

Textual Function of Presupposition in Business Letter Discourse

Yu Chunmei^{1,*}

¹Foreign Language Department, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, 180# Xueyuan Street, Huixing Road, Zigong City, Sichuan Province, China

*Correspondence: Foreign Language Department, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, 180# Xueyuan Street, Huixing Road, Zigong City, Sichuan Province, China. E-mail: 544146005@qq.com

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Abstract

Presupposition refers to what is assumed by the speaker when uttering a specific sentence, usually realized by the use of particular lexical items and/or linguistic constructions which are known as presupposition triggers, is an evitable requirement for interpretation of the utterance. Based on the theme-rheme theory and thematic progression patterns suggested by Hu Zhuanglin and Zhu Yongsheng, the author adopts qualitative method to make an analysis of the textual function of presupposition which is realized by serving as themes in clauses, helping to construct different thematic progression patterns and transmitting information in business letter discourse. Presupposition helps to construct four main thematic progression patterns in business letter discourse, which can be conclude as T1→T2 (the same theme), R1→R2 (the same rheme), R1→T2 (the rheme or part of the rheme in the previous clause becomes the theme of the next clause) and T1+R1=T2 (both the theme and rheme of the preceding clause are encapsulated into a noun phrase functioning as the theme of the frequent clause). The author chose 30 business letters selected from the internet and several textbooks as the object of research, and they cover almost every stage of foreign trade.

Keywords: *presupposition; theme and rheme; thematic progression patterns; business letter discourse*

1. Introduction

In reality, most of the deals are achieved or supported by letter communication. A business letter of good quality promotes the trade as well as relationship between foreign traders. Business letter refers to a letter dealing with business activities conducted by parties at home or abroad, it is used in the negotiation of trade conditions concerning the specific information about the transaction. The main function of business letters is to inform or remind the readers of certain things and persuade them to trust what are written. Thus, to achieve this purpose, besides a good command of stand modern English, the writers need to know the basic writing principles which are known as the "seven Cs": completeness, concreteness, clearness, conciseness, courtesy, consideration, and correctness (Liao Ying, 2002:97-116). Completeness and concreteness means that business letters should convey all the necessary information concerned by the readers, which is supposed to be specific, definite and vivid. Clearness and conciseness requires the writers to inform all the key points by using as few words as possible and keep it clear and easy to understand. Courtesy and considerateness require the writers to write from the readers' viewpoint by using polite and courteous expressions, to give the readers impression that they are on an honorable status. Correctness, the basic requirement of a letter of good quality, refers to what is written should be correct in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Theme which is put in the first place of a clause will influence the reader's understating of everything that comes next in the discourse. The message of a clause is organized as the theme-rheme structure which is expressed by the sequence in which the elements occur in the clause, with the theme is considered to be at the beginning. Different thematic structures or different choices of themes contribute to differences in meaning of clauses, which forms thematic progression in a discourse. According to Qi Yucun (1993), the thematic progression patterns can help us to learn the semantic relations between sentences and ways to develop the subject of one paragraph. That is, thematic

progression is helpful to realize the cohesion of discourse. Presupposition refers to the inference assumed to be true but not that directly asserted to be true. Such kind of inference is dependent on the actual linguistic structure of sentences and very sensitive to contextual factors. It is an aspect of meaning that must be understood by both sides of the participants and taken for granted for an utterance to make sense.

This study was designed to investigate how presupposition serves as the theme of one clause and helps to form thematic progression patterns; how it realizes the transmission of information and how it helps to ensure the development of discourse in a required way. The study is an attempt to study the textual function of presupposition in business letter discourse, and is expected to help writers to make use of the presupposition in letter writing, to cast some light on the teaching and learning of business letter writing. It is hoped to guide students in comprehending and writing business letters in the light of the concept that presupposition could be applied to ensure the smooth flow of information and textual cohesion.

2. Materials and Methods

The author adopts qualitative method to make an analysis of the textual function of presupposition by serving as themes in clauses, helping to construct different thematic progression patterns and transmitting information in business letter discourse. In the study, the author chose 30 business letters as the object of the research, whose functions include establishing enquiry, quotation, negotiation, ordering, confirming order, payment, shipment, insurance, acknowledging goods receipt, claim as well as adjustment, business relations, etc.. Samples were selected randomly from the internet and several textbooks including *International Business letters and Documents* published by Higher Education Press in 2006, *Business English Correspondence* published by University of International Business and Economics Press in 2008, *Write That Letter* published by Changchun Press in 2001, and *English Business letters* published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2000. All the letters are labeled from sample 1 to sample 30, with one or two successive sentences in each example.

3. Previous Study on Presupposition

Frege firstly put forward the term “presupposition” to describe the relationship between sentences in his paper *On Sense and Reference*. He ever said: “If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference. If one therefore asserts ‘Kepler died in misery’, there is a presupposition that the name ‘Kepler’ designates something.” (Frege, 1952:69) During the period of 1969-76, semantics studied presupposition as a kind of semantic relation. A presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions. (Yule, 2000: 25) A sentence A semantically presupposes a sentence B iff: (Levinson, 2001: 175)

A. in all situations where A is true, B is true

B. in all situations where A is false, B is true

Since 1970s, a lot of studies on presupposition are made from the perspective of pragmatics. In *Pragmatics*, Levinson (2001) described pragmatic presupposition as a relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context. In *Modern Pragmatics*, He Ziran and Chen Xinren (2004) points out that up now pragmatist’ studies on presupposition are based on two focuses: presupposition being too sensitive to context and the properties of pragmatic presupposition. Pragmatic presupposition refers to a kind of pragmatic reference which means “those presuppositions which are sensitive to the context and related to the belief, attitude and attention of the speaker (sometimes including the listener)” (He Ziran, 1997:68) Both Fillmore (1977) and He Ziran (1988) hold that pragmatic presupposition refers to the context-related material conditions that are necessary to the success of a speech act. While Keenan (1971) considers pragmatic presupposition as the social and cultural felicity conditions request to the effective implementation of some speech act.

Levinson (2001:179) defined those particular words or grammatical structures used in the utterance from which we can interpret the speaker’s real intension as presupposition triggers. He summarized 13 kinds of such triggers: definite descriptions, factive verbs, implicative verbs, change of state verbs, iteratives, verbs of judging, temporal clauses, cleft sentences, implicit cleft with stressed constituents, comparisons and contrasts, non-restrictive relative clauses, counterfactual conditionals, and questions. The presupposed propositions are based on presupposition triggers but not necessarily on the whole utterance.

4. Literary Framework

4.1 Thematic Structure: Theme+ Rheme

The terms Theme and Rheme were first introduced by Mathesius, a Prague School linguist. As Halliday (2000:38) mentions, the theme combined with a rheme constitute a structural configuration which organizes the clause as a message. The theme is defined as the “starting-point for the message” or “the ground from which the clause is taking off.” (Halliday, 1994:38) It is followed by a rheme, which is the remainder of the message or the rest part in a clause. Therefore, a clause consists of a theme followed by a rheme. The theme can be recognized as the the left-most constituent of the clause, the element which part of the meaning of the clause lies in. That is, different choices of theme create two different clauses, which is explicated by the following two examples: (Halliday, 2000:38)

- (1) A half penny is the smallest English coin.
- (2) The smallest English coin is a halfpenny.

There is a difference in meaning between the two sentences, with *a halfpenny* being the theme of sentence (1) and *the smallest English coin* being the theme of sentence (2). Here different themes mean different messages indicating that the speaker will talk about *a halfpenny* in sentence (1) and *the smallest English coin* in sentence (2).

Halliday (2000) divide theme into two kinds: unmarked theme and marked theme. Unmarked theme refers to the theme is conflated with the subject in declarative clauses. The most usual unmarked theme in a declarative clause is the first pronoun *I*, because we are intended to express what we think and feel. The unmarked choice consist of other pronouns including *you, we, he, she, it, they, it* and *there*, as well as nominalizations, providing these are conflated with subject of the clause. A theme that is something other than the subject in a declarative clause is a marked theme. The most usual form of marked theme is an adverbial group or prepositional phrase functioning as adjunct and a nominal group functioning as complement in a clause. The theme *you* in thematic equative *you are the girl I like* is unmarked, because it is conflated with the subject of the clause. Whereas in the non-identifying form *her I love*, the theme *her* is marked one, because the subject is *I* in this clause.

Halliday (2000) holds that the information structure includes new information and given information; the former is considered to be not known to the addressee, while the latter, known to the addressee. In general, a writer will select the Theme from the Given and put the new information somewhere the rheme arises. Miao Xingwei (2000) proposes that the communicative effect of information structure is to foreground certain aspects of the message of the clause, but to background others. The speaker can use thematic and information structure to produce an astonishing variety of rhetorical effects.

4.2 Thematic Progression Patterns

Thematic progression, first put forwarded by Danes (1974:115), is defined as “the choice and ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperthemes of the superior text units (such as the paragraph, chapter, etc.) to the whole text, and to the situation.” From his definition, we can see that thematic progression is a method of development of text that can be affected by the choice of the theme. As a clause is a message consists of the theme accompanied with the rheme, and the theme, the first constituent of the clause, with which the whole clause is concerned. Therefore, in choosing the starting-point for a clause or the theme of the clause, the writer selects something that is helpful for the reader to hook this clause onto the previous clauses, see how the information that will come in the remainder of the clause is likely to fit in with the message previously mentioned.

Danes (1974) offers five thematic progression patterns: simple linear, constant theme, derived theme, split rheme and spring rheme. Triggered by Dane’s theory of thematic progression, some new patterns have been proposed. Xu Shenghuan (1982) proposes that there are four patterns of Theme-Rheme development: parallel pattern (constant theme), continuous pattern (simple linear), concentrated pattern and alternative pattern. Zhu Yongsheng (1995) summarizes four patterns of thematic progression (T= theme, R=rheme): the same theme pattern (T1→T2), the same rheme pattern (R1→R2), continuous pattern (R1→T2) and alternative pattern (T1→R2). Although described as different terms, actually, Xu and Zhu share the same thematic progression pattern. Huang Zhuanglin (1994) provides three thematic progression patterns: T1→ T2 (the same theme pattern), R1→T2 (continuous pattern) and T1+R1→ T2 (inclusive theme pattern), but he does not provide a detailed description.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Functioning as Themes

Presupposition refers to the common knowledge shared by the participants in the conversation, which can serve as the theme of a clause mostly through nominalization. As Leech (1974:288) notes, in a conversation, participants share not only knowledge about the world specific to the situation in which they find themselves but also general knowledge about the world. Such general knowledge serves as presupposition in a conversation. Presupposition which serves as a theme plays an important role in the process of thematic progression. The business letter serves as a channel which enables the writer to have a conversation with the reader and with the development of the conversation, the asserted information or new information of the previous clause can become the theme of the next. Therefore, when the asserted information of a clause is changed into the common knowledge or presupposition, it becomes the new theme of the following clause in which the new theme is followed by a different rheme. Such process helps to ensure the smooth information flow, which is shown as follows:

1. Unless otherwise instructed, we (T1)// will arrange to take out *an ALL RISKS insurance policy for you on the above cargo*. (R1)

This type of coverage (T2)// is, in our opinion, necessary for a cargo of this nature. (Sample 1)

2. I (T1)// have asked *our representative, John Bush, to visit your next Thursday 20 August at 10.00 am*.

I hope this appointment will be convenient for you.

During *his visit* John (T2)// will be able to discuss your precise requirements and make appropriate recommendations. (Sample 2)

In the two examples, the rheme or the assertion of the previous clause is changed to the theme followed by a new rheme of the next one, which illustrates how presupposition serves as the theme of a clause and helps to develop the discourse cohesively. The theme *This type of coverage* of the second clause presupposes the asserted information which is the rheme *an ALL RISKS insurance policy for you on the above cargo* of the previous clause.

Nominalizations which encapsulate the previously mentioned information function as unmarked theme in the next clause. This can be well illustrated by the above examples. In example 2, the subject *his visit* which is the theme of the second clause encapsulates the rheme or the asserted information *our representative, John Bush, to visit your next Thursday 20 August at 10.00 am* in the previous clause, from this aspect we can say that theme *his visit* is given information while the rheme of the second clause is new. Sometimes, the theme of a clause, especially in the form of a noun phrase or a conjunctive, presupposes both the theme and rheme of the previous clause. The cohesion and coherence of a discourse can be realized through such kind of repetition in meaning. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

3. However, we (T1)//*still have to postpone the original orders from our customers* owing to the poor quality of the clothing material you sent us. (R1)

This (T2)//is bringing us much inconvenience. (Sample 18)

5.2 Constructing Thematic Progression Patterns

The application and illustration of these models in particular languages are determined by the features of the given language. As a discourse is presented by more than one clauses, or more than one theme-rheme structures, many pairs of theme and rheme interact with each other to form various information structures. Therefore, various patterns of thematic progression take place. In the present study, based on the review of the previous studies made by Danes (1974), Xu Shenghuan (1982), Hu Zhuanglin (1994) and Zhu Yongsheng (1995), and the distinct features of BUSINESS LETTER discourse, the author finds out there are usual four thematic progression patterns in business English discourse: the same theme pattern (T1→T2), the same rheme pattern (R1→R2), continuous pattern (R1→T2) and T1+R1→T2 (inclusive theme pattern).

5.2.1 The Same Theme Pattern (T1→T2)

Just as its name implies, in this pattern the theme is kept the same one with a new rheme to follow to produce the new information, so it is also called constant theme by Danes (1974). In other words, this pattern keeps the subject unchanged so that it could be elaborated from various aspects. T1→T2 pattern is said to be the most frequent pattern in the development of discourse. In English business correspondence writing, there are cases where the writer intends to make a more detailed introduction of his company or the commodities so as to guarantee a successive communication. Therefore, such thematic progression pattern in which the theme or subject as presupposition occurs

continuously followed by different rhemes to produce new information is applied by the writer. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

4. *Our leather products* (T1)// are made of superb materials and in traditional skills.

They (T2)// are very popular both at home and abroad. (Sample 19)

5. *The consignment of the clothing materials we ordered on August 10* (T1)// is not the quality as shown in the samples.

The consignment (T2)// arrived yesterday, but on checking the materials with the samples you sent us, we are surprised to find that they do not match each other. (Sample 18)

6. *We* (T1)// have felt it necessary to make our feelings known since we cannot give reliable delivery date to our customers unless we can count on undertakings given by our suppliers.

We (T2)// hope you will understand how we are placed and that from now on we can rely upon punctual completion of our orders. (Sample 22)

In example 4, the themes *Our leather products* and *they* have the same reference meaning, that is to say the two clauses share the same subject. The same themes followed by different rhemes or the unchanged subject elaborated from different aspects contributes to the coherence of the whole discourse. The same effect can be achieved through the same thematic progression patterns in examples 5 and 6.

5.2.2 the Same Rheme Pattern (R1→ R2)

In this pattern, the rheme or part of the rheme of a clause is identical to part of the rheme of the next clause. Thus, the asserted information as rheme in the preceding clause is encapsulated into a noun phase in the next clause as part of its rheme, so as to keep the information goes smoothly. The following examples provide a good illustration on this thematic progression pattern:

7. If you// desire earlier delivery, we can only *make a partial shipment of ten machines in September and the remaining ten in October*.

We// hope *this arrangement* will be agreeable to you. Should this be so, please amend the covering credit to allow partial shipments under advice to us. (R2) (Sample 3)

8. So we// would *require that the carton be bound with double iron straps outside*. (R1)

We// hope *these packing requirements* can be met and await your early shipment. (R2) (Sample 10)

9. I// have asked *our representative, John Bush, to visit your next Thursday 20 August at 10.00 am*. (R1)

I// hope *this appointment* will be convenient for you. (R2) (Sample 2)

The above examples show that the asserted information known as rhemes of the first clauses, that is *make a partial shipment of ten machines in September and the remaining ten in October*, *require that the carton be bound with double iron straps outside* and *our representative, John Bush, to visit your next Thursday 20 August at 10.00 am*, is all encapsulating into or presupposed in the noun phrases *this arrangement*, *these packing requirements* and *this appointment* which are called the rhemes of the next clauses. Presuppositions realized through repetitions of meaning contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the two clauses.

5.2.3 Continuous Pattern (R1→ T2)

It is the second most frequent pattern used in the letter discourse. In this pattern, the rheme or part of the rheme of the preceding clause is contracted into a noun phrase presented at the beginning of the next clause functions as its theme. Such kind of presupposition occurred in R1→T2 pattern makes the two clauses more cohesive and coherent, as can be shown in the following:

10. We (T1)//cabled back this morning, *offering you 250 metric tons of Groundnuts, Hand-picked, Shalled and Ungraded at RMB ¥1,800 net per metric ton CFR Copenhagen or any other European Main Port for shipment during October / November,1985*.

This offer (T2)// is firm, subject to the receipt of reply by us before 25th September. (Sample 27)

11. I (T1)//regret to note that *we delivered 12 Conway items instead of the 12 Royston units ordered by you*.

This delivery (T2)// was an oversight on our part and I apologize for it. (Sample 13)

The above examples provide good illustrations how the rhemes of the preceding clauses are encapsulating into the

noun phrases *This offer* and *This delivery* which serve as presuppositions and function as themes in the next clauses. In this pattern, the subject is developed in a chain-like way so that the coherence of discourse can be realized.

12. We// find both the price and quality satisfactory and herewith enclose *our order form for 300 dozen each of men's and women's woolen sweaters at the prices stated in your quotation.* (R1)

As *this* (T2)//is our first order, we would like to state our detailed packing requirements. (Sample 10)

13. We// write to tell you that *we will be increasing the prices of our product range by 4 percent from 1 January.* (R1)

This (T2)// is our first price rise in three years but is now unavoidable because of the increased costs of raw materials and component parts during this time. (Sample 14)

Similarly, in example 12 and 13, conjunctives *This* can also function as the themes of the clauses, from which the reader can presuppose the asserted information *our order form for 300 dozen each of men's and women's woolen sweaters at the prices stated in your quotation* and *we will be increasing the prices of our product range by 4 percent from 1 January* of the previous clauses, thus the information moves smoothly between clauses.

5.2.4 T1+R1 → T2

It is the least frequent pattern in letter discourse, in which the theme and rheme of the preceding clause will be encapsulating into a noun phrase which serves as a new theme of the subsequent clause. The new theme, based on the information which is expressed by both the theme and rheme of the previous clause, is followed by a new rheme. The new theme is a presupposition that contributes to the coherence of discourse since the theme and rheme of the previous clause can develop a new theme or a presupposition of the next clause to keep the smooth information flow, as can be shown as follows:

14. *We* (T1)// *have the Prima Donna that you wanted in stock for immediate delivery.* (R1)

However, *this* (T2) is a limited offer and is due to close at the end of this month when stocks are expected to be exhausted. (Sample 14)

15. *Being temperature-controlled, our containers* (T1)// *are provided for any cargo that needs special care.*

This (T2) lends its full benefit in shipping. (Sample 30)

The above two examples provide a good illustration on how both the themes and rhemes of the preceding clauses are developed into the themes of the sequent clauses. The theme and rheme of the first clause are compacted into a noun phrase *this* which serves as the theme of the second clause, that is to say, the new theme is a presupposition of the message contained by both the theme and rheme of the previous clause. Thus, a cohesive relation is built between these two clauses.

5.3 Transmitting the Information

The main function of business letters is to convey the necessary information so as to realize successful communication between the writer and the reader. The information which is the bridge connecting the two parties contributes to the possibility of one letter. Presupposition which is the background information shared by both sides of parties serves as a good way to convey the information in business letter discourse. Since the information structure is usually formed by the given information accompanied by the new information, presupposition, the common knowledge between the two parties, usually appears with asserted information. Therefore, presupposition helps to enlarge the amount of information. Presupposition can convey more information than that apparently expressed in business letter, which is illustrated in the following examples:

16. We also ask you to see to it that all the goods are well packed, so as to *avoid damage in transit.* (Sample 36)

17. *We apologize for failing to perfect the goods you required* but we will do our utmost to make you satisfied with our improved product in the near future. (Sample 23)

In the above examples, the sentences *avoid damage in transit* and *apologize for failing to perfect the goods you required* presupposes that *the goods are prone to be damaged in transit* and *the writer's company did not successfully perfect the goods required by the counterpart* respectively. Therefore, presupposition adopted in business letters helps to enlarge the amount of the information.

In the unmarked sequence, the information focus is often put at the last lexical item of the new information put at the end of an utterance, and such information focus is called unmarked focus. However, the writer usually changes the position of information focus so as to put emphasis on certain elements. The information focus is closely tied with

presupposition, so the former will change accordingly if the latter changes. Therefore, to change the position of presupposition information is a good way to mark information focus, which can be realized through various means including certain words or phrases, implicit cleft and some grammatical structures used in business letter discourse. This can be demonstrated in the following:

18. We are somewhat surprised to note from your letter dated November 20, that you have now met with difficulty in opening the L/C in Renminbi, and many of our buyer in your city have been sending us credits in that currency without *any* trouble whatsoever. (Sample 5)

As is shown in the above examples, *any* is put before *trouble whatsoever*, which presupposes that *it's quite easy and convenient for many of our buyer in your city have been sending us credits in that currency*. If *any* is canceled, the presupposition will definitely disappear. Therefore, the positions and contents of presuppositions will be altered by the use of words like *any*, and the information focus will be changed accordingly. The alternations of both presupposition and the information focus have the effect of information emphasis. The same effect of information emphasis can be realized through cleft sentences, which is seen in the following example:

19. *It was* on this understanding *that* we placed the order. (Sample 22)

20. *All* we have to do when shipments made *is* to advise them of the particulars. (Sample 17)

In the above listed examples, the syntactic means by using the structures of *it be ... that...* and *all... is...* is adopted to change the presupposition and put emphasis on some elements, and the emphasized information falls between *it is* and *that* in the former structure, and on the end of the sentence in the latter. Therefore, the cleft structure serves as a good way to put stress on the information that is assumed to be the most important and essential in realizing effective communication between the writer and the reader.

As is mentioned by Vennemann (1975:315), presupposition could determine the felicity of a clause or a paragraph in the whole discourse. Therefore, presupposition plays a crucial role in the development of the information, because both the presupposition and assertion are involved in a clause. The assertion constructs the new information while the presupposition which is assumed to be the background information serves as the starting point of the information structure. As Zhu and Miao (2000) claims, to realize the clarity and economy of the discourse, the addressor often puts the information that is assumed to be known by the addressee into presupposition. Such presupposed information is less important than the asserted information in the clause, which can be expressed with the use of presupposition-triggers like subordinate clauses including adverbial clauses, attributive clauses and appositive clause, etc.

21. *In the light of the contract stipulations*, we have begun producing the goods ordered and expect to effect timely shipment as soon as your L/C arrives. (Sample 5)

The adverbial clause *In the light of the contract stipulations* presupposes that the two parties have signed a contract and are aware of the stipulations. The presupposed information is known to the reader, so the information is relatively unimportant, and it is reasonable to put the more important information *we have begun producing the goods ordered and expect to effect timely shipment as soon as your L/C arrives* more prominent. If the presupposition-trigger is taken out, the presupposed information is expressed in the form of asserted information shown below:

We have signed a contract and are aware of the stipulations, so we have begun producing the goods ordered and expect to effect timely shipment as soon as your L/C arrives. .

It is obvious that the layout of the second version makes the discourse wordy and non-smooth. All the information is treated equally, which causes difficulties for the reader to comprehend the discourse, because he is bombard with too much information.

6. Conclusion

From what has been discussed in the present study, it can be concluded that presupposition can be widely used in business letter writing and meet various textual requirements of the discourse. The basic writing principles of business letters are known as the "seven Cs": completeness, concreteness, clearness, conciseness, courtesy, consideration, and correctness. Presupposition, which is context-sensitive and determined by the mutual knowledge shared by the participants or contexts of the utterance, could function as the theme of a clause to help the reader hook this clause onto the previous one, that is, presupposition reminds the reader of what was mentioned in the previous clause, which contributes to the cohesiveness of the discourse, and this can be realized through different thematic

progression patterns.

In the process of thematic progressions, the themes followed by new different rhemes in the next clauses can be developed from the themes or rhemes or both themes and rhemes of the previous clauses to keep the smooth information flow between clauses in business letter discourse. Presupposition is helpful to construct variety of thematic progression patterns to guarantee the information moves smoothly. The patterns of thematic progression applied in business letter discourse are classified into four types: the same theme pattern (T1→T2), the same rheme pattern (R1→R2), continuous pattern (R1→T2) and T1+R1→ T2 (inclusive theme pattern). Information structure consists of the given information and new information, and the former refers to the information that is assumed to be known by the reader and the latter is new to the reader. It is the new information that the writer wants to convey it most, which is inevitable to ensure a successful communication. Therefore, presupposition and assertion may appear alternately, and the topic can be elaborated from various aspects, which contribute to the coherence of the discourse. Writers usually utilize presuppositions when writing business letters, in hope that the whole discourse can be developed in a cohesive way.

This paper provides implications for the business letter writers:

As a successful writer, he or she is expected to fully convey the required information without sacrificing the quality of clarity, so as to keep the successful communication between the writer and the reader. But this doesn't mean that the writer is suggested to use as many presuppositions as possible in his letter, because too many presuppositions will add the difficulties of communication or even lose the quality of completeness and correctness, it depends on various factors such as the values, culture, and reading abilities of the readers.

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Appendix

Sample 1

Dear sirs,

Please be informed that we will be shipping your order for 12 c/s Cameras per s/s "Peace", due to leave here at the end of this month or the beginning of next month.

Unless otherwise instructed, we will arrange to take out an ALL RISKS insurance policy for you on the above cargo. This type of coverage is, in our opinion, necessary for a cargo of this nature.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 2

Thank you for your letter of 14 August about renovating your reception area. I was pleased to hear that we were recommended by Jack Smith at Huangfeng Furniture.

I have asked our representative, John Bush, to visit your next Thursday 20 August at 10.00 am. I hope this appointment will be convenient for you. During his visit John will be able to discuss your precise requirements and make appropriate recommendations. He will also be able to give you approximate guidelines about the cost of this work. This then be followed up within one week with a formal report and estimate for the work.

I am pleased to enclose a copy of our latest catalogue which I am sure you will find interesting. It may also help you in deciding in a color scheme, design or layout for your reception area, which you can then discuss further with John during his visit.

Please confirm that this arrangement will be convenient by telephoning John on extension 216 as soon as possible. Meanwhile if you have any questions please give me a call.

Sample 3

Dear sirs,

Your Order No.5718 for Safety Pin Machine

We are in receipt of your letter of July 22 requesting us to ship all the 20 sets of Safety Pin Machine in one lot. Unfortunately we are unable to comply with your wishes.

When we offered the machines it was expressly stated that shipment would be effected in October. If you desire earlier delivery, we can only make a partial shipment of ten machines in September and the remaining ten in October. We hope this arrangement will be agreeable to you. Should this be so, please amend the covering credit to allow partial shipments under advice to us.

Please cable us your confirmation so that we can request the manufacturers to expedite delivery.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 4

Dear sirs,

Our Order No.1487

We duly received the documents and took delivery of the goods in arrival of s.s. "Chunlin" at Hamburg.

We are much obliged to you for the prompt execution of this order. Everything appears to be correct and in good condition except in Case No.71.

Unfortunately when we opened this case we found it contained completely different articles, and we can only presume a mistake was made and the contents of this case were for another order.

As we need the articles we ordered to complete deliveries to our new customers, we must ask you to arrange for the dispatch of replacements at once. We attach a list of the contents of Case No.17, and shall be glad if you will check this with our order and the copy of your invoice.

In the meantime we are holding the above-mentioned case at your disposal.

Please let us know what you wish us to do with it.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 5

We are glad that through our mutual efforts and cooperation at the Autumn Fair, the deal for 40 metric tons palm oil has been brought to a conclusion. We sincerely hope that this initial business will serve to promote the friendship as well as trade relations between the people of our two countries.

With regard to payment for the above order, we emphasized during our negotiations that as a result of frequent devaluation of Pounds Sterling, we— as sellers— are not sure of the net worth of the proceeds when an L/C in Pounds Sterling is presented to the bank by us for negotiation after payment should be made by a credit in Renminbi which, as you are probably aware, is one of the most stable currencies in the world, protecting the interests of both exporters and importers.

Apparently you shared our views and a contract was signed between us, which calls for payment in Renminbi.

We are somewhat surprised to note from your letter dated November 20, that you have now met with difficulty in opening the L/C in Renminbi, and many of our buyer in your city have been sending us credits in that currency without any trouble whatsoever. For your information, these credits are opened through the Bank of China in Hong Kong. We presume your bank, the United Malayan Banking Corporation, must have connections with the Bank of China there and, if so, L/C arrangement can easily be made in Hong Kong.

In the light of the contract stipulations, we have begun producing the goods ordered and expect to effect timely shipment as soon as your L/C arrives. Therefore, we hope you will proceed with the matter in the same spirit of close observance of the contract, and do your best to have the credit in Renminbi established without any further delay.

We assure you of our full cooperation and hope that your L/C will reach us in due course.

Sample 6

Gentlemen:

Our Order No.JT-8

After carefully examining the curtain materials supplied to our order of February 20th, we must express surprise and disappointment of their quality. They certainly do not match the sample you sent us. Some of them are so poor that we can't help feeling there must have been some mistake in making up the order.

The materials are quite unsuited to the needs of our customers and we have no choice but to ask you to take them back and replace them with materials of the quality ordered.

We have no wish to embarrass you and if you can replace the materials we are prepared to allow the stated time for delivery to run from the date you confirm that you can supply the materials we need.

Your truly,

Sample 7

We have examined the specification and price list for your range of color lights, and now wish to place an order with you. We enclose our Order No. QHD-103 for 2,000 sets of color lights.

As we are in urgent need of color lights for the coming holiday season, we would be grateful if you would make up the order and ship it as soon as possible.

In the past we trade with you on a sight credit basis. We would now like to propose a different arrangement. When the goods are ready for shipment and the freight space booked, you will fax us and we will then remit the full amount by telegraphic transfer (T/T).

We are asking for this concession so that we can give our customers a specific delivery date and also save the expenses of opening a letter of credit. As we believe that this arrangement should make difference to you and help, we trust that you will agree to our request.

We look forward to receiving confirmation of our order and your agreement to the new arrangements for payment.

Sample 8

We received your offer of July 1 for Trail Grabber model bicycles.

They are indeed a quite popular item in North America currently. However, compared with your last quotations for North America, we find the current offer rather high. We refer to a purchase in our region in January 1995 for 1,000 men's and women's bicycles

of the same brand and similar sizes and models. Those models were priced 3% lower than your current quotations. Also, retail prices of bicycles have dropped by 2% in the last 6 months. Acceptance of your offer would make your bicycles uncompetitive with other stores in our region.

We do, however, want to be a steady, long-term purchaser of your bicycles, and suggest that you consider a 5% reduction in your initial price. In that event, we would be able to place an order for 2,000 items by August 1. All other terms are acceptable.

Please contact us at your earliest convenience.

Sample 9

Dear sirs,

We thank you for your telegram duplicating your order of October 12 for 1,000 doz. Rubber Shoes.

Although the prevailing quotations are somewhat higher, we will accept the order on same terms as before with the view of encouraging business.

As requested in your previous letter, we have made out our Sales Confirmation No.500 in duplicate and shall thank you to send back one copy duly countersigned.

We are glad to know that a letter of credit will be established in our favour immediately. However we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the stipulations in the relative credit should strictly conform to the terms in our Sales Confirmation in order to avoid subsequent amendments.

We appreciate your cooperation and trust that the shipment which is to be dispatched after receipt of the relative letter of credit, will turn out to your entire satisfaction.

Yours faithfully,

Encl.

Sample 10

Thank you for your quotation of March 10 and the sample sweaters sent to us recently. We find both the price and quality satisfactory and herewith enclose our order form for 300 dozen each of men's and women's woolen sweaters at the prices stated in your quotation.

As this is our first order, we would like to state our detailed packing requirements. We want the sweaters to be packed each in a polybag, 5 dozen to a carton lined with waterproof paper. If the cartons are not strong enough, most of them will be liable to go broken on arrival. So we would require that the carton be bound with double iron straps outside.

We hope these packing requirements can be met and await your early shipment.

Sample 11

Dear sirs,

Reference is made to your Contract No.AB405 covering Weasel Tail Hair in the amount of RMB¥1,200 and No.AB507 RMB ¥1,100 for Dressed Goathair "2--4".

As either of these contracts is less than the equivalent of £ 1,000 in value,we shall be glad if you will as usual ship the goods to us on CAD. i.e. each against documents basis.

We hope you will accommodate us in this respect and look forward to your early reply.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 12

we are very disappointed to learn of the problems you are having with the Midway that you purchased from us in June. All of our products are subject to the most stringent testing and checking procedures before they are sold and we do not know why these problems have arisen on this occasion.

We are arranging to have the item collected at the earliest opportunity so that we can ascertain the cause of the difficulties and resolve the situation on your behalf. Our Dispatch Manager, Stuart Hay, will telephone you shortly to arrange a precise collection time that is convenient to you.

Assuring you of our best attentions.

Sample 13

Thank you for your letter of 14 January. I regret to note that we delivered 12 Conway items instead of the 12 Royston units

ordered by you. This delivery was an oversight on our part and I apologize for it.

We are now preparing a replacement order, which will be delivered to you on Wednesday morning. We will collect the Conway items at the same time.

Once again, please accept my apologies for this unfortunate error. Procedures have been put in place to ensure that it does not happen in the future.

Sample 14

We were delighted to receive your enquiry about the Prima Donna early last month and to send our agent, Kiefer Lodge, to demonstrate it for you in your home. We are sure you were impressed with it.

We can confirm that this product is still available on the same terms that were offered by Kiefer when you met £ 799.95, paid over 12 months on an interest-free basis. We have the Prima Donna that you wanted in stock for immediate delivery.

However, this is a limited offer and is due to close at the end of this month when stocks are expected to be exhausted. We would be happy to put one aside for you, though, on request.

I am pleased to enclose our sales literature for your perusal. For further information, please do not hesitate to call me on my direct line – 01777 717476. Alternatively, Kiefer can be contacted on his mobile on 0793 1619393.

We look forward to hearing from you again.

Our best wishes.

Sample 15

We acknowledge receipt of your order 564 of 9 September, which is currently receiving our attention.

We are at present awaiting delivery of component parts from our overseas supplier and expect to receive these in the next seven to ten days. Finished goods will be produced within ten days of this and then dispatched to you straight away.

We trust this is agreeable to you. If not, we would be pleased to offer you 21 deluxe AZ6 – 1 – X models as an alternative. In the circumstances, we would be happy to supply these at the same price as the 12 standard AX610 – Y models ordered.

They are available for immediate dispatch.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sample 16

Dear sirs,

We are in possession of your letter of 28th August and have noted your proposal for payment against documents for Contract Nos. AB405 and AB507.

We are pleased to say that we agree to your above proposal. However we consider it advisable to make it clear that for future transactions D/P will only be applicable if the amount involved for each transaction is not up to £ 1,000 or its equivalent in Renminbi at the conversion rate then prevailing. Should the amount exceed that figure, payment by letter of credit would be required.

As we said previously, it is only due to our long friendly relations that we extend you this accommodation.

Yours faithfully,

Best regards

Sample 17

We thank you for your letter of May 10, quoting us 100 metric tons of Wool on CIF terms. However, we prefer to have your quotation on CFR terms.

For your information, we have taken out an open policy with the Lloyd Insurance Company, London. All we have to do when shipments made is to advise them of the particulars. Furthermore, we are on very good terms with them. We usually receive from our underwriters quite a handsome premium rebate at regular intervals.

In the meantime, we should be obliged if you could supply us with full details regarding the scope of cover handled by the People's Insurance Company of China for our reference.

We look forward to hearing from you at an early date.

Sample 18

Clothing Material Under Order No. 042356 Must Be Delivered in Line with the Samples

The consignment of the clothing materials we ordered on August 10 is not the quality as shown in the samples.

The consignment arrived yesterday, but on checking the materials with the samples you sent us, we are surprised to find that they do not match each other. Their quality seems inferior to the samples, so they do not meet our customers' requirement.

We have arranged for the production of the customized suits and planned to start as soon as the materials arrive. However, we still have to postpone the original orders from our customers owing to the poor quality of the clothing material you sent us. This is bringing us much inconvenience.

Would you take them back and replace them with the one as we ordered? We allow you another 10 days to prepare them. If you cannot guarantee delivery for whatever reason before September 1, we should ask for a complete refund of the money and full compensation for all our costs. Your prompt cooperation will be beneficial to both of us.

Sample 19

From the recent issue of International Business, we learn that you are in the market for Chinese leather products.

As we are one of the leading exporters in this line of business and have handled various kinds of leather products for about 10 years, we would like to establish business relations with you.

Our leather products are made of superb materials and in traditional skills. They are very popular both at home and abroad. We enclose a copy of our illustrated catalogue covering the main items available at present. If you are interested in any of the items, please let us know. We will give you our lowest quotations and try our best to comply with your requirements.

We look forward to your early reply.

Sample 20

Dear sirs,

Silicon Steel Sheets

We learn from your letter of 10th October that our price for the subject article is found to be on the high side.

Much as we would like to cooperate with you in expanding sales, we are regretful that we just cannot see our way clear to entertain your counter-offer, as the price we quoted is quite realistic. As a matter of fact, we have received a lot of orders from various sources at our level.

If you see any chance to do better, please let us know. On account of a limited supply available at present, we would ask you to act quickly.

In the meantime, please keep us posted of development at your end. We assure you that any further enquires from you will receive our prompt attention.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 21

In reply to your letter dated July 10, we are pleased to advise that the confirmed, irrevocable Letter of Credit No. 326 for the amount of USD 24,000 was established through the ABC Bank, London on July 15. Upon receipt of the same, please deliver our Order No. 811 for chemical fertilizer per S.S. "Elizabeth" ETA August 25, 2000 at Rotterdam and confirm by return that the goods will be ready in time. We also ask you to see to it that all the goods are well packed, so as to avoid damage in transit.

We shall appreciate your close co-operation in this respect and await your shipping advice by fax.

Sample 22

We regret to have to complain about late delivery of the filing cabinets ordered on 2nd July. We did not receive them until this morning though you had guaranteed delivery within a week. It was on this understanding that we placed the order.

Unfortunately, there have been similar delays on several previous occasions and their increasing frequency in recent months compels us to say that business between us cannot be continued under conditions such as these.

We have felt it necessary to make our feelings known since we cannot give reliable delivery date to our customers unless we can count on undertakings given by our suppliers. We hope you will understand how we are placed and that from now on we can rely upon punctual completion of our orders.

Sample 23

You were right to let us know about the unsatisfactory quality you found when your goods were put into the market. Your

complaint is perfectly understandable; however we hope you will also see our viewpoint.

You asked us to alter our specifications to your need, and we informed you repeatedly that the change demanded a substantial revolution on our production system and it was beyond our technical standard.

However at your request we reluctantly had to manufacture the goods neglecting the level of our technique. We apologize for failing to perfect the goods you required but we will do our utmost to make you satisfied with our improved product in the near future.

Sample 24

We write to tell you that we will be increasing the prices of our product range by 4 percent from 1 January. This is our first price rise in three years but is now unavoidable because of the increased costs of raw materials and component parts during this time.

Our products will continue to be made to the same high standards and will still represent outstanding value for money in the marketplace. Our new catalogue is enclosed to remind you of all our products, which are at very competitive prices and are all available for immediate dispatch.

Finally, as a special offer to our valued customers, we can confirm that our prices remain at current rates for all goods ordered prior to 31 December, regardless of when you want them to be delivered. Goods will be invoiced as at the date of delivery.

An order form is enclosed for your convenience, along with a stamped addressed envelop.

With good wishes.

Sample 25

Dear sirs,

We are in possession of your letter of 28th August and have noted your proposal for payment against documents for Contract Nos. AB405 and AB507.

We are pleased to say that we agree to your above proposal. However we consider it advisable to make it clear that for future transactions D/P will only be applicable if the amount involved for each transaction is not up to £1,000 or its equivalent in Renminbi at the conversion rate then prevailing. Should the amount exceed that figure, payment by letter of credit would be required.

As we said previously, it is only due to our long friendly relations that we extend you this accommodation.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 26

Dear sirs,

We thank you for your telegram duplicating your order of October 12 for 1,000 doz. Rubber Shoes.

Although the prevailing quotations are somewhat higher, we will accept the order on same terms as before with the view of encouraging business.

As requested in your previous letter, we have made out our Sales Confirmation No.500 in duplicate and shall thank you to send back one copy duly countersigned.

We are glad to know that a letter of credit will be established in our favour immediately. However we would like to draw your attention to the fact that the stipulations in the relative credit should strictly conform to the terms in our Sales Confirmation in order to avoid subsequent amendments.

We appreciate your cooperation and trust that the shipment which is to be dispatched after receipt of the relative letter of credit, will turn out to your entire satisfaction.

Yours faithfully,

Encl.

Sample 27

Dear sirs,

Groundnuts & Walnutmeat

We confirm your cable of 2nd September asking us to make you firm offers for both Groundnuts and Walnutmeat CFR Copenhagen. We cabled back this morning, offering you 250 metric tons of Groundnuts, Hand-picked, Shelled and Ungraded at RMB ¥ 1,800 net per metric ton CFR Copenhagen or any other European Main Port for shipment during October /

November, 1985. This offer is firm, subject to the receipt of reply by us before 25th September.

Please note that we have quoted our most favourable price and are unable to entertain any counteroffer.

As regards Walnutmeat, we would inform you that the few parcels we have at present are under offer elsewhere. However, if you should make us an acceptable bid, there is a possibility of your obtaining them.

As you are aware that there has been lately a large demand for the above commodities, such growing demand has doubtlessly resulted in increased prices. However you may avail yourselves of the advantage of this strengthening market if you will send us an immediate reply.

Yours truly,

Sample 28

Dear sirs,

Enamelled Copper Wire

Your letter of 1st August addressed to our Shanghai Branch Office has been passed on to us for attention and reply, as the captioned goods lie within the scope of our business activities.

We regret to inform you, however, that this particular line has already been represented by ABC & Co., Ltd., 144 Broad Street, Alexandria, Egypt. As a result, we are not in a position to supply you with the goods but would rather recommend that you approach them direct for your requirements.

If you are interested in any other items, please let us know and we shall be only too pleased to make you offers.

Yours truly,

Sample 29

Dear sirs,

Your Order No.5718 for Safety Pin Machine

We are in receipt of your letter of July 22 requesting us to ship all the 20 sets of Safety Pin Machine in one lot. Unfortunately we are unable to comply with your wishes.

When we offered the machines it was expressly stated that shipment would be effected in October. If you desire earlier delivery, we can only make a partial shipment of ten machines in September and the remaining ten in October. We hope this arrangement will be agreeable to you. Should this be so, please amend the covering credit to allow partial shipments under advice to us.

Please cable us your confirmation so that we can request the manufacturers to expedite delivery.

Yours faithfully,

Sample 30

Dear sirs,

Information on Container Service

Thank you for your inquiry of March 23. The shipping containers we provide are of two sizes, namely 10ft and 20ft respectively. They can be opened at both ends, thus making it possible to load and unload at the same time. For carrying goods liable to be spoiled by damp or water they have the great advantage of being both water-tight and air-tight. Containers can be loaded and locked at the factory, if necessary. Pilferage is therefore impossible.

Being temperature-controlled, our containers are provided for any cargo that needs special care. This lends its full benefit in shipping.

There is also a saving on freight charges, when separate consignments intended for the same port of destination are carried in one container, and an additional saving on insurance because of lower premium charged for container-shipped goods.

We enclose a copy of our tariff and look forward to receiving your instructions.

Yours faithfully,

Encl.