

## POLITENESS IN THE COMMERCIAL CORRESPONDENCE. THE ROMANIAN TRANSLATION OF THE ADDRESSING FORMULAS IN THE OFFICIAL FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE

### POLITEȚEA ÎN CORESPONDENȚA COMERCIALĂ. TRADUCEREA ÎN LIMBA ROMÂNĂ A FORMULELOR DE ADRESARE ÎN CORESPONDENȚA OFICIALĂ DIN STRĂINĂTATE

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#### Abstract

*In English, writing a business letter means most of all politeness and a great attention to etiquette. The English people are known to be a people with great attention to details. In the English style for writing the letters, the addressing formulas are essential. Compared to the Romanian style these formulas are rather strange and difficult to translate word by word. For instance in the Romanian way of writing a business letter we do not find the formula “Dear”. This formula is used in other types of letters, but not in the ones for commercial correspondence. Usually the beginning formula “Dear” meaning “Dragă” is used in letters sent to family and friends, but not in the business ones. The official way of addressing someone in a Romanian business letter would be “Stimate (ă) domnule/doamnă” followed by the name or title of the person in English meaning “Esteemed Sir/Madam, Mister/Misses”.*

#### Rezumat

*Scrierea unei scrisori în limba engleză înseamnă de cele mai multe ori folosirea politeții precum și o mare atenție la etichetă. Poporul englez este cunoscut pentru atenția acordată detaliilor. În stilul englez de a scrie scrisori, formulele de adresare sunt esențiale. În comparație cu stilul limbii române aceste formule sunt destul de ciudate și greu de tradus cuvânt cu cuvânt. Spre exemplu în limba română, în corespondența oficială nu vom găsi formula “Dear”. Această formulă este folosită în alte tipuri de scrisori, dar nu în cele pentru cele de corespondență comercială. De obicei formula de început “Dear” însemnând “Dragă” este folosită în scrisorile trimise familiei și prietenilor. Modul oficial de a se adresa cuiva în scrisorile românești de afaceri ar fi “Stimate (ă) domnule/doamnă” urmată de titlul persoanei, în limba engleză însemnând “Esteemed Sir/Madam, Mister/Misses”.*

**Key words:** *politeness, business correspondence, addressing formulas, translation*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *politețe, corespondență comercială, formule de adresare, traducere*

The Romanian business letters tend to persuade the reader and to show the good part of the issue while the English business letters go straight to the point being brief and concise no matter how ugly or impossible to solve the matter could be. The most interesting point in research for this domain is the ending formulas used in English and the way that they can be translated word by word. If we take for instance the ending formulas used in the end of the English business letters and try to translate them into Romanian we would find that a bit difficult because in Romanian they simply do not have a sense and some of them might seem even funny. [PETRESCU I., 1994, 28]

In some cases we might find even some informal formulas which can get even funnier if translated into Romanian, such as the formula “Cheers” translated as “Noroc” meaning “Good luck” which would be very difficult to be found in a Romania business letter, although usually men when they shake hands or close a deal in Romania, they say “Noroc”.

Another example of ending formula would be “Best” which in Romanian has the meaning of “Superior”, “Optimal”, “the Highest Grade”, a formula which is not enough to have a meaning. In order to have a meaning, this formula would have to be “All the best”, meaning “Toate cele bune”, in Romanian.

“Cordially yours”, is a formula translated into Romanian as “Cordial, al tău” which does not have a good or official connotation nowadays although this formula was used in the past between friends and relatives.

The formulas which cannot be used in Romanian in their translated forms are the ones including the word “faithfully”. In Romanian this word has a strict connotation, its sense being that one person is faithful to another, so in a business letter there is no place for a translated ending formula as “Faithfully” or “Faithfully yours”.

“Respectfully yours/Sincerely yours/Yours cordially, Yours faithfully, Yours sincerely, Yours truly”, are some ending formulas which translated into Romanian would mean that the person who writes the letter belongs to the one reading it. In a Romanian business letter we could never find a letter signed by using this formula because the exact translation would be “Cu respect al tău/Cu sinceritate al tău”.

When addressing a formal letter whose recipient is not known by name, the salutation of preference is *Stimate Domn, Stimate Doamnă* (equivalent to Dear Sir or Madam in English). When the recipient is known by name, *Stimate Domnule* or *Stimate Doamnă*, followed by the person's last name, is used for a man or a woman respectively. For unmarried women, *Stimate Domnișoară* is acceptable for close relations, though this title is falling out of use in written communication and can be considered inappropriate or offensive.

Examples:

*Stimate Domn, Stimate Doamnă* (used when the reader is unknown)

*Stimate Domnule Ungureanu*, (used when the reader is a man and his last name is known - this is the most commonly used version)

*Stimate Doamnă Ungureanu*, (the reader is a woman and the last name is known, the most commonly used version)

When the addressee has additional titles, such as Doctor or Profesor, they are interposed between *Domnule/Doamnă* and the person's last name, although it is sometimes acceptable to drop the last name altogether when the intended recipient is clear. It is also preferred to write out a person's title when addressing a letter and abbreviations such as Prof. or Acad. are best avoided. [DINU M., 1997, 72]

An exception is Dr. for Doctor, which is still acceptable in the salutation. If the recipient has multiple titles, generally only the most important one is used.

For women, it is current practice to use the masculine form of the title, preferring, for instance, “Doamnă Director” instead of “Doamnă Directoare”. Note that some titles may lose their intended meaning when used in their feminine form. For instance, “Profesor/Profesoară” are titles which may be associated with a male/female school teacher. When used to mean a university professor (profesor universitar), however, only the masculine form carries this meaning. The feminine “profesoară universitară” is not in common use.

Examples for use of titles:

*Stimate Domnule Dr. Ungureanu; Stimate Domnule Doctor* (the former shows more respect)

*Stimate Domnule Profesor Ungureanu; Stimate Domnule Profesor; Stimate Domnule Prof. Ungureanu* (first two versions are better)

*Stimate Domnule Academician; Stimate Domnule Academician Mihai Ungureanu*

*Stimată Doamnă Director; Stimată Doamnă Directoare* (the former is the recommended version)

In very formal situations there can be slight variations in the choice of wording. Most often, more emphasis is added to the adjective “stimat” (esteemed), becoming mult stimat (much esteemed) or “onorat” (honoured). When addressing groups, the latter is preferred.

Examples:

*Mult stimat Domnule Director* (for a director, man)

*Mult stimată Doamnă Președinte* (for a president, woman)

*Onorate Domnule Ungureanu* (understood as something like: “Honoured Mr. ...”, is used in formal letters, usually has the same power as “Mult stimat ...”)

During Romania's communist period, it was generally frowned upon to use domn/doamnă (meaning Mr./Mrs.) to address people, preferring “tovarăș” (comrade) or “cetățean” (citizen) instead. This was reflected in written communication from that period. Today, society has reverted to using domn/doamnă as the standard way to address or refer to others. Today, salutations using the distinctly communist-sounding “tovarăș” or “cetățean” are only used in closed communist circles or humorously.

Examples:

*Stimate Tovarășe Ungureanu; Stimată Cetățeană Ungureanu; Stimate Cetățean Ungureanu*

The oldest surviving document written in Romanian, a 16th-century letter from a Wallachian boyar to the mayor of Brașov, contained a salutation in Slavonic, a lingua franca of the region at that time.

In addition, one important aspect that the English business letters always try to avoid is the monotony. One of the negative aspects of effective writing is lack of variation within the text. Choice of appropriate words and word variations can make the writers' job easy and at the same time can make reading enjoyable. [PĂUȘ V., 2006, 39]

In some cultures formalities are not compulsory, in some cultures they are essential and the highest expression of respect must be shown. The French people are known for their aristocratic habits which imply a lot of high respect expressed in words which might even make us think that we are flattering the person we are writing to.

Such cultures as the Arab one require a certain repetition of the main points of the letter in order to make sure that the reader will understand exactly what we want him to, because otherwise the letter will be considered as pointless after reading it one and not understanding the main ideas which must be repeated. In some other cultures it is very important to follow the etiquette and make the letter look very elegant and well wrapped etc. [SAID SHIYAB M., 2015, 2]

Speaking about the French business correspondence, in order to write a very formal letter in French, we must know that we must start in a very respectful way, with the formula or its equivalent: “Je vous prie d’agr er, l’expression de mes salutations distingu es/Please accept, the expression of my distinguished regards”.

This is a very formal start and in case that the writer is the one providing the service or the good, he or she should write: “Je vous prie d’agr er, l’expression de mes salutations d vou es/Please accept, the expression of my devoted regards”. If we want to use a less formal tone: “Je vous prie d’agr er, l’expression de mes meilleures salutations/Please accept, the expression of my best regards”.

For example if we are writing a business letter to a person that we already corresponded with in the past, the formula would be: “Je vous prie d’agr er, Cher Monsieur Dupont, l’expression de mes sentiments distingu s/Please accept, Dear Mr. Dupont, the expression of my distinguished feelings”, a formula that again could not be used in English nor Romanian due to the word “feelings” which could never find a context in a business letter.

One step less formal, but still in a line of business language, we have the formula: “Meilleures salutations” which could be translated as “Best regards”. [HELLRIEGEL D., 1992, 102]

If on the other hand we are talking about a not too formal situation, even for a professional relationship, we can write: “Cordialement,” which means “Regards” to “Warm regards” or “Bien à vous”, “Yours truly”.

For instance, writing a good French business letter depends on one major thing, meaning knowing how to use the correct formulas. In French, the greeting is very important. The French have an inherent sense of privacy and there is a definite distinction between business and personal life. Respecting this privacy is particularly important in France. In accordance with French business culture, relationships must be formed first, before business can begin. [DEVITO, J., 1988, 46]

Business correspondence in France is very impersonal in nature. Letters will start with a prefix alone (i.e., Monsieur) or with the prefix followed by a title (i.e., Monsieur le Ministre).

Closing salutations will be replaced by an entire paragraph, which translated into English word by word does not have a very pleasant meaning, “I beseech you, sir, to accept the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments/Je vous prie d’agréer, l’assurance de mes sentiments distingués”. In order to avoid blunders, even French secretaries need specific training in how to address individuals, depending on their rank and the nature of the message. [MINTZBERG H., 1975, 74]

There are some formulas that must be used, such as:

<i>Monsieur, Madame</i>	To whom it may concern
<i>Messieurs</i>	Dear Sirs
<i>Monsieur</i>	Dear Sir
<i>Madame</i>	Dear Madam
<i>Mademoiselle</i>	Dear Miss
<i>Monsieur le Directeur</i>	Dear Mister Director
<i>Monsieur le Ministre</i>	Dear Mister Minister
<i>Monsieur/Madame le* Professeur</i>	Dear Mister Professor ...

Moreover, speaking about the business correspondence in French, we have some formulas used in the cases when we do not know the person that we are addressing to. The most common are:

<i>Monsieur</i>	Sir
<i>Monsieur xxx</i>	Mr. xxx
<i>Madame</i>	Mrs. xxx
<i>Madame xxx</i>	
<i>Mademoiselle</i>	Miss
<i>Mademoiselle xxx</i>	Miss xxx
<i>Messieurs</i>	Sirs

Regarding the ending formulas here we have:

<i>Je vous envoie mes biens amicaux pensés.</i>	Best wishes.
<i>Recevez, je vous prie, mes meilleures amitiés.</i>	Yours sincerely.
<i>Je vous adresse mon très amical souvenir.</i>	Kindest regards.

Overall, the French respect a cautious, incremental approach to business relationships. This pervades all areas of their business culture, from correspondence to the dress code. It is advisable to be well prepared, with all documents translated and presented with the necessary supporting materials.

If one is prepared to answer all questions in an articulate and logical manner, the French will be impressed by the value and quality of the company’s product or service – thus ensuring the development of a positive relationship.

For the French people, the order of first name and last name is also particular. The French tend to use the last name first and first name second. This can cause some misunderstandings since both could sound as if they are first names. For example “Pierre Paul” or “Jason Andrew”. If unsure, it is best to double check and look at their business card or signature on the documents you might have

from their correspondence. There are also instances where, the last name could be substituted by the person's official title (e.g., Monsieur le President). [PÂNIȘOARĂ I. O., 2004, 115]

Flexibility and cultural adaptation should be the guiding principles for keeping a good business relation with France. Some of the cultural distinctions that businesspeople most often face include differences in business styles, attitudes towards the development of business relationships, attitudes toward punctuality, negotiating styles, gift-giving customs, greetings, significance of gestures, meanings of colours and numbers, and customs regarding titles, this is why these things must be kept in mind while writing a French business letter.

As a curiosity about the French way of communicating in the business domain, thank you notes are not that frequently sent although they are said to care about formalities a lot. In the United States of America and in England, thank you notes are very often sent even in the business domain, thing which largely helps strengthen the bonds between business partners. [PERETTI A., 1994, 57]

Also, unlike in the Romanian and English culture where people usually send cards for celebrating the main holidays and other big events, in France this habit does not exist in such a wide range.

In the Romanian business domain, people send congratulation cards and religious ones in order to keep a good relation with the people they interact with and even with the personnel. In the offices and institutions from Romania, usually, cards are sent, with respectful messages and best wishes for good occasions. This is a thing I know from my own experience, in the office where I work, there is a good formal relation between the administration and the personnel, kept by receiving and sending polite letters, notes or cards. [CÂNDEA R., 1996, 82]

In English speaking countries such as Ireland, Sweden, Great Britain and many other people usually send birthday cards and they feel as if it is a lack of respect if they don't receive them. Unlike these countries, in Romania, this habit is not yet very developed because people are accustomed to send cards mainly for the holidays. On the other hand, the fact that globalization is blooming, I believe that soon the Romanian people will send birthday cards too.

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