

SCAFFOLDING FOR RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE TEXTUAL FUNCTION IN MEMORANDA, LETTERS AND SAVINGRAMS

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Abstract

The study is located in Systemic Functional Grammar which considers the architecture of language in terms of an inherent system of choices that are influenced by the functions that the language performs in the social contexts in which the language is used. It therefore takes the position that the sequence of text structure in correspondence documents in which directives are issued, reveals a dialogic relationship which contributes to the management of interaction. The study views the interpersonal function as progressively built into the discourse structure (Martin and Rose 2003; Sinclair and Mauranen 2006). Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1990) refer to these structures as moves and they also see them as combining to contribute towards the creation of a text. Using data from correspondences including memoranda, savingrams and letters produced in the some government departments and ministries, the sample was qualitatively analysed and the discourse structure classified into five main structures. The data further showed that writers prefer the nuclear-satellite structure or its inversion, to show humility and deference on the part of the writer even when he or she was in a position of authority. This result was a demonstration that the dialogic nature of language is progressively and intricately weaved into its discourse structure as the text unfolds.

Introduction

The study takes off from the premise that language is fundamentally dialogic and interactive. It endorses Bakhtin (1981) who posited that every utterance is made in the backdrop of many voices. The analysis demonstrates how positive communication is created in business correspondences in which directives are issued. It makes a case that there are preferred syntactic patterns in organizational correspondences conveying directives in order to bring about goodwill. Sequences of discourse from official correspondences (Swales and Bhatia 1993 referred to as moves; Sinclair and Mauranen 2006 as chunks) are used to show that management of relationships in discourse is not limited to the clause, but rather, sustained as the text unfolds, with each element in the structure contributing towards the interpersonal meaning.

Many official charged with writing memoranda, savingrams and letters in which they ought to issue directives, have expressed difficulties to convey in the message, while showing sensitivity to the audience. As such the current study is intended to provide assistance and guidance by showing that discourse structure plays an important part in the management of interaction. Vergaro (2004) had observed that people of the world structure discourse differently. It may be posited that the study reflects a cultural practice amongst Batswana when they make directives in official correspondence. The results of the study therefore

demonstrates that text structure is not only about organizing the information, but also reveals the writer's desire to manage the interaction between the interlocutors.

The study will address the following research questions.

1. How is the management of relationships in directives structured?
2. How does the structure contribute to the management of interaction?

Theoretical Framework

The study is located in the Systemic Functional Grammar theory (SFG), which was developed by Halliday and his associates in which they view the architecture of language in terms of an inherent system of choices made at two levels; paradigmatic and syntagmatic, in order to convey the three meta-functions; Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. (Halliday 1994 ;) The concept of *functions of language* was developed by the anthropologist Malinowski (1923) in his early work amongst a group of inhabitants in the Trobriand Islands in the South Pacific. This is what he wrote in his attempt at forming a view of the nature of language:

The structure of all this linguistic material is inextricably mixed up with, and dependent upon, the course of the activity in which the utterances are embedded (Malinowski, 1923:311).

The view of language gave rise to the principle that meaning and structure in language should be traced from the context of what people use it for and in the circumstances in which they use it. Bühler (1934) too agreed that functions provide the principles of linguistic structure and meaning. He views linguistic structure in terms of what is favourable to the individual and which might change with space and time. What may be taken as Bühler's contribution to the SFG is that meaning and linguistic structure are shaped by the individual's desire to influence others. Other studies have also confirmed that communication is a cooperative exercise between participants (Labov 1972; Grice 1975; 1989; Brown and Levinson 1987; Bolivar 2001 Jameson 2004). In terms of SFG this is seen in the choices that speakers make along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis.

According to SFG theory, the clause is the basic unit that expresses a message that can be understood. The theory holds that the components in the structure of the clause reflect all of the three types of functions. What this means, regarding the grammatical structure of the clause, is that it can be analysed so that its interpretation reflects it to be performing any of the metafunctions. For example, the analysis of the structure of the clause may reveal the speaker or writer in the utterance as focusing on the flow of experiences in the world around or within, it may reveal him or her as engaged in the management or sustenance of interaction, or it may also reveal him or her as engaged in demonstrating the manner in which the experience or the interaction or a combination of both are organised or related in the text.

The current study will focus on elements of text structure and will consider the meanings expressed in extended discourse and not by individual clauses. It is noted that directives are not conceived and expressed in isolated clauses, but rather as sequences of chunks with elements that link to perform discourse functions (Sinclair & Mauranen, 2006). The discourse functions may be physically delineated in the text as sections, or, according to Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), as moves. Each element in the structure or sequence of language in a

directive, contributes to a positive meaning in the directive. Directives are therefore perceived as a particular genre type with a definite shape or structure that enhances the construction or maintenance of social relationships. A genre type in a business communication context construes particular role relationships; hence, particular sequences of text expressing positive meanings are typical in such contexts. They unfold in linear progression and at each stage in the discourse the writer is doing something that contributes towards ensuring that the imperative does not jeopardise positive interaction. Each chunk is seen in the context of its role in the interpersonal function.

The corpus and method of analysis

The corpus consisted of 130 complete and authentic samples of correspondence documents. Following Swales (1990), the general function of commanding or directing was used as the basis for selection of the corpus. The corpus was made up of letters, memoranda and savingrams, obtained from three ministries in the public service in Botswana and two parastatal organisations in Botswana.

Two procedures for analysis were used. The first was to analyse each document separately and identify the rhetorical structures. These were then classified resulting in identification of five main structures. Within the identified structures slight variations were identified, but the five main structures were maintained. Confidentiality was ensured by removing any reference in the form of names of addresses or those of originators.

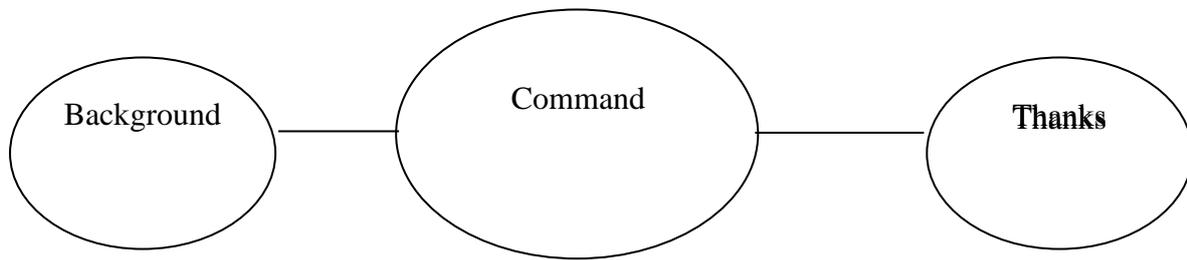
Structuring schemata for Directives

Halliday and Matthiessen (2009) have noted that the development of text is a product of an ongoing process of choices, a sequence of instantiations based on a selection of options. Bakhtin (1981) viewed language as performing a dialogic role. He saw the dialogic function as a crucial factor that co-determines choices in the development of text. In Bakhtin's terms, every act of communication reflects different choices of voice. The structure of the text is seen as choices that resonate with others to form a prosody that runs through as the text unfolds. The structure constructs the stance of the speaker–writer and supports the rhetorical purpose of the text (Martin & Rose, 2003). When writers in government institutions in Botswana issue directives in business communication, their purpose is to maintain good interpersonal relationships to ensure efficient operation in the organisation as well as gain the required action from the audience. All these are reflected in the discourse structure of the directives and discussed below.

The background-command structure

Iedema (1997:75) viewed directives in terms of a definite structure with several elements that all contribute to the interpersonal function. He suggested that these elements work to “do more work” in order to bring about effective management of the interaction and to persuade the reader to carry out the actions. He postulated that the structure of the genre of the directive was a result of the tension between the imperative and the need to manage the interaction (the conciliation that the writer makes towards the audience) as a result of the social context. He suggested a basic schema as follows.

Figure 1: Background-command schematic representation of directive



This structure is exemplified in the body of the memorandum below (directive 1). The directive deals with a very unpleasant situation, a transgression, and therefore one that potentially warrants strong and direct command.

Directive 1:

Background

I have been alerted to the fact that contrary to communication to you from the office of the XXX referenced E XX/X/10 VII (XX) dated 2 November, 2001 copy of which is attached for ease of reference, you have gone ahead and donated trial materials for wider use in the public school system.

Command

Could you please confirm or deny the veracity of the above-mentioned state of affairs.

Expression of thanks Thank you

In the directive above, the management of interaction is carried out in the background section, which is foregrounded in the content. The directive is backgrounded as content and this structure mitigates the command. It works to locate the command in the context of a social experience that gains prominence by its position in the opening position in the text. This position ensures that the command is not construed as a subjective or biased imposition by the writer on the audience. Rather it provides the command with a basis or legitimation.

By stating that he or she was alerted to something, the writer is making a statement about a negative force that impinges on his or her consciousness and causes the writer to react. In the case of the phenomenon above, it is a fact and it is reported as causing a reaction on the part of the writer, for example it drew his or her attention. People are alerted to things so that they can respond to counter the ‘looming’ situation. The background to the command that comes later has the impact of providing the basis upon which the audience is commanded to act. This is done in order to prepare the audience mentally to view their assent to the command that is made later as noble or necessary and not as a sign of weakness or strength on the part of the source of the command.

The structure of the text therefore contributes to the imposition that the writer communicates in the subsequent commanding clause. The positive attitude in the commanding clause is particularly brought about by a sense of the hypothetical implied by the oblique *could*, which

points to tentativeness in the performance of the action *confirm or deny the veracity of the above mentioned state of affairs*. The use of *Please* further mitigates the command. *Please* codes veracity of the writer in respect of his or her behaviour. It suggests that the writer is truthful in his or her action. Literally, it means *if it pleases you* and it provides the addressee with the opportunity to say *it does not please me and so I will not comply*. Both *could* and *please* communicate that minimal obligation is placed on the addressee and therefore some kind of deference is shown to the recipient. This structure therefore injects into the communication a sense of collegiality and construes the writer as persuading rather than instructing the audience. This view is further conveyed by the expression of *thanks* at the end of the text, showing appreciation towards the audience, which is envisaged in the positive response. For example, *thanks* are given to construct positive relations with the other person.

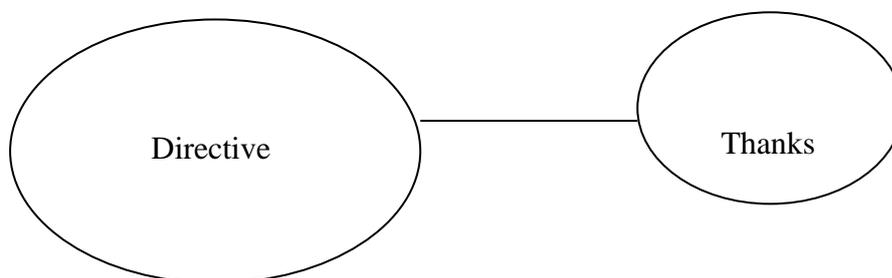
Not all directives would offer legitimation in terms of background information as in directive 1 above. In directive 2 below, not ‘much work’ is done in the sense that has been discussed.

Directive 2:

<i>Command</i>	Please prepare a draft for the December Notices.
<i>Expression of thanks</i>	Thanks

Although there is ‘little work’ done, there is mitigation brought about by the use of the word *please*. Its mitigating effect is viewed in terms of veracity and therefore reveals the writer’s effort to maintain a positive relationship with the addressee. The differences in the choice to convey interpersonal meaning in the two texts above can be analysed, amongst other things, in the type of processes conveyed and the types of clauses used to construct the experiences. The structure can be schematically represented as follows in Figure 2. In Figure 1, the clause is a complex one and the logico-semantic relations in the clause provide the context that justifies the command. Figure 6 shows a simple clause that makes the command direct, save for the politeness marker *please*, which highlights respect and deference to the audience.

Figure 2: Schematic structure without textual legitimating elements



The structures above reveal a social context in which management of interaction is given prominence in the communication process. The textual organisation reveals a tenor of discourse that reflects assumptions about prevailing relationships and social context of the communication. The structure construes a social environment in which there appears to be task negotiability, democracy and solidarity amongst the participants.

Nucleus-Satellite Structure

Iedema (2001) distinguishes between the background-command structure and the nucleus-satellite structure. The former is seen as having one clause at each level of structure as the example in directive 1 above. The clause could however, have more than one clause or sentence that belongs to the same level in the discourse structure. According to Iedema (2001), satellites hover around the nucleus (commanding clause). The nucleus-satellite structure is an expansion of the background-command structure. In this, the nucleus, like the command, forms the thesis of the text. The satellites are the means or enabling factors for the nucleus to be positively received. This is the nucleus-satellite structure, which is illustrated in directive 3 below.

Directive 3:

Satellite

(Sentence 1) In order to improve service delivery, the XXX has streamlined the Recruitment and Disciplinary Processes for industrial employees.

Satellite

(Sentence 2) Before the re-engineering exercise, the time taken by the Ministries/Departments to recruit an industrial class employee was between 8 to 10 weeks, while the time taken to complete a disciplinary case was 145 days.

Satellite

(Sentence 3) After the streamlining exercise the Recruitment Process has been targeted at six (6) weeks four days while the Disciplinary Process should be take 46 days.

Satellite

(Sentence 4) XXX shall be visiting Ministries and departments in the month of August to explain these processes.

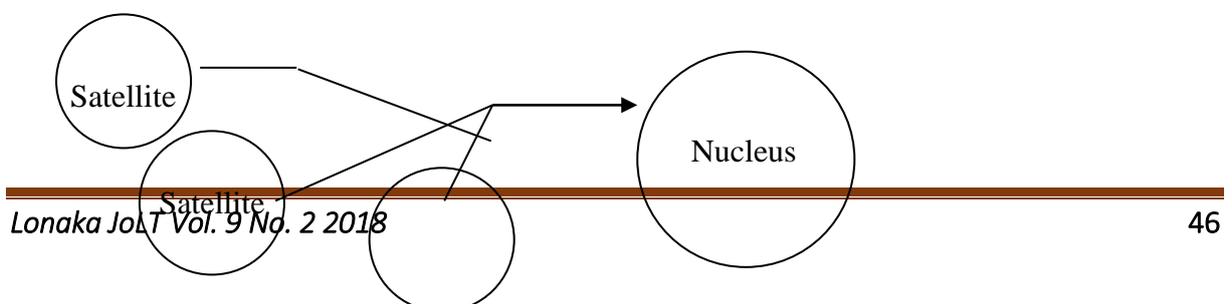
(Sentence 5) Thereafter, implementation shall begin with effect from 1st September XXXX.

Nucleus

(Sentence 6) We appeal to all to cooperate fully in this exercise so that the objective can be realised.

The nucleus-satellite is schematically represented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Schematic representation of nucleus-satellite structure



Satellite

In the scheme above, the satellites work towards legitimating the command by giving more information. This would help the audience to understand and appreciate the details and circumstances operating and necessitating the command. This information is useful for creating a positive attitude on the part of the audience towards both the writer and the command. In Hallidayan terms, this structure conveys a field of discourse that is appropriate to the context of texts in which directives are conveyed. The overall goal in such texts is to elicit a response and simultaneously maintain interaction. The kinds of activities that have been selected are appropriate to the context. For example, in business communication, particularly when commanding someone to do an act, the expression of certain experiences will help to facilitate the communication. The field of discourse prepares the audience for the imposition in the commanding clause.

The textual organisation provides the basis for that which is being requested and therefore worthy to be supported. The satellites represent information that has been selected because of its worth. In other cases, the satellites may convey negative evaluation and this works to present an untenable situation that justifies the command that is subsequently given. Directive 4 shows the satellites conveying negative evaluation. In this instance the structure has two nucleuses, both with an interpersonal effect.

Directive 4:

Satellite Please be informed that Members of the Diplomatic Corps have complained to us that Immigration and Customs Officers do not extend any courtesies to them, in keeping with their Diplomatic status, when they cross our borders

Satellite They specifically complain of the long hours they are made to wait before they are served.

Satellite Another point they raise is that the Immigration and Customs Officers do not seem to recognize their Diplomatic Identity Cards because some of these Officers insist on the production of Exemption Certificates, which, because of their A-4 size, are too cumbersome for Diplomats to carry around.

Command In the light of the aforesaid, it would be greatly appreciated if you could please advise your officers to henceforth recognize the Diplomatic Identity Cards when Diplomats present themselves and to also make some effort to extend the necessary assistance and courtesies to them.

Command We will be happy if you could cooperate.

The above was the most popular structure accounting to 92% of the document types of directives. The structure in directive 4 may be reversed and the nucleus elevated to the fore

position in the text structure as in directive 5 below, where the change in discourse structure does not affect the role of clause enhancement observed in directive 4 above.

Directive 5:

Nucleus I am requesting P40, 000 supplementary funds to cover travel and subsistence costs for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Satellite Additional funds are required to support my entire staff; XXX, and 2 XXX Volunteers.

Satellite Our funds were recently exhausted (XXX and XXX), while the two XXX Volunteers did not receive any funding for the entire year.

Satellite This puts a tremendous burden on my limited funds to support my staff.

Command Your support for a supplementary P40, 000 for the remaining months of the fiscal year will be most appreciated.

Command We hope you will advise us quickly as required training is scheduled for January and February.

Expression of thanks Thank you.

In the opening sentence, which is the nucleus, the writer conveys a positive attitude in the statement. Although this is an imposition; which in bald record says give me P40,000 00, the subsequent satellite sentences (two to four) give what may be seen as details that justify or provide a context that reveals the action as genuine and worthy of the reader's positive attention. The rhetorical effect of both the nucleus and satellite structures seek to motivate a positive reaction of the audience towards the text. Other clauses in which commands are also expressed in tentative tones may be added in the closing section, or in the middle of the text. These are not the nucleus of the text. They are usually included to demonstrate the writer's conciliation towards the audience and therefore to further persuade the audience to carry out the action. In the literature, some refer to this as a *pressure tactic* (Pinto dos Santos 2002), it is not the actual nucleus of the directive in the sense espoused by Iedema (1997). For example, the clause *We hope you will advise us quickly as required training is scheduled for January and February* acts as a pressure tactic in directive 5 above.

The structure in directive 5 above may be further complicated by the addition of more satellite elements as in directive 6 below. Notice that this is usually motivated by the writer's wish to sound persuasive, particularly because what is requested is considered an imposition or because the addressee is someone very important. In the context of the Tswana culture, this structure would be considered appropriate and polite. Such an imposition would require the writer's commentary (additional satellite elements) to allay the doubts of the audience concerning the proposal as a way of showing deference to the audience. This structure is used particularly where some resistance is expected or where the audience has more authority and therefore the writer feels the pressure to provide more information to support his or her action. The structure does not occur frequently in the corpus, accounting only for 1% of the data. This is probably because, in as much as the face of the addressee is critical, that of the writer is equally critical, and therefore writers always ensure a balance in their presentation.

Directive 6:	
<i>Subject</i>	Request for Private Papers of Historical Importance – Private Archives.
<i>Nucleus</i> (Sentence 1)	The XXX requests you to consider donating the XXX family private documents of historical and research value to the Department.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 2)	XXX is a government department within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs charged with the responsibility of preserving Botswana’s cultural heritage in document form (archives).
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 3)	In an effort to achieve this mandate, the department identifies individuals and families who have had a significant contribution towards the development of Botswana and requests for private documents.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 4)	It is our belief that, through your involvement with the military and various non-government organizations over the years, you have made such a contribution and would have valuable documents of historical and research value.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 5)	There is no doubt that the XXX family through the exploits of both the late XXX and XXX has made telling contributions to the development of Botswana and its people.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 6)	Some private documents they would have generated, collected and kept would be of historical value to the nation, and such important documents are targeted for collection by us.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 7)	XXX is only interested in documents that can be used for research by students and scholars on various aspects of the development of Botswana such as governance, politics, community development, village development, associations etc.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 8)	Our interest is mainly in documents from pre-independence to present day.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 9)	However it is not our intention to collect recent documents which may still be in use by you or are deemed sensitive.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 10)	Documents of particular interest to XXX are official/private diaries, minutes of meetings of any committee or association, correspondences with government on various issues, correspondences with other leaders (Parliamentarians, Chiefs, etc), appointment letters, awards, rare publications and newspapers, speeches and photographs etc.
<i>Satellite</i> (Sentence 11)	Where necessary the department is prepared to assist with the selection process to ensure that you donate what is relevant and can keep what is personal.

- Satellite*
(Sentence 12) As a donor of private archives the family can set the conditions under which documents can be used or give complete control to XXX.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 13) The documents may remain your property and cannot be destroyed, published or copied by anyone without your written permission.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 14) Preferably total control may be given to XXX resulting in management of the documents in line with the Department's policies and procedures to ensure their preservation.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 15) These conditions may be set and entered into in writing with XXX.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 16) We already keep documents donated by the XXX family, XXX, XXX 's family, XXX family and others.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 17) It is important for individuals and families to donate private documents to XXX as these are useful to students and other researchers, and as a record of our past as a Nation.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 18) They will contribute to the education and development of the Nation of Botswana.
- Satellite*
(Sentence 19) Donating private archives helps us preserve our past for future generations to know the true history of our Nation.
- Conciliation*
(Sentence 20) XXX would be glad to house the XXX family papers for reference by future generations.
- Conciliation*
(Sentence 21) For any further clarification or questions regarding donation of private papers kindly contact the undersigned by phone, fax or e-mail.
- Conciliation*
(Sentence 22) We hope to hear from you soon.

In the directive, the satellites are structured in a sequence of episodes in which the writer conveys tokens of deference that build up to give strength and purpose to the objective of the text, which is to persuade the reader to accede to what the writer desires. In this example, the addressee is asked to provide private papers of historical importance to be included in the national collection. The persuasion arises not only from the attitude expressed, but also from the objects that are the targets of the attitude. The writer makes a calculated move to evaluate certain objects in a particular way with the knowledge that such evaluation will cause a particular rhetorical effect.

For example, sentences 2 and 3 are comments about the institution that is the source of the imperative. This positive appreciation in the comment acts to give a positive context within which the imperative statement above has been made. The effect is to lend credibility and authority to the institution and therefore to present it as worthy to make such a demand. For example:

1. *XXX is a government department within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs charged with the responsibility of preserving Botswana's cultural heritage in document form (archives).*
2. *In an effort to achieve this mandate, the department identifies individuals and families who have had a significant contribution towards the development of Botswana and requests for private documents.*

In sentences 4, 5 and 6, the evaluation is another positive comment about the addressee and his or her family, as well as about the documents. This works to bestow appreciation and value on the addressee and therefore to motivate him or her to appreciate that he or she would be making a valuable contribution should he or she do as the writer desires. In This detail is particularly effective when making requests because it affords the requested person the extent to which obliging to the request would jeopardise his or her position.

Conclusion

From the study above, it can be concluded that the general structure of discourse is directly related to the rhetorical effect of the text. The data has shown that writers of correspondences are influenced by the need to maintain interpersonal relations with the audience in constructing messages in which they issue directives. Such influence is manifested in the discourse structure. Sequences of experience in each sentence structure were found to be linked in ways that appealed to the audience's cooperation and understanding with regard to the actions or positions they are asked to take by the writer. The textual development therefore reveals dialogic considerations by the writers that contribute towards the management of interaction. The analysis has therefore demonstrated that sequences of text structure is not a random selection of information, rather that such sequences are selected based on the way they contribute to the management of interaction.

The analysis has therefore illustrated that management of interaction is not confined to the choice of wording and internal structure of the clause, but rather that it is progressively built into the structure of the discourse. The most typical structure is the nuclear-satellite structure or the reverse of this structure. It has been noted that this structure is quite effective as it reveals the writer's wish to persuade the audience. The persuasion is carried in the satellite sentences, which places the imperative in the context of the situation they describe. Sustenance of relationships/ goodwill is not limited to selection of linguistic resources and patterns of structure in the clause. Rather, this dialogic role of language is progressively and intricately weaved into the discourse structure as the text unfolds. The data shows that each chunk in the structure or sequence of language has a logical link that contributes to the construction or maintenance of social relationships. The language unfolds in linear progression and at each stage in the discourse the writer is doing something that ensures that the imperative does not jeopardize positive interaction.

The study has also shown that working with actual discourse to teach how to write, particularly using texts produced by those members of the discourse community who have mastered the skill, could be a useful approach to teaching correspondence writing. It should be noted however, the current study does not explore the types of meanings that are expressed during the management of interaction, except to show the syntactic structures responsible for such management.

It is posited here that the textual structures of the directive reveal a kind of acculturation of the English language. The language structure shows humility and deference on the part of the writer, even when he or she is in a position of authority. This is because writers of varying levels of authority made equally frequent use of the move structures. An argument could be advanced that in the context of business correspondence amongst Batswana speakers, indirectness, leading to maintenance of goodwill, is an important feature of the discourse.

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