**Topic 6. Business letters**

Official business letter and official business style. Strict and fixed norms of writing business letters. Entering of business letter into the sphere of international relations. Diachronic analysis of official business letters. Business letters and emotional expressive means of influence. Business letter and its status of legal document. Classification of business legal letters according to their pragmatic purpose.

At present, when international relations – economic, cultural and political – are being rapidly developed, the role of business legal letters in this development is difficult to be overestimated. Any official business letter including legal letter serves for connection of institutions, organization and firms with each other and separate persons. The specific character of business legal letters is that they do not only serve as a means of delivering information or (and exerting influence on the addressee, but appear to be legal documents. They are a variety of official business documents realizing official business style with all attributes inherent in it.

Serving to business interrelations between people business legal letter passes into the sphere of international links (for example, transportation of cargo to different ports of the world, joint cruises with foreign companies and concluding an agreement in this connection, certain agreement, contracts between interested parties (parties concerned); filing a suit for the damage done during a cargo carriage or for the failure to fulfill undertaken commitments according to the concluded agreements etc). Thus, the letter which fixes the whole process of negotiations for settlement of this conflict and the agreement reached by two parties as a result of these negotiations and in accordance with the letter of the law acquires significance and status of the legal document. Hence follows a specific character of its formalization, namely: strict sequence and accuracy in stating factual, space and time information, objectivity of estimation, precision in formulating proposed decisions. That is why the language of business legal letters is characteristic of traditional linguistic means namely: strictness of composition, the use of special phraseology and syntactical clichés, and refusal of all variety of expressive linguistic means because the language of a document demands, first of all, accuracy and impossibility of false interpretations.

Business speech because of its communicative pragmatic properties, as a rule, does not have emotional expressive nuance, emotional means of expression. But it does not mean that the style of writing (narrative style) in official business letters is always neutral in its tone. Depending on a concrete content of a letter it can be deliberately impartial, emphatically official and demanding, ironic and solemnly enthusiastic.

It was considered for a long time that the style of official correspondence represents once and for all times a given pattern of official cliché expressions and formulas of politeness subjected to demands of straightforwardness (monosemantic words and expressions) clearness, strictness of stating, in other words an official business letter was regarded as a type of communication absolutely free from displaying any kind of emotion. A letter writer was obliged to submit to the elaborated canon and conform to the strict rules which were compulsory in composing business letters. The use in official business style of some specific speech means, a characteristic of some other language styles (first of all fictional and publisistic styles) was perceived as violation of the accepted norm. The use of jargon, popular speech, colloquial and emotional tinged words, expressions or constructions was forbidden in the language of business documents.

Diachronic analysis of official business letters allows to speak of their evolution, some change of demands made on official correspondence. Under the conditions of sharp competitive struggle, high demand for quality of services, complex corporative interrelations a letter must evoke interest and attract an addressee’s attention, stimulate certain positive emotions in him, create an atmosphere of successful personal contact, at last influence him to accept the decision necessary for a sender. And this requires bringing into a letter some other stylistic elements, emotional and expressive means of influence. Some foreign authors dealing with business correspondence point out the necessity of creating the atmosphere of personal contact: «when we write a letter we enter into personal relations with our reader. He has feelings like we have and we cannot ignore them. The whole secret of a good business letter consists of writing it in a simple, natural language resembling a friendly conversation». (Gartside L. Model Business letters).

In accordance with the pragmatic purpose and subject-matter of legal business letters we can single out the following types: information letters, covering letter; inquiry letter (which can be of two types (request letter and petition letter); reply to inquires; claim (which is divided into pretension letter and protest letter); letter of thanks and letter of guarantee.

1. Information letter

This kind of letter represents notification of legal actions caused by basic professional activities of communicators. This is the most common type of legal correspondence which differs in its character, tone and size. For example: an impassive information-explanation from barristers directed to the Arbitration Commission or an official notice from representatives of a firm, ship agents on current affairs containing cliché phrases at the beginning of the letter: we have to note, we have to inform, we have to say, we wish to confirm, we have to ask you. These clichés sometimes have adverbs «hereby» which in this case is a legal term.

As an example of this kind of letter can be a dry, detailed, written in accordance with the letter of the law information letter about a contract, concluded between two firms. The letter is rich in verbs of obligations, modal verbs, complex infinitive and intensified constructions, impersonal phrases, forms of subjunctive mood, complicated syntactic structure:

«The right to withdraw the ship, however, purports to exit but, having due regard to the terms of the guarantee, payment could have been collected from Bank and it was not until the guarantee had been exhausted and the next payment due had not been paid that in our opinion the vessel could have been safely withdrawn without the right of argument».

Here is another example: a detailed information – report from barristers to the Insurance Board of ship owners concerning a legal action taken by a consignee for the done damage written on 17 pages and rich in passive voice forms, forms of subjunctive mood, numbers, figures, complex numeration, monetary units:

«The 1200 bales of woodpulp carried from Saint John to Savona under bills of lading 1,2 and 3 were bleached hardwood craft woodpulp, the same woodpulp as the Barcelona shipments about 10% of these bales destined for Savona, were noted by checkers to have their wrappers torn and chafed upon delivery at Saint Sohn…. If the claim of J.Vilaseca can be reduced to a deprecation of 2…5 % from a loss of 60 %, the total claim can be introduced and be some $204, 338.09 excluding interest».

Information letters can also include expressive estimation elements. For example, in an information letter from agents of the suffered firm the bad condition of the carried (delivered) cargo is emphasized by the use of adverbs: so badly, far in excess, excessively, considerably, so disintegrated, and also by the marked estimation vocabulary (lexis): to suffer the damage, to aggravate the damage, dirty and not adequate for this type of cargo, abnormal manner etc.

2. Covering letter

This letter represents some information about a stage (details) of basic professional activities of communicators, namely a short notice about the taken steps, confirmed by documents, a list of which is enclosed. As a rule this kind of letters is characterized by a dry, official tone and accompanied by cliché formulas of politeness, such as: we would very much appreciate receiving from you…; would you be in a position to bring this question to his attention; thank you for kind cooperation; we have the pleasure in enclosing the following documents; we are at your disposal for any further information etc. and clerical words: herewith, hereto – «we enclose herewith a copy of a letter, we have pleasure in enclosing the following document herewith, the copy of their reply is attached hereto».

3. Inquiry letter

This letter may have two varieties request letters and application letters (a letter of request and a letter of application). In an inquiry letter a sender asks to confirm some facts; to collect information on the question which he is interested in; to allow certain actions etc. A letter of application bears as a rule a detailed character and is composed on behalf of a person interested in a positive solution of the question and in connection with the forthcoming consideration of this question.

A letter of request is stated briefly by the author and consists usually of one or two sentences. Rarelier, by analogy with a letter of application it can be extensive and contains a preamble. This preamble acquaints an addressee with the facts of the affair and begins with introductory phrases such as for your information or as you know… and also by the words of thanks (for the previously rended service, hearty welcome) or it can begin with introductory sentences preparing an addressee for a positive acceptance of the request: «Although we understand the difficulties of chartering a boat, we are taking the opportunity based on our strength of passenger of last year and on the fact that we, ourselves, had managed to charter the aircrafts from London to Brindisi without any failure, to ask the Black SS Company to charter…».

The both varieties of inquiry letters are characterized by stereotyped patterns of politeness at the beginning: we would request; we kindly request; could you search…; could you get any information; please be kind enough to reply; we shall be pleased if you…; we should be obligated if you would confirm; we would very much appreciate receiving answers to certain questions; I should be greatly obligated if you could kindly let me know; I would very much be most obligated if you could… In the two last examples a personal character of appeals which is seen from the use of the personal pronoun «I» is intensified by emotional expressive lexis.

At the end of the letter a polite request to speed up the reply or action follows: we would like to have an answer as soon as possible, your early reply will be greatly appreciated etc.

4. Reply letter

It is usually a letter proceeding from the opposite direction, in which a reply to the put question or request is given, and some additional information is contained. This letter has very often information which is very important for an addressee. That is why a sender giving some interesting facts, and advancing his arguments very often refers to quotations from the Rules of Procedure while investigating some claim, quotations from the agents’ letter who deal with this matter, refers to photo-copies enclosed in a reply letter. In order to make a reply clearer and more precise the given information is divided into paragraphs.

In reply letters there is always a reference to the previous letter of the addressee or a sender refers to his own letter which represents additional information to the given letter with obligatory indication of the date and month. Thus, reply letters differ from the previous letters by the following differential signs: quotations, presence of references, paragraphs, emphasized division with numeration of items, double date (one date belongs to a letter itself and the other date belongs to the letter which is answered (to which the reply is given): we acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 10th inst, with reference to our letter to you of the 25th ultimo [instant (inst) means current month in business letters; ultimo means last month]; with reference to our interview with you of the 27th October; referring to your letter of the 24th September; with reference to your as above letter, I think…; we confirm our interview with you…, dated 5th June.

5. Claim

This letter is represented by two kinds: pretension letters and letters of protest and contains a claim of one person or firm made on the other person or people for non-fulfillment (failure to carry out) of the undertaken commitment (obligations), for example, failure to pay the promised sum of money to a ship agent; or careless attitude to their duties of confidential persons etc.

This type of letters is characterized by variation of strict pretension formulas which is expressed by the use of rational evaluated lexis and emotional expressive elements: to protest rigorously; considerable and unexpected losses; to slander in all ways and by all means; to serve faithfully and honestly since long time; unmalicious victim to their intrigues and plots; to safeguard interests in the best way; to obtain full justification; to lodge our most formal protest; to be extremely careful and others.

The graphic singling out of the pronoun «you», its repetition with the modal verb «must» stressing categorical attitude of the letter writer serve to emphasize the utterance and together with the negative estimated adjectives «illegal» and the noun «unlawfullness» exert emotional and expressive influence on the addressee: «and YOU as legal Authorities, you must realize that this is illegal and it is obvious that this unlawfulness reflects the Company’s policy».

An analogous influence is created in the letter by the combination of the modal verb «must» and emotional coloured «extremely careful» expressing a reproach directed at the receiver of the letter: «The B (L Lots were badly classified as some bales from one Lot were mixed up with bales from another. As the quality – and consequently the price – differs, you must be extremely careful with the delivery, in order to avoid changes for which you would be liable».

Exclamation sentences, which are characterized by vividly expressed emotional expressive direction, can be found in the two kinds of letters: «The place is inappropriate for storage, owing to the large quantity of dust and various substances on the ground, which will damage the sheets if these become impregnated, thus making them unfit for the purpose for which they were intended causing a loss of value. There is no telling what damage might result in case of rain! You flame that I never took part in the sessions of the Arbitration Committee in Kharkiv. This is untrue!»

Letters of protest are always distinguished by a strict compositional construction. The whole letter is divided into small passages briefly formulating claims of the sender with each passage having a new claim. Such compositional strictness together with emotional tinged elements intensify categorical impression.

In a pretension letter written from one person besides the above mentioned means of emotional expressive influence on the addressee abbreviated verb forms, colloquial constructions and oral spoken (colloquial) phraseology are used which promotes the washing away of the genre borders of official business letters: I haven’t heard anything…, it’ll not be long that everything in this matter would be put into clear; unfortunately, evidently, now to come back to the assurances…; still I haven’t been paid…; being frank I decided…; in my opinion, to give a better picture of…; to be in hands; besides; They slandered me…

Although pretension letters contain some features characteristic of private letters, that is some elements belonging to another style, however, they realize official business style and use mainly the elements inherent in this style. First of all it is a standard contact frame: Dear sirs…, Yours faithfully…, I remain sincerely yours. Then cliché beginning: In reference to your as above letter I think…

Pretension letters are rich in bookish lexis, legal terms, official business lexis and phraseology: to lodge a complaint, Arbitration Committee, the agreement was null and void; furthermore, for your information; you have to note; it would appear and others.

6. Letter of thanks

This is one more kind of business letters characterized by its own, differentiated (signs) means of expression and its own pragmatism. Its aim is an expression of thanks for the duties fulfilled or the favour done (for example, a letter to the captain of a chartered ship for a good service, or head of international passenger transport for according a hearty welcome or showing hospitality).

The beginning of such a letter, as a rule, contains some words of thanks, expressed by a form of subjunctive mood: we would like to express our thanks. The words of thanks are often intensified by the adverbs (indeed, very, wholeheartedly) or the verb intensifier «do»: «It was indeed very nice to see you in Kharkiv. I do thank you for your hospitality».

The lexis with positive connotation is used in the middle part of the letter: very pleased, sincere willingness, human approach, sincere and friendly atmosphere, warm and sincere thanks, encouraging results.

As to the tone of the letter it is usually written in a solemnly raised tone: «On our behalf we would like to thank especially all the staff of Ukraine, who gave us the opportunity to be proud of using a Ukrainian boat on the service between Bridinski and Kingdom…».

The formulas of politeness at the end of the letter are, as a rule, intensified by an adverb of the superlative degree or represented by forms of subjunctive mood: We would like to have…; I would very much be most obligated if you could telex…

Emotional expressive tendency of letters of thanks often depends rather on the aim set by the author of the letter than on their content. The words of thanks are usually followed a request directed to the addressee in the fulfillment of which the sender of the letter is very interested.

Letters of thanks usually have the following compositional structure: unstandard beginning with the words of thanks and expression smoothly passing into request and again a concluding phrase of thanks at the end.

7. Letter of guarantee

This letter constitutes a document-guarantee for one person (client) before the other to fulfill all the liabilities (commitments) provided for by a contact concluded between the clients.

In the preamble to a letter of guarantee, beginning with the word «Whereas», graphically singled out and separated from the following part, a reference is given to the contract concluded between two clients, their official names, the date of the conclusion of the contract, its subject and conditions are indicated. Then clauses with the detailed stating of the guarantees to be fulfilled are enumerated. This part of the letter is introduced by the graphically singled out words NOT IT IS HEREBY WITNESSED as follows.

As to the lexis a letter of guarantee is characterized by the use of legal terms: party, hereby, guaranty, term; clerical and obsolete words characteristic of official documents hereafter, the same, to witness, to appear, whereas, pursuant to; by the frequently used verb «shall» in the second and third persons, expressing obligation and usually used in documents in this meaning.

As to the syntax this letter is characterized by the complicated syntactical structure, including a ramified net of subordinate clauses: «We hereby agree that our liability under this guarantee shall not be affected in any way by any time or other indulgence which you may grant to Dorian Cruises in respect of their liability under the Principal Agreement provided it does not extend beyond the 10th March, 1990 at which date this guarantee shall expire, unless it is renewed by mutual agreement between the parties».