letter and are located on one line: (E) – date of the letter after two or three spaces, and (R) – signature transcription in the center of the letter.

Business correspondence is classified as an occupational colloquial substyle of the official style of language. The key requirement to standard business correspondence is the economy of language, leading to an increased information processing rate. Special letter forms developed for formal business letters contain sender information, company logo, name and address. As the names of large-scale enterprises, major companies and banks, as well as some expressions, are frequently repeated, business correspondence resorts to abbreviations to save time and space, for instance, using shortened names of the months (Jan., Apr., Sept., Nov., Feb., Aug., Oct., Dec.)

If a letter is sent to the UK, the address includes the name of the county as necessary, and it is most often abbreviated (e.g., Sy. for Surrey, Warks. for Warwickshire, Notts. for Nottingham, Yorks. for Yorkshire, Oxon for Oxfordshire, Sx. For Sussex, etc.).

Similarly, the names of US states are also used in the abbreviated form (e.g. AL for Alabama, DC for the district of Columbia, TX for Texas, CA for California, KS for Kansas, MT for Montana, WA for Washington, KY for Kentucky, etc.)

The names of cities and states in Germany are also abbreviated, for example Frankfurt a.M. for Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt a.d.O. for Frankfurt an der Oder, Düss. for Düsseldorf, Münch. for München, Rheinl. Westf. for Rheinland Westfalen, Thür. for Thüringen, Sachs. for Sachsen, etc.

The style of business letters stands out in the diversity of styles pertaining to official documents, regulations, contracts, certificates, briefing notes, fact sheets, acts of law and instructions. Official style is characterized by rigorous logic of presenting information, clear text structure, compliance with the language standards, and adherence to speech etiquette. While making use of standard patterns and clichés, business writing is topic- and content-oriented. And if on the whole official style is conservative and reserved, business writing shows a certain degree of inclusiveness with regard to borrowings as a consequence of international contacts (Kirsanova, 2022).

The vocabulary of business writing includes proper names (company names and logos); specific terminology, such as *complaint/claim*, *offer*, *direct mail*, *CV*, *P.S.*; Latin phrases (e.g., *status quo*, *persona grata*); terms related to business (*aviso* [notification], *acceptor* [recipient], *current account*, *contractor*, *transit* [transportation]); abbreviations (*c.i.f.*, *c.a.f.*, *MP*, *Ltd*); currency symbols; the same can be seen in business letters written in German: *Mop.* for Monat ("month"), *Dtzd.* for Dutzend ("ten"), *Pkw* for Personenkraftwagen ("passenger car"), *GmbH* for Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung ("limited liability company"), *EDV* for Elektronische Datenverarbeitung ("electronic computing"), *Esb.* for Eisenbahn ("railway transport"), *Flgw.* for Flugwesen ("aviation"), *Mar.* for Schifffahrt ("shipping"), *Kfz.* For Kraftfahrzeuge ("road transport"), *Ök.* for Wirtschaft ("economy"), *Hdl.* for Handel ("trade"). There is a tendency for maximally short opening and closing phrases and the absence of

figures of speech such as metaphors, similes or allegories. Another feature of business writing is the use of stock phrases that have lost their literal meaning and bear no connotations (e.g., *Dear Sir, Yours truly / Sincerely yours*, German *Sehr geehrte Herren* ("dear sirs"), *Ihr ergebener Freund/ Diener* ("your humble friend/ servant"), *Mit freundlichen Grüßen* ("my best regards") (Sokolova, 2022).

A business letter should mostly consist of shorter words because they take less time to read, are known to and understood by everyone and at the same time produce a stronger emotional impact. The outcomes of our study of language units about business writing also show the more frequent use of one-syllable words and one-word lexemes over their two-syllable synonyms and prepositional phrases, respectively; archaic word combinations have also been replaced with more modern or stylistically neutral vocabulary. The table below gives a comparative list of the synonyms, with today's preferences in the right-hand column.

advise, inform	say, tell, let us know
at an early date	soon, today, next week
at the present time	now, at present
to deem	to believe, to consider
due to the fact that	because
for the purpose of	for
in accordance with	according to
in advance of, prior to	before
the writer, the undersigned	I, we
in compliance with your request	as you requested
attached hereto	attached
avail oneself of	use
be of the opinion	believe
check into	check
connect up	connect
continue on	continue
co-operate together	co-operate
customary practice	practice
enclosed herewith	enclosed
forward by post	mail

have a tendency to	tend to
in many instances	often
inform of the reason	tell why
letter under date of	letter of
letter with regards to	letter about
past experience	experience
place an order for	order
repeat again	repeat
send an answer	reply
write your name	sign

Table 3. The list of preferred vocabulary in modern business letters

Using words in certain direct meanings can also be considered an important feature of vocabulary pertaining to business writing. Specific terms and abbreviations are explained or expanded. Newly introduced terminology that needs to be used in a letter is provided with definitions or explanations. Interjections, expressive idioms, and colloquial vocabulary, including verbs, are hardly ever used or used at all. Any business letter that contains colloquial language and/or idioms would sound vulgar and unceremonious, breaking the requirements of style, so the writers use neutral vocabulary instead. Thus, *you have probably guessed* is replaced with *you probably know*; *prices are at rock bottom* is replaced with *prices are very low*, etc. (Cherkashina et al., 2021).

Describing language situations that are common and typical in business in an accurate, objective manner and within the low-key official register is possible owing to standard expressions and clichés; these are referred to as bureaucratic language since they were coined in administrative offices as units to be used in official documents. Some examples are as follows: *for want/lack of* (German *wegen Fehlen*), *because of* (German *im Zusammenhang*), *during the last period / year* (German *im Ablauf von*), *stated above* (German *oben Dargelegtes*), *as aforesaid / hereinabove* (German *oben Vermerktes*), *hereinafter contained* (German *das unten folgende*).

Official style tends to be nominal; this is one of its most representative features, with nouns used more often than in other functional styles (including scientific style). This characteristic is manifested through frequent use of denominal linkers and prepositions: *in accord with* (German *im Zusammenhang mit*), *with reference to* (German *laut*), *because of the fact that* (German *infolge*), *in view/ seeing that* (German *angesichts*), *due to the fact/ on grounds that* (German *Verbindung damit, dass*).

Bureaucratic language also includes deverbal substantives (verbal nouns), in particular, artificial formations derived employing adding *-ing* and *-er/or* for the process of action and the person/company that performs the action respectively: *delivering* (goods), *sending/ receiving* (letters), *sender/ receiver* (Nubarian and Pyankova, 2021).

A defining feature of the official style is its particular formality (reserved manner) manifested through using masculine nouns to name the profession of feminine persons (*student Ivanova, director Kravtsova*).

A distinctive grammatical feature (although this is not characteristic of introductory clauses and conclusions) is the predominant use of verbs in the active voice and the impossibility of using passive forms, along with rigorous syntax, explicit and consistent presentation of ideas, and the conventional character of the language. For example, instead of a passive form (English *You letter has been received by us*; German *Ihr Brief wurde von uns erhalten*), an active verb form is used as semantically preferable (English *We have received your letter*, German *Wir erhielten Ihren Brief*).

Another fundamentally important point for business writing is common links between its syntactic elements, namely, sentence parts and whole sentences. In particular, the subject-predicate relation is at the core of nominative phrases in which subordinate sentence parts specify the information presented by the subject and predicate groups. Connected by the common content, sentences in a business letter combine into a variety of text unities by means of subordinating linkers prevalent in business writing (Domnitskaya et al., 2021).

Today, business writing hardly ever uses subordination, because the grammatical unity of many clauses connected into one multiple sentence, or hypotaxis, is difficult for the reader to understand. The maximum stylistic effect is achieved by communicating a number of points or concepts to the addressee (or the opposing party) using parataxis (sentence coordination), in particular, such linkers as *and* (German *und*), or *or* (German *oder*), leaving it to the addressee to work out the logical connections. Thus, we conclude that in business letters, preference should be given to simple, short sentences, direct word order in sentences where the subject comes before the predicate, the definition comes immediately before the definite word, and the introductory words and phrases are at the beginning of the sentence. In addition, the use of participles and de-particular clauses should be avoided, which makes it difficult to perceive the business content of the text.

Results

The conducted comparative analysis of about 100 British and German modern business letters (requests for information, responses to inquiries, various letters – requests and offers, letters – summaries, letters – offers, letters – messages, letters – confirmation, etc.), the usage of analytical, comparative and descriptive methods allowed us to come to the following conclusions regarding the architectonics of space and stylistic features of English and German business correspondence.

- 1) An essential feature of written business correspondence is the matrix arrangement of "black" (verbal) and "white" (non-verbal) space in a business letter and their interconnectedness, where "black" space is the text itself, and "white" space is represented by indents, red lines, spaces between paragraphs, margins from page edge. Both black" and "white" domains are significant in business letters and should be equally analyzed and studied before writing a business letter.
- 2) National and economic peculiarities dictate norms of business letter formation. Both the text of the letter itself and key sentences and its internal organization, in combination with the architectural construction of the whole space of the text of a business letter, can be considered normatively determined.
- 3) In the writing of English and German business letters, there is a certain difference in the structure of requisites and their location. Differences in the writing of official and private English, German letters are due to their sociocultural characteristics, norms and standards of business correspondence in England and Germany.
- 4) Notable features of business letter style include a high degree of standardization of language means, expressive logic of presentation, almost complete absence of emotionality and imagery, and widespread use of impersonal and fiat forms. The vocabulary is mainly neutral, it is used in its direct meaning. Special terminology is used, and specific syntactic constructions, in particular clichés, are employed. Business writing has such specific features as: 1) objectivity; 2) instrumentality; 3) pragmatism; 4) conventionality. In Germany, the main document regulating the formulary-compositional form of a business text is "Regeln hier

Maschinenschreiben" - DIN 5008. Special attention in German office management is paid to the way the business papers are designed in correspondence with the authorities – Korrespondenz mit Behörden, where the conservative Verwaltungssprache/ Kanzleistil style is used. When dealing with public authorities, official papers should be typed using Courier font only. When writing the date in a German business letter, the month should be given in its full form - 10 February 2002.

- 5) England has developed a codified style of official address known as Zip-Code, which means "code lightning". In general, the following features are characteristic of English letters: 1) The vocabulary and syntax should not be too dry and insensitive. 2) An abundance of phrases and conjunctions is typical of British correspondence, and cohesion is widespread. 3) Modern British business letters are quite simple and concise.
- 6) Multilingualism was and has been a relevant phenomenon that is necessary for the coexistence of different ethnic groups and cultures. It has a great number of contradictions and interactions. Nevertheless, it is proved that multilingualism, being one of the actual world tendencies, has a positive value both for the creation of a progressive model of modern society and for the development of the communicative potential of an individual linguistic personality.

Conclusion

Business writing is one of the most important means of communication in today's business world. Since ancient times, business correspondence has been a flexible and powerful tool with special economic and strategic tactics to resolve many issues for numerous public and private enterprises, companies and firms. A modern-day business letter can take the form of an official document, as well as various offers, confirmations, requests, inquiries, reminders, orders, claims, congratulations, condolences and replies to them, i.e., anything that can be put in writing to make business relationship work. There is no doubt that writing business correspondence is an art form. Business correspondence should be written impeccably; it must consider and comply with all the rules, canons and formalities. After all, even a slight deviation from the business regulations can make a business letter unauthorized from a legal point of view. A letter on letterhead written in clear business language is a basic requirement in the constantly increasing competition in the business and financial field.

Speaking about multilingualism and business correspondence, our young generation has to deal daily with this sociocultural phenomenon, and they face complex tasks that need to be taken into account to get a successful outcome, the ability to communicate and co-operate with people of different nationalities, races and confessions considering and respecting their cultural identity and personal peculiarities. It is reasonable to say that multilingualism leads to the formation of a multifaceted picture of the world, stimulates full-fledged communication, contributes to the organization of effective labor activity, and spreads cultural exchange between people.

The authors of the article hope that this study of business letters will draw the readers' attention to the importance of writing them correctly, which can help business partners pay more attention to the vocabulary, word choice, the rules of spelling and punctuation, the construction of sentences and word combinations and, of course, to the composition of business letters, to the "black" and "white" domains in business correspondence. All these items will help increase the company's prestige, gain profitable contracts, preserve and develop the image and expand the sphere of business cooperation. Business partners should always remember that an unambiguous and correctly constructed business letter is one of the keys to the success of business cooperation.

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