

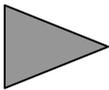
**ASPECTS OF GRAMMAR TO BE POINTED OUT WHEN TEACHING
COMMERCIAL CORRESPONDENCE
AND BUSINESS ENGLISH**

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Abstract

The present article highlights some of the important aspects to be taken into account when teaching commercial correspondence and business English. The most important points that the paper discusses are related to the use of modal verbs, to the ways in which they can be mistaken for other structures (like auxiliary verbs for instance), and to the ways in which students can be taught to grasp the respective meanings correctly. Also, traditional language structures are compared to the new, modern uses of some of these modals.

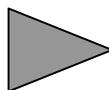
Keywords: commercial correspondence, business English, grammar, modal verbs, conditional clauses.



Introduction

By the time the students in the Bucharest University of Economics begin studying Commercial Correspondence and Business English in general, they are supposed to be familiar with the problems of English grammar. They have already covered all the grammar subjects which should enable them to express their ideas correctly, not only on the basis of the repetition of some patterns but also relying on a sound knowledge of rules.

However, a revision of some aspects of grammar would be welcome so far as modals, subjunctives and if-clauses are concerned. I will especially refer here to the uses of *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*.



Will

The students have been taught that *will* is used in the formation of the future. *Will* cannot be found, by any means, after *if*, in a conditional clause. However, in business letters, they often come across *will* after *if*.

Examples:

1. "We shall be glad if you will confirm this and make the necessary alterations to the invoice"¹
2. "We regard this as an extremely sharp practice and shall be glad if you will correct the invoice immediately"²
3. "We shall be grateful if you will kindly let us know whether..."³
4. "If you will give us exact details of your requirements we will supplement our offer accordingly"⁴.

Such examples should be given to the students and the use of *will* as a modal with the meaning of intention, volition should be pointed out. In this way, the students

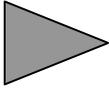
¹ An Anthology for the Students of Commerce, 1965, Longman, Green & Co Ltd., p. 52

² *id.*

³ Eckersley, C.E., 1969: *English and American Business Letters*, Longman, Green & Co Ltd., p. 80

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 98

will know that this is no breaking of the rule “no future in a clause of condition”, but it is a special use of *will* as a modal.



Would

The students know that *would* is used in the formation of conditional tenses. They also know that, after *if*, conditional *would* may not be used. Yet, they will often come across sentences like the following:

1. “I should be glad if you would consider how far my qualifications meet your requirements”⁵
2. If you would give me the opportunity of an interview I should be pleased to supply you with any other information you may require”⁶
3. I should be glad if you would send me full particulars”⁷

Just like in the case of *will*, the students should have their attention drawn to the volitive use of *would*, therefore *would* used as a modal and not a conditional.

However, in more recent textbooks, like *Company to Company*⁸, there appears a use of *would* with the verb *to like*, in a conditional clause in which *would* doesn't seem to be a modal but looks like a perfect example of a conditional.

Examples:

1. I am enclosing some brochures but if you'd like any more details I'd be happy to provide them.⁹
2. If you would like to order these, could you inform us as soon as possible.¹⁰

I must admit that, as a teacher, I find it rather difficult to explain to the students what the role of *would* is in these cases after *if*. Might it be a part of the trend of

⁵ An Anthology for the Students of Commerce, 1965, Longman, Green & Co Ltd., p. 62

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 75

⁷ Eckersley, C.E., 1969: *English and American Business Letters*, Longman, Green & Co Ltd., p. 40

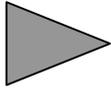
⁸ Littlejohn, A., 1990: *Company to Company*, CUP, 1990

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 61

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 66

doing away with the old grammar rules, in these cases accepting a conditional after *if*? Then why does it appear only in the case of the verb *to like*? Will this use of *would* after conditional *if* be extended to other verbs some time in the future?

Might it be a fixed pattern only accepted in the case of the verb *to like*? I suppose the future usage will bring an answer to these questions.



Shall

The use of *shall* in contracts, in public documents, in charters of banks or other organizations is widely spread.

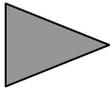
The students should be given some examples from such documents:

1. Article 4: None shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Anthology, p. 130).
2. General meetings shall be called by the Administration Board whenever requested. The meeting deadline shall, by no means, be less than 15 days from the publishing of the call. (Charter on the Organization and Operation of the Romanian Bank for Development, p. 9).
3. The seller shall notify the Buyer by fax or telex until 15 February at the latest that the goods are ready for shipment. (Contract de afaceri – Fulvia Turcu, p. 5).

It is obvious that *shall* has a modal use in these contexts, since it does not appear in the first person, as it happens when it is used to represent an action taking place in the future.

Grammar books generally explain this use of *shall* as expressing the will of the first person, the speaker, imposed upon the second or the third person as a promise, a decision, a constraint, or even a threat.

When presenting the subject to our students, we should add that, in the case of official documents, the use of *shall* for the second or third person expresses the will of the decision-making bodies who have issued the respective document, be it a charter, a declaration or a contract.



Should

When they are taught *if clauses*, the students are told that in the cases of unreal condition, the subordinate clause includes a subjunctive with the form of past tense or past perfect. With particular reference to commercial correspondence, the teacher should also present the use of *should* as a subjunctive equivalent accepted in conditional clauses (example: If you should require further information, we would be pleased to send it to you), or followed by an imperative clause (If you should require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us).

Mention must also be made of the fact that this use of *should* allows for the omission of *if* in quite a number of cases.

Constructions like:

Should you require further information...

Should difficulties arise...

Should you wish to contact us...

are very common in business letters.

While pointing out these grammar aspects, we do not suggest that the teachers make a revision of the respective problems in all their complexity. Just a brief talk about the specific usage in business English will be sufficient to make the students aware of the language they come across and they are expected to use in their future jobs.

References and bibliography

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The author

Dr. Nora Tomoșoiu is a Professor in English, Commercial Correspondence and Business Communication at the Academy of Economic Studies Bucharest. She has contributed to a number of specialized journals with articles in language teaching and methodology. She holds a PhD in philology (specialization: English language). She is the author or co-author of several well-known books in the domain, among which “The Structure of Particle Verbs in English”, “The English Verb – Basic Rules and Modern Trends” and “Export – Import Commodity Expertise”. Her domains of interest include business English teaching, communication, teaching methodology, negotiations, commercial correspondence and commodity science.