

THE STYLE OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Official documents are written in a formal, “cold” or matter-of-fact style of speech. The style of official documents, or ‘officialese’ as it is sometimes called, is not homogeneous and is represented by the following sub-styles, or varieties:

1. the language of business documents,
2. the language of legal documents,
3. the language of diplomacy,
4. the language of military documents.

Like other styles of language, this style has a definite communicative aim and accordingly has its own system of interrelated language and stylistic means. The main aim of this type of communication is to state the conditions binding two parties in an undertaking. These parties may be:

- a) the state and the citizen, or citizen and citizen (jurisdiction);
- b) a society and its members (statute or ordinance);
- c) two or more enterprises or bodies (business correspondence or contracts);
- d) two or more governments (pacts, treaties);
- e) a person in authority and a subordinate (orders, regulations, authoritative directions);
- f) the board or presidium and the assembly or general meeting (procedures acts, minutes), etc.

- In other words, the aim of communication in this style of language is to reach agreement between two contracting parties. Even protest against violations of statutes, contracts, regulations, etc., can also be regarded as a form by which normal cooperation is sought on the basis of previously attained concordance.
- The most general function of official documents predetermines the peculiarities of the style. The most striking, though not the most essential feature, is a special system of clichés, terms and set expressions by which each sub-style can easily be recognized, for example: *I beg to inform you; I beg to move; I second the motion; provisional agenda; the above-mentioned; hereinafter named; on behalf of; private advisory; Dear sir; We remain, your obedient servants.*

In fact, each of the subdivisions of this style has its own peculiar terms, phrases and expressions which differ from the corresponding terms, phrases and expressions of other variants of this style.

Thus, in finance we find terms like *extra revenue*; *taxable capacities*; *liability to profit tax*. Terms and phrases like *high contracting parties*; *to ratify an agreement*; *memorandum*; *pact*; *protectorate*; *extra-territorial status*; *plenipotentiary* will immediately brand the utterance as diplomatic.

In legal language, examples are: *to deal with a case*; *summary procedure*; *a body of judges*; *as laid down in*; *the succeeding clauses of agreement*; *to reaffirm faith in fundamental principles*; *to establish the required conditions*; *the obligations arising from treaties and other*

The vocabulary is characterized not only by the use of special terminology but the choice of lofty (bookish) words and phrases: *plausible* (=possible); *to inform* (=to tell); *to assist* (=to help); *to cooperate* (=to work together); *to promote* (=to help something develop); *to secure* (=to make certain) *social progress*; *with the following objectives/ends* (=for these purposes); *to be determined/resolved* (=to wish); *to endeavour* (=to try); *to proceed* (=to go); *inquire* (to ask).

Likewise, other varieties of official languages have their special nomenclature, which is conspicuous in the text, and therefore easily discernible.

Besides the special nomenclature characteristic of each variety of the style, there is a feature common to all these varieties – the use of abbreviations, conventional symbols and contractions.

Some of them are well-known, for example, *M.P.* (Member of Parliament); *Gvt.* (government); *H.M.S.* (Her Majesty's Steamship); \$ (dollar); *Ltd* (Limited). But there are a few that have recently sprung up. A very interesting group of acronyms comprises the names of the USA presidents: *FDR* – Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and accordingly *FDR-drive* in New York; *JFK* – John Fitzgerald Kennedy and *JFK Airport* in New York; *LBJ* – Lyndon Baines Johnson; *W* – for America's President George Walker Bush, but his father is simply George Bush though his full name is George Herbert Walker Bush; *POTUS*, *VPOTUS* and *FLOTUS* – accordingly President/Vice President/First Lady of the United States.

Another feature of the style is the use of words in their logical dictionary meaning. There is no room for words with contextual meaning or for any kind of simultaneous realization of two meanings, as in the other matter-of-fact styles. In military documents sometimes metaphorical names are given to mountains, rivers, hills, or villages, but these metaphors are perceived as code signs and have no aesthetic value.

Words with emotive meaning are also not to be found in official documents.

Even in the style of scientific prose some words may be found which reveal the attitude of the writer, his individual evaluation of the fact and events of the issue. But no such words are to be found in official style, except those which are used in business letters as conventional phrases of greeting or close, as *Dear Sir; yours faithfully*.

As in all other functional styles, the distinctive properties appear as a system. It is impossible to single out a style by its vocabulary only, recognizable though it always is. The syntactical pattern of the style is as significant as the vocabulary though not perhaps so immediately apparent. Perhaps the most noticeable of all syntactical features are the compositional patterns of the variants of this style.

Business letters

Business letters have a definite compositional pattern, namely, the heading giving the address of the writer and the date, the name of the addressee and his address. The usual parts of the business paper are:

1. Heading.

The heading, which includes the sender's name, postal and telegraphic addresses, telephone number as well as reference titles of the sender and recipient, is printed at the top of the notepaper.

Note: in the United Kingdom all companies registered after 23rd November, 1916, must give the names of the directors, and if any of them are not British by origin, their nationality must be also printed.

2. Date.

The date should always be printed in the top right-hand corner in the order: day, month, year, e.g. 21st May, 2004 (21/5/04). Another order is usually employed in the United States: May 21st, 2004 (5/21/04)

3. Name and address, i.e. the inside address or the direction.

The inside address is typed in three, four or more lines whichever is necessary, either at the beginning of the letter, or at the end, e.g.,
*Messrs. Adams and Wilkinson, / 4,
Finsbury Square, / London, E.C.2.,
England.*

4. Salutation.

The salutation may be: *Sir, Sirs, Gentlemen* (never 'Gentleman'), *Dear Sirs* (never "Dear Gentlemen), *Madam, Dear Madam* (for both married and unmarried ladies), or *Mesdames* (plural). *Dear Mr., or Dear Mister* should never be used! *Dear Mr. Jones, (Mrs. Brown / Miss Smith)* may only be used when the sender is fairly intimate with the person receiving the letter.

5. Reference.

Underlined heading should look as follows: *Re: Your Order No 12345*. *Re* is not an abbreviation of “regarding”, but a Latin word meaning “*in the matter*”.

6. Opening.

If you are hesitating for a phrase with which to commence your letter, one of the following will suit your purpose: *In reply / with reference / referring to your letter of...; in accordance with / compliance with / pursuance of your order No.; we greatly appreciate your letter of...*

7. Body.

The body is the subject matter that should be concise but not laconic. The sentences should not be too long, the whole matter should be broken into reasonably short paragraphs which should be properly spaced.

8. Closing or the complimentary close.

It usually looks something like this: *Yours faithfully / truly / sincerely / cordially* (not *respectfully* as it is too servile). *Your obedient servant* is used by the British civil service, i.e. by all non-warlike branches of the British state administration. The most appropriate closing is: *Awaiting your early reply with interest / Hoping there will be no further complaints of this nature / Thanking you in advance for any information you can offer.*

9. Stamp (if any) and signatures.

The closing, with the signature following it, is made to slope off gradually so that the end of the signature just reaches the right hand margin of the letter.

10. Enclosures.

The Word “Enclosure “should be written either in full or in its abbreviated form “Enc.” Usually at the bottom left-hand corner of the letter.

Official documents

Almost every official document has its own compositional design. Pacts and statutes, orders and minutes, codes and memoranda – all have more or less definite form, and it will not be an exaggeration to state that the form of the document is itself informative, inasmuch as it tells something about the matter dealt with.

An official document usually consists of a **preamble, main text body and a finalizing (concluding) part.**

The preamble is usually a statement at the beginning of the document explaining what it is about and stating the parties of the agreement, e.g. “*The States concluding this Treaty* (Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons), *hereinafter referred to as the ‘Parties to the Treaty’...have agreed as follows...*”. The most important words and phrases are often capitalized as well as the beginnings of the paragraphs in very long sentences listing the crucial issues.

The main text body constitutes the central and most important part of the document. It consists of articles – individual parts of a document, usually numbered ones, which state the conditions on which the parties reach their agreement. For example, Article I of the above cited Treaty begins: “*Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly...*”

The finalizing part comprises the signatures of the duly authorized people that have signed the document; the amount of copies of the document; the date (more often than not, stated by words, not by figures); the place: “*IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, duly authorized, have signed this Treaty. DONE in triplicate, at the cities of Washington, London and Moscow, this first day of July one thousand nine hundred sixty-eight*”.

Depending on the type of document, the composition and content of its individual parts may slightly vary as, for example, in business contracts setting the conditions binding two parties. A business contract consists of a standard text and changeable elements. In modern linguistics, standard text structures intended for information presentation are called **frames**. A *frame* is understood as a language structure with changeable elements. The changeable elements within a text are called **slots**.

- Consider a preamble to a commercial agreement as an example of a frame.
- *This Agreement is made this _____ day of _____, 2007, by and between _____, (a _____ corporation with its principle office at _____) or (an individual with an office and mailing address at _____) (“Agent”), and (company name), a corporation organized and existing under the laws of _____, with its principle place of business at _____.*
- Here, in the above frame of an agreement the blank spaces represent the slots to be filled with **slot fillers** (by the date, company names, addresses, etc.).

- But a text frame seldom has the form of a text with blank spaces. More often than not a frame is a standard text with stable and changeable parts, for example:
- *_____ by this Agreement does not grant to Agent any rights in or license to _____'s trademarks, trade names or service marks. _____ reserves all such rights to itself. Agent shall not utilize, without _____'s express, prior and written consent, any _____ trade or service marks on trade names, and will promptly report to _____ any apparent unauthorized use by third parties in the Territory of _____'s trade or service marks or trade names.*
- In the above text frame the non-italicized text fragments are presumed to be changeable depending on the subject and conditions of the Agreement, e.g. “prior and written consent” may be replaced by “oral consent”, etc.

- The task of a translator translating official documents is to find target language equivalents of the source text frames and use them in translation as standard substitutes, filling the slots with frame fillers in compliance with the document content.
- The syntax of official or business documents is characterized by the frequent use of non-finite forms – Gerund, Participle, Infinitive (*Considering that...; in order to achieve cooperation in solving the problems...*), and complex structures with them, such as the Complex Object (*We expect this to take place*), Complex Subject (*This is expected to take place*), the Absolute Participial Construction (*The conditions being violated, it appears necessary to state that...*)

CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

We the People of the United Nations Determined

TO SAVE succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

TO REAFFIRM faith in fundamental rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

TO ESTABLISH conditions under which justice and respect for obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

TO PROMOTE social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

And For These Ends

TO PRACTICE tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and

TO UNITE our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

TO ENSURE, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

TO EMPLOY international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

Have Resolved to Combine Our Efforts to Accomplish These Aims.

As is seen, all the reasons which led to the decision of setting up an international organization are expressed in one sentence with parallel infinitive object clauses. Each infinitive object clause is framed as a separate paragraph, with the infinitive being capitalized, thus enabling the reader to attach equal importance to each of the items mentioned. The separate sentences shaped as clauses are naturally divided not by full stops but either by commas or by semicolons. It is also an established custom to divide separate utterances by numbers, maintaining, however the principle of dependence of all statements on the main part of the utterance.

The over-all code of the official style falls into a system of subcodes, each characterized by its own terminological nomenclature, its own compositional form, its own variety of syntactical arrangements. But the integrating features of all these subcodes emanating from the general aim of agreement between parties, remain the following:

- 1) conventionality of expression;
- 2) absence of any emotiveness;
- 3) the encoded character of language; symbols (including abbreviations);
- 4) a general syntactical mode of combining several utterances into one sentence.

INFINITIVE

Depending on the function the Infinitive plays in the sentence it can be translated in the following ways:

- as an adverbial modifier of purpose the Infinitive can express an independent idea that adds new information about its subject; the adverb *only* is omitted in translation, e.g.:

The president announced his resignation only after the failure of his drive to push through the merger of the two countries last summer.

Президент объявил о своей отставке после того, как прошлым летом закончилась неудачей его попытка объединить две страны.

GERUND

Depending on the function the Gerund plays in the sentence, it can be translated as:

- ***a noun:*** Banking on a loss of nerve within the board of trustees may turn out to be misguided. Расчёт на то, что у членов опекунского совета сдадут нервы, может оказаться неверным.
- ***an infinitive:*** Under the pressure of national campaign, he showed a positive gift for saying the wrong things in the wrong words at the wrong time.
В условиях напряжённой кампании в масштабе всей страны он определённо показал способность говорить не то, что надо, не так, как следовало, и не там, где следовало.

