A Comparative Study of Interpersonal Meaning on Solicited and Unsolicited English Application Letters
(Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach)

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Abstract - This research is a qualitative study applying descriptive comparative method based on systemic functional approach. It compares interpersonal meaning of solicited and unsolicited English application letters taken from four websites representing American, European, and Asian letters. Moreover, this research examines the realization of interpersonal meaning in terms of their lexicogrammar, text structure and genre to find out the status, affect, and contact and obtain the similarities and differences of solicited and unsolicited English application letters. From the analysis of lexicogrammar, text structure and genre, it is found that the status between the applicants and the employers of both types of application letters is unequal. In case of affect, solicited and unsolicited application letters have positive judgment towards the company and themselves. The contact between the applicants and the participants in the texts has low degree of involvement but uses familiar and readable language. Finally, the differences between solicited and unsolicited application letters of America and Europe can be seen in the way the applicants employ proposal demanding and giving goods and services, and arrange types of process. Meanwhile, Asian solicited and unsolicited application letters tends to be similar in organizing the letters.

Keywords: interpersonal meaning, application letters, solicited, unsolicited

I. INTRODUCTION

This research compares two types of application letters: solicited and unsolicited application letters. Solicited application letter is a response letter to a job advertisement while unsolicited is application letter written according to the applicant's own initiative without any job opening announcement (Debasish & Das, 2009). This research aims to figure out the realization of interpersonal meaning covering status, affect, and contact. Furthermore, it is to find out the similarities and differences of American, European, and Asian solicited and unsolicited application letters.

This study comparing American, European, and Asian solicited and unsolicited application letters is expected to give a complete description about the realization of interpersonal meaning in application letter which has not been examined yet by other researchers. The interpersonal meaning on application letters is rarely investigated. Most studies analyze English business letters using Pragmatic approach related to politeness strategies (Arvani, 2006; Zhang, 2011; Hou & Li, 2011). Some of them examine the interpersonal meaning of English business letters in general way (Wei & Yunlin, 2008; Bo Xu, 2012). Many researchers explore interpersonal meaning in conversation, speech, brochures, advertisement text, opinion, and news article (Nirmala, 2002; Fahmy, 2005; Tjahyani, 2006; Wan, 2008; Feng & Liu, 2010; Araghi & Shayegh, 2011). This research is also expected to explain how the way of those types of English cover letters can deliver the applicants' skills and abilities, attract the attention of the employers to have positive judgment to the applicants, and convince the employers to give an opportunity of interview for the applicants. This research can also be used to find out the relation between the culture and the way of the applicants are engaged in written communication to get an opportunity of job interview.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Halliday (2004) asserts that interpersonal meaning is the metafunction which explains the interaction among participants in a text. In grammar, it is realized in clause as exchange dealing with proposition (giving or demanding information) and proposal (giving or demanding goods and services). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) state that interpersonal meaning relates with the attitude and viewpoint of the speaker and the way he/she maintains social relationships with the addressee in order to achieve his/her communicative purposes. Martin (1992) and Santos (2003) adds that interpersonal meaning is projected by tenor which includes status, affect, and contact. Status deals with the interrelationship level among participants, whether it is equal or unequal. It can be analyzed through its mood structure, modality, text structure and genre. Affect refers to the emotional charge as well as the positive or negative judgment among participants. Affect can be observed through the lexis: descriptive or attitudinal lexis, transitivity system, modality and polarity. Meanwhile, contact discusses the familiarity and readability of language used in the texts and the degree of involvement among participants. It can be identified by clause system, nominal group system, lexis: congruent or
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Materials
The source of data of this research used six letters representing solicited and unsolicited English application letters of America, Europe, and Asia. They were taken from four websites: www.mybusinessprocess.net representing application letters in America, www.open.ac.uk representing application letters in Europe, and www.polyu.edu.hk and hk.jobsdb.com which represents application letters in Asia. This research applied primary data covering the realization of interpersonal meaning in terms of Mood structure, MOOD system, lexis, transitivity, theme, clause, nominal group system, polarity, modality, text structure and genre, and secondary data including the theories and studies which support this research.

B. Design
This study was a qualitative research applying descriptive comparative method based on systemic functional linguistics approach. It focused on interpersonal meaning and its lexicogrammar. In collecting the data, this research used purposive or criterion-based sampling and then the data were analyzed qualitatively and inductively through content-analysis.

C. Procedure
There are four stages of content analysis, namely domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componental analysis, and finding cultural values (Spradley in Santosa, 2012). Hence, the procedure of data analysis of this research is as follows.

1. Applying Domain Analysis
This stage was conducted by examining all clauses, including minor and major clauses, and their environment in the application letters gained from four websites: www.mybusinessprocess.net, www.open.ac.uk, www.polyu.edu.hk and hk.jobsdb.com through Mood structure, MOOD system, lexis, transitivity, theme, clause, nominal group system, polarity, modality, text structure and genre.

2. Applying Taxonomic Analysis
In this stage, the data were classified based on each category including mood structure, transitivity system, lexis system, thematic structure, clause system, and nominal group.

3. Applying Componental Analysis
This stage is used to find the relationship between the categories which have been classified in taxonomic analysis. The analysis of mood structure, modality, vocation, lexis system (descriptive/attitudinal lexis), text structure and genre was used to interpret the status. The analysis of lexis system (descriptive/attitudinal lexis), transitivity system, modality and polarity contributed in the interpretation of affect while the analysis of clause system, nominal group system, lexis system (congruent/incongruent lexis), thematic structure, text structure and genre had a role in the interpretation of contact.

4. Finding Cultural Values
Finding cultural values is applied to find out why the applicants use a certain interpersonal interaction in their application letters referring to status, affect, and contact. It also figures out any similarities and differences of solicited and unsolicited application letter by considering the context since those texts taken from four websites which represent America, Europe, and Asia.

IV. RESULTS

A. The Realization of Interpersonal Meaning

1. Status
The status in solicited and unsolicited application letters can be described by the table below.

Table 1: Status of solicited and unsolicited application letters in mood structure and modality (modalization and modulation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>App.letter</th>
<th>Mood</th>
<th>Modality</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GI</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DI</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>82</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
S : Solicited                GGS : Giving goods and services
U : Unsolicited              DGS : Demanding goods and services
I : American letters        Prb. : Probability
II : European letters       Usl. : Usuality
III : Asian letters         Obl. : Obligation
GI : Giving information     Icl. : Inclination
DI : Demanding information

The table above indicates that either solicited or unsolicited application letters mainly give information to the employers. The applicants have lower status than the employers even though they are the information giver. Santosa (2006) explains that the use of proposition is to let the readers decide by themselves. The employers have higher status since the employers are the ones who have the authority to decide whether the applicants are suitable for the job. It can be seen in the application of proposal of demanding goods and services employed by the applicants. For example:

a) But you **can** leave a message for me at (718) 330-0911, or at the above address. (Sol I/cl.17b)
b) If you **would** like to meet me for an interview. (Unsol III/cl.22b)
The applicants employ low degree of modulation ‘can’ and medium degree of modulation which is indicated by modal ‘would’. Jin (2007) and Ling (2010) emphasize that lower degree of modal verbs is applied to show the applicants’ intention and courtesy, and persuade the readers. Thus, the employment of modality by the applicants does not refer to an order but a persuasion or suggestion.

More number of descriptive lexis than attitudinal lexis indicate that the applicants try to make objective statements in their application letters. However, the attitudinal lexis such as available employee, particularly appropriate for the above post, and qualified for the position strengthen the employers’ more powerful status since the employer is the one who has the authority to decide whether the applicants are suitable for the job they are applying for. The analysis of text structure and genre show that the applicants sell their skills and abilities to the employers and underline what they are able to do for the company. The unequal status between the participants and the employers of solicited and unsolicited application letters can also be examined through the respectful vocation “Mr.” employed in the texts. Martin (1992) asserts that the reader has higher status if the writer uses respectful vocation toward the reader.

2. Affect

The affect of solicited and unsolicited application letters can be interpreted through several categories displayed by Table 2 below.

Table 2: Affect of solicited and unsolicited application letters in lexis system, transitivity system, and modality (modalization and modulation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>App. Letter</th>
<th>Lexis</th>
<th>Transitivity</th>
<th>AR</th>
<th>IR</th>
<th>Ex</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>Mda</th>
<th>Mdu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S II</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S III</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U I</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U II</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U III</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
S: Solicited
U: Unsolicited
I: American letters
II: European letters
III: Asian letters
D: Descriptive lexis
A: Attitudinal lexis
Ma: Material process
Me: Mental process
O: Obligation
V: Verbal process
VB: Verbal behavioral process

Based on Table 2, both types of application letters apply more descriptive lexis than attitudinal lexis. Nevertheless, solicited and unsolicited application letters give positive judgment to the company and themselves. It can be seen by the employment of attitudinal lexis in those application letters.

a) From reading your Annual Report I am assured that your work with youngsters who have been identified as being at risk of offending is highly regarded in the community. (Sol II/cl.22)

b) I would be very happy to be considered for any short term contracts as a summer warden on any of your reserves. (Unsol II/cl.22c)

c) I also have fluent spoken and written Mandarin. (Sol III/cl.20a)

d) With a solid background in taxation, coupled with four academic degrees and current attendance in the Taxation Program at Stanford University’s Law Center, I know I can make a positive contribution to your firm. (Unsol I/cl.14)

The applicant in example (a) shows her feeling using mental process ‘am assured’ and puts her assessment as the phenomenon in her sentence. In contrast, the applicant in example (b) applies attributive relational process to give a positive judgment by showing his expectation to join in the company; ‘very happy to be considered for any short term contracts as a summer warden on any of your reserves’. Example (c) and (d) show positive judgment to the applicant themselves which is signified by the presence of attitudinal lexis; ‘fluent spoken and written Mandarin’ and ‘a positive contribution’.

In terms of modality, the applicants of both types of application letters use low and medium degree of modulation. The function is to avoid the impression of forcing or intimidating and to persuade the employer to choose the applicant for the job. In addition, the analysis of polarity indicates that the positive judgment is created by the use of positive polarity in almost clauses describing the company. It is found one negative polarity in unsolicited II; but if there are no vacancies at present. This clause does not a negative judgment, but it shows a possible condition since unsolicited letter sent without any job opening in that company. Jin (2007) clarifies that such clause gives freedom of choice to the employer and avoid any forcing impression.

3. Contact

The realization of contact can be investigated from the following table.

Table 3 Contact of solicited and unsolicited application letters in clause system, nominal group, and lexis system
The similarities between solicited and unsolicited application letters are in the way the applicants deliver their qualifications covering educational background, skills, abilities, and experiences through the employment of proposition and types of processes. The role of proposal, first pronoun ‘I’, lexis, clause, and nominal group system is to deliver the applicants’ intention. The intention of the application letter is to convince and persuade the employers and to give the opportunity of interview. It is supported by the employment of positive polarity and modality to create good impression. These findings refer to the status, affect, and contact of both types of application letters: unequal status between the applicants and the employer; positive judgment towards the company and themselves; familiar and understandable language used in the texts; and low degree of involvement among participants.

In contrast, the differences between solicited and solicited application letters can be seen through the way of American and European solicited and unsolicited application letters employ proposal of giving or demanding goods and services and decide what type of processes applied in the letters. In obtaining opportunity of interview, American solicited letter employs only proposal of demanding goods and services and mostly using material and attributive relational process while unsolicited applies proposal of giving goods and services and does not employ certain dominant type of process. European solicited letter employs only proposal of demanding goods and services and dominant mental process. On the other hand, the applicant of European unsolicited does not only try to obtain the employer’s attention through proposal of demanding goods and services but also proposal of giving goods and services. It mostly uses attributive relational process. Finally, Asian solicited and unsolicited application letters tends to have similar arrangement of the letters.

VI. CONCLUSION

By comparing American, European, and Asian solicited and unsolicited application letters, the similarities and differences can be found. The similarities of solicited and unsolicited application letters can be seen from the status, affect, and contact. The status between the applicants and the employers is unequal while the status between the applicants and the issue tends to be equal. The applicants give positive judgment toward the company and themselves. Conversely, the differences of solicited and unsolicited application letters are in the employment of proposal and transitivity system.

In brief, this study examined only solicited and unsolicited English application letters taken from some websites representing America, Europe, and Asia without analyzing the aspect of gender and age. Therefore, further researches may conduct a study of solicited and unsolicited application letters from other sources such as books, companies, and the applicants considering gender and age aspects.

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