When Genre Studies and ICT Marry, Reliable Offspring Is Guaranteed: The Case Of A Web-Based Tool For Text Writing

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Abstract

The international business community members speak different mother tongues and come from varied cultural backgrounds which structure discourse differently. However, in the context of global commerce, professionals are bound to use English in a universally accepted way, in order to make themselves understood and carry out their transactions accordingly. This requires not only good command of the foreign language, but also to know the rules and conventions that govern communication in English within international commerce practice.

Aware of this need, the research team Inglés para Fines Académicos y Profesionales, conducted a survey among a large number of SMEs in Aragón, whose informants confirmed that correspondence is the main communicative activity in their international business relations, but employees lack the necessary skills to write letters in English properly.

This paper reports on the development of a website aimed at helping Spanish small business staff write their commercial correspondence in English efficiently, and it describes the steps involved in the process of designing the tool:

- identification of the target user/learner, their specific context and needs
- collection and classification of a corpus of commercial letters
- exam of the generic options following Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) to establish the move structure patterns and strategy that are employed to articulate the communicative purpose of each type of letter
- selection of the lexico-grammatical realizations of each move, which then can be useful for the composition of the letter texts
- design of the content delivery in the form of a user-friendly web site.

The initial classification of the core materials obeys to the commercial transaction chronological order. Instructions and language have been categorised relating to each other by a general-to-specific clickstream which connects them in a sequence of parallel deeper planes.

The explanations offered do not contain any linguistic or technical terminology; they have been presented in communicative terms with the purpose of making the learner aware of the strategies that an expert writer of this genre employs to achieve his/her communicative goals. It is assumed that the learner shares the knowledge, experience and some conventions of the specialist community associated with commerce.

The result is the website www.inglescomercial.net, offering ready-to-use- materials, which are easy-to-manage and flexible enough to serve both as a helping tool at work and as an autonomous-learning resource, already being used by a large number of Spanish professionals in their international business transactions.