

MASTER'S THESIS

An analysis of three letter types in relation to field, tenor and mode of discourse

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**AN ANALYSIS OF THREE LETTER TYPES
IN RELATION TO
FIELD, TENOR AND MODE OF DISCOURSE**

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to investigate the similarities and differences in linguistic choices among three letter types – complaint letters, explanatory letters and sales promotion letters – in relation to their contexts of situation. To situate the study in the larger context of register variation analysis, references are drawn from the field, tenor and mode of discourse in Halliday's Systemic Functional Model of Grammar.

Three research questions and related hypotheses are set up, based on the prediction that there will be differences in the transitivity systems, mood structures as well as theme selections among the three letter types. A total of ninety genuine texts forms the corpus. *Clause* is used as the unit of analysis and the frequencies of occurrence of individual grammatical and lexico-semantic features are presented as percentages in tabular forms and bar graphs.

The results are found to support the hypotheses. Major findings include the relatively more frequent use of (1) material processes in passive voice and verbal processes in the complaint and explanatory letters; (2) material processes in active voice in the sales promotion letters; (3) spatial and temporal circumstantial elements among the three letter types; (4) manner circumstantial elements in the sales promotion letters; (5) cause circumstantial elements in the complaint letters; (6) declarative mood structures in the complaint and explanatory letters; (7) imperative mood structures in the sales promotion letters; (8) simple Themes in the sales promotion letters; and (9) multiple Themes in the complaint and explanatory letters. Other interesting findings

include the distribution of polarity and modality among the three letter types; the use of grammatical metaphors in the complaint and explanatory letters; the frequent use of ellipted Themes in the sales promotion letters; and the various lexico-semantic properties of the selected Themes.

Discussions of the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions are made with reference to the use of informative, evaluative and persuasive languages in the texts. Implications are then drawn, with special emphasis on future socio-cultural and linguistic development in Hong Kong.

The study is made with a hope that the results would contribute to a better understanding of local business communication and help to stimulate similar studies on comparing and contrasting micro-registers of various text types before the related macro-registers can be postulated.

摘要

本論文嘗試研究三種函件文章，包括投訴信、解釋信及推銷信，在其情境中所選取用語的異同。有關文體變異分析的參考來自凱尼狄(Halliday)功能系統文法模式中就文章範圍、語調及方式三方面的理論。

本論文設立了三項研究問題及有關假設，預測以上三種文章在動詞系統、語調結構及主題選取上會有分別。研究資料由九十篇從現實生活中選取的文章組成。研究過程以「子句」為分析單位，而個別文法及情意特徵的出現頻率則化作百分比，通過列表及棒形圖表方式表達。

研究結果顯示對假設的支持。主要結果包括在以下各項，出現相對高的使用量：(一)投訴及解釋信中的被動實物過程及說話過程；(二)推銷信中的主動實物過程；(三)三種函件中的空間及時間參照；(四)推銷信中的方式參照；(五)投訴信中的起因參照；(六)投訴及解釋信中的宣告語調結構；(七)推銷信中的祈使語調結構；(八)推銷信中的簡單主題選取；及(九)投訴及解釋信中的複雜主題選取。其他有趣結果包括三種函件中的正反及判斷語調的分佈；投訴及解釋信中的文法比喻；推銷信中主題省略的常用；及各種選取主題所展示的情意內涵。

本論文會就文章中所用報告、評價及說服的語言範疇，針對討論各項結果在理念傳達、人際關係及結構發展上的功能。接著是指出各結果的引申含意，特別著重香港社會文化及語言發展的未來方向。

本人希望本論文的結果有助進一步理解本地的商業溝通，並能激發類似的研究，透過以各類微觀文章體裁的比較和對照為推理基礎，達成就有關的宏觀文章體裁的假設。

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