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“A cargo of coffee, sugar, and indigo”: Transatlantic business correspondence in nineteenth-century business letter-writing manuals

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses two case-studies of specialised nineteenth-century business letter-writing manuals (Anderson 1836 and Williams – Lafont 1860). The investigation initially focuses on the dynamics of transnational export of British epistolary guides both to continental Europe and across the Atlantic. The analysis of the three American editions of the first manual (Anderson 1836) offers an insight into the strategies of adaptation performed by different publishing houses. The second step of the investigation is represented by the analysis of specific linguistic strategies of politeness employed in the model letters. The examples clearly show the preference accorded to the strategies of negative politeness, a finding which supports the hypothesis on the ongoing nineteenth-century codification of new negative politeness culture in the British context (Jucker 2012). In summary, this paper discusses the role of specialised business epistolary guides in establishing, maintaining and strengthening transnational commercial networks by imparting rigid sociocultural norms of proper business conduct.

1. Introduction

The study of “letter writing as cultural practice” (Dossena – Del Lungo Camiciotti 2012: 6) has only begun to receive due attention in recent years. The publication of a number of volumes (see Dossena – Fitzmaurice 2006; Dossena – Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008; and Dossena – Del Lungo Camiciotti 2012) has contributed greatly to the increasing prominence of the field by laying out innovative theoretical and methodological frameworks applicable to the study of familiar as well as commercial correspondence.

Other scholars (see Culpeper 2011b) have shown how new quantitative and qualitative approaches can be used in the investigation of language use in historical epistolary material. The increase in importance of writing in nineteenth-century English society, demonstrated, for instance, in the spread of literacy, has been explained by factors such as progressive bureaucratisation and the expansion of commercial interests both at home and abroad (Bailey 1996: 23-68). The tenfold increase in the volume of letters sent in the thirty years after 1840, the year in which the Penny Post system was introduced in Britain, bears testimony to what Beal describes as “the real revolution in written communication” (2004: 9).

The nineteenth-century revolution in letter writing was accompanied by an unprecedented boom in various kinds of self-help books, which included a high proportion of pronunciation and grammar guides alongside manuals belonging to an already well-established genre of epistolary instruction manuals. Unlike authentic historical correspondence, the study of letter-writing manuals can still be considered to be a rather neglected area of research (Bannet 2005). Only a handful of studies (Austin 2007; Bannet 2005; Del Lungo Camiciotti 2002, 2005; Fens-de Zeeuw 2008 and Poster – Mitchell 2007) have so far dealt with specific aspects of this highly interesting historical genre. Moreover, it is important to remember that the generic name “letter-writing manuals” functions as a broad umbrella term which covers guides addressed to the general public as well as to very specific groups of readers. In the latter category, one of the most prominent groups of target readers was that of upwardly mobile young men wishing to find employment as correspondence clerks in one of the many British commercial houses of that period. Hence during the eighteenth century it gradually became customary to include a dedicated section with sample business letters in general letter-writing guides (Cooke 1770) and the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of specialised manuals for business correspondence.

The vast area of research on linguistic politeness/impoliteness currently offers a multitude of theoretical models and methodological tools for the analysis of the linguistic phenomena of (im)politeness and, more importantly, their relationship with the underlying social and cultural practices¹. A number of recent studies (for example, Jucker 2012 and Culpeper – Demmen 2012) focus on the paradigmatic changes in politeness culture in the British context

¹ See Culpeper (2011a) for an exhaustive overview of literature on politeness/impoliteness research.

which started to take place in the last decades of the eighteenth century and continued to occur in the course of the nineteenth century. Letter-writing manuals, which enjoyed growing popularity in the same period, provide ample evidence of prescriptive efforts. In addition to instructing the reader on how to apply appropriate epistolary conventions, the manuals aimed at imparting codes of proper social behaviour through the use of specific linguistic strategies of politeness. Hence the analysis of politeness strategies in nineteenth-century letter-writing guides could prove particularly fruitful in an attempt to gain a better understanding of contemporary linguistic practices. More specifically, in view of the claims that the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries witnessed a paradigmatic shift towards a new negative politeness culture (Jucker 2012: 423-424), a study of model letters could provide new supporting evidence of that shift taking place at that time.

In this light, the aim of the present paper will be twofold. In the following section I will begin by introducing the first of the two nineteenth-century specialised business letter-writing manuals analysed in the paper, namely the 1860 American edition of *Practical Mercantile Letter-Writer: A Collection of Modern Letters of Business*, a highly popular British guide originally entitled *Practical Mercantile Correspondence: A Collection of Modern Letters of Business*, by William Anderson. The popularity of this particular guide helps to shed light on the dynamics of the transnational importation of specialised British correspondence manuals, which, as I will show, were in great demand both in continental Europe and across the Atlantic. I will then analyse the pragmatic strategies of politeness employed by and imposed on the reader/learner of this type of manual. I will use sample letters extracted from Anderson's manual together with examples from a second nineteenth-century business letter-writing guide, *French and English Commercial Correspondence*, a bilingual manual co-authored by Thomas Sidney Williams and Jules Lafont (1860). The comparison of the linguistic strategies of politeness suggested in the two guides will offer an insight into the potential usefulness of historical letter-writing guides in shedding light on the connections between linguistic and underlying social practices. My investigation aims to show how strict standards of correct linguistic behaviour can be taken to reflect rigid codes of self-representation and self-conduct in the global business environment of the nineteenth century. The concluding section will be devoted to the discussion of the importance of the manuals in establishing, maintaining and strengthening transnational commercial networks.

2. Transnational trade in British correspondence manuals

By the second half of the eighteenth century the authors of letter-writing manuals were already going to great lengths to convince their readers of the utility and importance of excellent epistolary skills for commerce:

The greatest commerce is carried on amongst the absent. This cannot be done verbally; letters are made use of. These must speak for us in the most distant places, buy and sell, and in general testify our intention, our thoughts and meaning, instead of ourselves. (Smith 1768: 2)

In a specialised business letter-writing manual published approximately one hundred years later, the authors emphasise new factors that, in their eyes, have contributed to raising the profile of commercial correspondence even further:

The seats of Commerce are so numerous now at home and abroad, inland as well as on the seaboard, that the business correspondence carried on is immense, arising not only from the greater facilities afforded by more frequent and cheaper postal communication, but also from the rapid progress of Trade, and the vast extension of Shipping, home and foreign. [...] Independent of the large correspondence resulting from our home trade and manufacturers that connected with the Continental Trade, with the trade with Africa, North and South America, Australia, India, China and the Far East is enormous. (Williams – Simmonds 1864: 3-5)

These factors include the improvement of systems of communication and transportation, the expansion of British commerce and the consolidation of global commercial networks, whose smooth functioning depended to a great extent upon the successful exchange of correspondence between business partners.

In her study of eighteenth-century English-language epistolary manuals, Bannet (2005) takes into consideration several popular and therefore important guides published during the same period on both sides of the Atlantic. Bannet connects the beginning of the popularity of this genre of self-help literature at the turn of the seventeenth century specifically with “the inception of English efforts to unite the three kingdoms and the American mainland and island colonies within a growing, and increasingly

far-flung, commercial empire, when letters were the only available technology for distance communication" (2005: ix-x). The case-studies of individual eighteenth-century manuals presented by Bannet shed light on the ways in which transatlantic book exchange functioned in that period:

[L]etter manuals were among the earliest types of book that were not only printed in Britain and regularly imported into the American provinces, but also reprinted and consciously "fitted" by local American printers to the values and needs of their local customers. The importation, reprinting and adaptation of British letter manuals continued well into the early Republic. (2005: xviii)

Bannet's suggestion that there was continuity within the transatlantic import of letter manuals from the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries is undoubtedly confirmed in the first of the two nineteenth-century specialised business letter-writing guides which are the focus of this paper. The volume in question is the 1860 New York edition of William Anderson's *Practical Mercantile Letter-Writer: A collection of modern letters of business, with notes critical and explanatory, and analytical index, and an appendix*, first published in London in 1836. Anderson's guide represents one of the most commercially successful British examples of the specialised business letter-writing manuals which enjoyed an increasing popularity in the course of the nineteenth century. The original English-language version of the manual was reprinted numerous times in Britain, with the last publication dating to the beginning of the twentieth century (Anderson 1903). In addition to reprints produced in Britain, the manual was published in a number of European (Anderson 1846, 1855, 1858), as well as American publishing houses (Anderson 1851, 1860). The volume was translated into German (Anderson – Lucas 1840) and several model letters from the original English edition were subsequently included into a manual published by Krull (1844), which provided German and French translations of the English model letters. In the course of the century Anderson's guide was also revised and adapted for several bilingual versions: English-German (Anderson 1886), English-Portuguese (Anderson – Tugman 1867), English-Italian (Anderson – Millhouse 1873), and English-Dutch (Anderson – Playter 1866), to name the most popular ones, all of which contained explanatory notes to the model letters in the second language.

In the process of being exported and reprinted abroad, Anderson's manual underwent revisions which were most likely deemed necessary by the European and American publishers alike in order to make the guide more

suiting to the specific demands of the local reading audience (Bannet 2005). The variation in the new titles, which amended or substituted the original *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, can be considered the first indication of changes made by the new publishers. In fact, in the case of the American reprints of Anderson's guide, it is only with the second D. Appleton & Company New York edition that we have the modification of the title from *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* to *Practical Mercantile Letter-Writer*, a new choice for the publisher who maintained the original title in the first American edition of 1851. In other cases of bilingual or translated versions of the manual, the publishers often chose to highlight what they considered to be the most important selling point of the guide. An instance of this is the bilingual English-Dutch edition dating from 1866 (Anderson – Playter 1866). The English title of this edition was changed to *William Anderson's Mercantile Correspondence: A Collection of Real Letters of Business*, in which "real letters" replace "modern letters" found in most of the other editions. The Dutch title, *Keur van Echte Engelsche Koopmansbrieven. Door William Anderson, i.e. A Selection of Authentic English Businessmen's Letters* (my transl.), reproduces the change in the English sub-title. This revision aimed to stress the authenticity of the model letters, a feature which was most likely considered to be very important for the new target audience.

The two American editions, both by D. Appleton & Company of New York (Anderson 1851, 1860), are unremarkable if we take into consideration the overall popularity and successful circulation of *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* outside Britain. Compared to several European reprints, the American volumes appeared relatively late. In fact, both of them are based on the revised and expanded 1843 edition, rather than the original 1836 book, and, except for a few minor revisions, such as the amendment of the title in 1860, the American guides can be said to be faithful copies of the original British version. As such, D. Appleton & Company's imported reprints have little to tell us about the particularities of the "fitting" practices (Bannet 2005: xviii) in the transatlantic circulation of self-help literature in the nineteenth century. However, the analysis of the 1837 American business letter-writing guide entitled *The Clerk's Guide, or, Commercial Correspondence; comprising letters of business, forms of bills, invoices, account-sales, and an appendix* by Benjamin Franklin Foster may provide some insight into the mechanisms of revision that British manuals underwent once they became destined for the American reading public.

While the titles of the two guides in question clearly differ, the same cannot be said of the beginning of the two prefaces. In *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* the second paragraph reads:

- (1) It appears a remarkable anomaly that, in a country so eminently commercial as Great Britain, the initiatory studies of young men destined for mercantile life should be so notoriously neglected. Our literature, copies enough in almost every other branch, afford abundant facility for an appropriate course of tuition and study for the liberal professions and the arts; but, to the young merchant, it proffers little assistance of the kind required. (Anderson 1836: v)

In the *Clerk's Guide* we find the following lines:

- (2) It is certainly a remarkable anomaly that in a country so eminently commercial as this, the initiatory studies of young men who are destined for the active pursuits of trade and commerce should hitherto have been so much neglected. Our schools and academies afford abundant opportunities for an appropriate course of instruction in the liberal arts and sciences; but, to the incipient merchant they proffer but little assistance of the kind required. (Foster 1837: iii)

Foster's paragraph is undoubtedly a rewriting of the original text in Anderson's guide: specific building blocks from the original sentences are re-employed, albeit with the substitution, modification, or removal of single words, syntactic structures and even punctuation marks. Moreover, the author pays close attention to culturally-specific reference points, which are duly transformed: for example, "Great Britain" is changed into "this country". The operation of "fitting" continues in the subsequent pages, where the revised opening taken from Anderson is followed by what seems to be a compilation of passages taken from other letter-writing guides. Two pages further (Foster 1837: v), the author again inserts several paragraphs from *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, applying the same procedure of "fitting" performed in the introductory part of the preface. For reasons of space, it is impossible to go into further analysis of the specific linguistic strategies of fitting employed by Foster, but the example given above is representative of the ingenuity and great care taken by the author to offer the local public points of reference to the cultural context that they would find familiar².

² For example, whereas in his "Preface" Anderson refers to the target readership of the volume as "young gentlemen" (1836: v), in rewriting the same paragraph Foster replaces the term with a much more general "students": "The utility of such a collection has long been acknowledged by merchants and men of business, and its want felt, as well by the students themselves, as by those instructors [...]" (1837: v). This simple

In the concluding part of the preface Foster explicitly acknowledges his debt to “a variety of sources”, and names Anderson’s guide together with another volume which so far it has not been possible to locate (Foster 1837: vii)³. Unlike Anderson’s manual, the preface in Foster’s volume is followed by an introductory chapter dedicated to general instructions on the specificities of business letter-writing. As regards the sections that contain model letters, a comparison with the contents of *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* reveals that almost all of Foster’s samples are in fact taken from the British original. Also, in the case of model letters themselves, the American author employs similar strategies of “fitting” to those discussed above in the case of the preface. All references to a British context have been removed or amended, where possible, so that, for instance, Anderson’s original model letter of introduction entitled “To Bristol in favor of a nephew of an old connection” (1836: 23) has become simply “In favor of a nephew of an old connection” (Foster 1837: 37). The body of the model letters likewise shows traces of intervention: British locations (London, Bristol and Manchester in this case) are replaced by New York, Boston, and Pittsburgh. In addition, one comma is missing in the American version and the closing formula has been abbreviated. Another example of similar revisions can be found in the series of model letters concerning a transaction related to the purchase of cotton (Anderson 1836: 30-38; Foster 1837: 67-76 respectively), in which Foster has also changed the type of product discussed in the transaction, from the Upland variety to the Pernambuco one.

In summary, Foster’s *Clerk’s Guide* represents a highly interesting example of an imported and adapted British manual. Published in America a mere one year after the original publication in Britain, not only did it anticipate the subsequent 1851 and 1860 reprints, but it sought to present itself to the local reader as a self-help book produced and aimed specifically at an American

operation allows the author/editor to significantly expand his target readership, with the aim of potentially including any upwardly mobile American reader/learner. Moreover, in paragraphs written (presumably) by Foster himself and not copied from *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, the references to the local cultural context are even more explicit, as in the following example, in which (perhaps predictably) dollars are mentioned, instead of pounds: “Something more is expected in a merchant’s correspondence than in that of any other class of men; as upon the faith of a single letter, he may negotiate many thousand dollars [...]” (1837: vii).

³ Foster simply refers to “Anderson’s Mercantile Correspondence” and “Percival’s Complete Man of Business” (1837: vii). It is likely that Foster abbreviated the title of the latter guide, and in this case the book in question may possibly be Raymond Percival’s 1834 *A Voice from the Counting House*, etc. However, I have not yet been able to consult a copy of this guide to establish whether it served as Foster’s second source.

audience. Unlike the publishing house D. Appleton & Company, which faithfully reprinted the manual in its second edition version, Foster employed several different strategies of "fitting" the original guide with the intention of rendering the book more accessible to the American reader. A further analysis of these strategies would certainly offer insight into the dynamics of transatlantic book importation in the first half of the nineteenth century.

3. Codification of negative politeness culture

As some of the examples presented in the previous section have already suggested, the authors of these guides were well aware of the specific sociohistorical context in which they were living and producing their works. The consolidation of existing global commercial networks on the one hand, combined with further expansion of British and transnational trading interests on the other, contributed to creating a very profitable niche for specialised collections of model business letters within the booming market in self-help literature. The investigation of the sociocultural function of such guides cannot be limited to their prescriptive efforts to impose correct linguistic forms on the reader/learner. While the authors of the manuals repeatedly emphasised how the acquisition of excellent epistolary skills would benefit the advancement of a career in commerce, another key function of specialised business letter-writing manuals consisted in providing young men aspiring to start a career in commerce with rigid sociocultural models of proper business conduct (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2008). The norms of business conduct were suggested and promoted in the manuals to those hoping for a successful business career, regardless of their nationality or geographical location. In other words, the export of letter-writing manuals aimed at implanting British standards of proper gentlemanly behaviour abroad, within the context of the expanding global commercial connections of the nineteenth century.

There were several ways in which manuals attempted and to some extent were able to convey sociocultural norms. Firstly, some authors chose to include introductory letters with general guidelines which in an explicit and detailed manner dictated rules of proper business conduct for the benefit of young learners. Examples of two such letters can be found in the expanded second edition of *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* (Anderson 1843: 1-5). The second, more subtle way of introducing norms of business conduct can be traced to the employment of specific linguistic strategies of politeness in the model letters offered by the manuals. Del Lungo Camiciotti

(2008), for instance, has looked at pragmatic strategies of politeness in her analysis of requests and commitments presented as examples by a number of nineteenth-century British business letter-writing manuals, including an Italian edition of *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* dating from 1873. Del Lungo Camiciotti's study confirms a high incidence of linguistic strategies of negative and positive politeness in Brown and Levinson's sense (1987). Consequently, these specific pragmatic strategies imposed on the reader/learner cannot be treated as simply reflecting current linguistic norms, given their role in the promotion of the specific standards of self-representation and self-conduct in the business environment. In the next paragraphs, examples from *Practical Mercantile Letter-Writer* and a second nineteenth-century specialised letter-writing manual should prove revealing of the mechanisms that transmitted norms of business conduct through the use of negative and positive politeness strategies.

The second manual under examination, namely *French and English Commercial Correspondence: A collection of modern mercantile letters in French and English, with their translation on opposite pages* (Williams – Lafont 1860), could not boast the same popularity as Anderson's *Practical Mercantile Correspondence/Letter-Writer*, and only two additional reprints (1862, 1871) seem to have been made. However, when it comes to their structure and organisation, and the content of the model letters, the two manuals can be said to be very similar. One feature in particular immediately distinguishes these two specialised guides from letter-writing manuals of the same period destined for a more general public of readers (cf. Sadler 1828, Cann 1878, Penholder 1890), namely the presence of interconnected letters, conveniently grouped into distinct series. Such series, which represent the bulk of the model letters in the two guides, follow the development of lengthy and complex business transactions often involving business partners operating from different countries across the Atlantic.

Interestingly, the transactions presented in such series of letter exchanges often revolve around commercial failures. In *Practical Mercantile Letter-Writer*, there is a series entitled "Cargo seized by customs at Charleston" (Anderson 1860: 152-156)⁴. Several American business partners from Charleston,

⁴ Anderson explicitly states that his volume contains "genuine commercial letters" (1860: v). Moreover, he claims that the letters have undergone only minor revisions, made either with the view of protecting the identity of the commercial houses which offered their correspondence or with the aim of "correct[ing] the diction, when necessary, in order to render them fair examples of the commercial style" (1860: vii). In addition, at least two editions of the guide (Anderson 1846 and 1865) contain endorsements which, in their turn, draw attention to the (presumed) authenticity of the model letters, as in

Philadelphia and New York attempt to sell a party of goods on behalf of their British partner based in London. Their combined efforts unfortunately do not yield the expected results and, as a consequence, the Americans find themselves in the position of having to repeatedly provide a satisfactory explanation for their inability to conclude the transaction profitably:

- (3) We are sorry to say that, from the prices Mr. S. handed to us, the goods are not likely to sell for their invoice value, as British manufactures are extremely low; however, you may rest assured that our best endeavours will be used to promote your interest. (Anderson 1860: 153)
- (4) We are extremely sorry to have to render so unsatisfactory an account of sales. (Anderson 1860: 154)
- (5) We are sorry to say business continues in the same dull state as when we last addressed you. (Anderson 1860: 154)
- (6) We regret that it is not in our power to hand you a bill for your claim, but trust that what we have done will be satisfactory. (Anderson 1860: 155)

The authors provide apologies which are routinely accompanied by references to external factors, most commonly unfavourable market conditions. This addition serves to mitigate the face-threat by shifting responsibility for the failure of the transaction to an event that the partner cannot be expected to control.

A similar situation occurs in the case of the transaction entitled "Correspondence between Bremen and Havanna respecting a consignment of linen with returns in cigars" in *French and English Commercial Correspondence* (Williams – Lafont 1860: 284-318). Here, a Bremen-based company ships out a consignment of linen to be sold on the overseas market and their partners in Havana have been asked to oversee the operation. Similar patterns of business conduct rendered linguistically by the employment of specific strategies of negative politeness can be found in this exchange:

the following examples: " 'A large collection of real letters of business, to which our vast commerce extends; [...].' – *New Monthly Magazine*" (Anderson 1846: vi); " 'These letters are real transcripts – with only such changes as are necessary to conceal the transaction, and the parties between whom they passed [...].' – *Globe*" (Anderson 1865: vi). Further investigation would be required, in order to establish whether these model letters can be traced back to their original source. However, at this stage, the analysis of the letters themselves strongly points to the reliability of Anderson's claim.

- (7) In the interim, the Louisa, from Hamburg, has still further increased the stock of Linens in the Market which immediately caused our retail dealers to be more reserved in their purchases. (Williams – Lafont 1860: 294)
- (8) Acknowledging receipt of yours of October 20th and November 6th, we regret to say that, to this day, we have not succeeded in getting rid of your Linens, in spite of every exertion; but business in this article has been so flat. (Williams – Lafont 1860: 300)
- (9) We [...] are grieved, that we cannot yet advise the sale of your Creas [...]. You can scarcely conceive the stagnation in the linen trade. (Williams – Lafont 1860: 302)

These examples show how well-established the mechanism of shifting responsibility was in the nineteenth-century business community, at least according to specialised epistolary guides, in order to attempt to preserve the business relationship. The specific rhetorical choices and linguistic conventions to be used in a number of potentially conflictual, face-threatening communicative situations point to the predominance of negative politeness moves prescribed by the authors of the manuals. In fact, in similar situations of (potential) conflict negotiation which several other series describe⁵, the frequency of negative politeness strategies increases significantly. Such an increase can be explained by the contextual factor, with the emphasis on the correlation between the usage of specific pragmatic strategies and a type of the communicative situation.

My conclusions concerning the preference accorded to negative politeness strategies employed in an attempt to shift responsibility for a failed transaction are in line with the findings of a study which focused on authentic business correspondence (Dossena 2008). Dossena highlights how “[I]n a business context, the attribution of responsibility may be a very

⁵ For example, the series dedicated to “Trade between Fayal and London in fruit, wine, etc.” (Anderson 1860: 59-94) contains a total of 50 letters. This complex transaction involves two English businessmen, together with their partners in the Azores, Germany and Russia. The transaction results in a complete commercial failure which, moreover, puts a considerable strain on the professional, as well as the personal, relationships between the various partners. The model letters included in this series contain frequent examples of negative politeness moves employed by the participants in order to mitigate the consequences of such a “troublesome though trifling affair” (Anderson 1860: 90).

serious step to take [...]. In any case, the act is inevitably face-threatening" (2008: 236). High frequency of negative politeness moves prescribed by the authors of nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals also supports the conclusions made in the studies by Culpeper – Demmen (2012) and Jucker (2012). Culpeper and Demmen discuss the key sociocultural shifts which started to evolve in the British context in the second half of the eighteenth century. Among these, secularisation, industrialisation, geographical and social mobility, and the rise of individualism as a positive ideology are listed as factors which had significant impact on changes in linguistic practices (Culpeper – Demmen 2012: 52-60). They claim that these "sociocultural shifts [...] are consonant with changes in politeness practices and could be linked to the development and usage of a more individualistic style of politeness, including negative politeness" (Culpeper – Demmen 2012: 51). This hypothesis is validated by an analysis of linguistic data which clearly shows a rise in the usage of conventional indirect requests, exemplary of negative politeness strategies (Culpeper – Demmen 2012: 61-75)⁶. Jucker (2012) offers a description of the different periods in the history of English from the perspective of "particular types of politeness that predominate in the sources surviving from that period" (2012: 423). In line with Culpeper – Demmen (2012), Jucker focuses on the eighteenth century as the key period in which the conceptions of appropriate behaviour started to be associated with specific social positions, contributing to the increasing importance of the role of linguistic politeness (2012: 429). The historical and sociocultural shifts which continued to evolve in the course of the nineteenth century led to the prominence of non-imposition politeness. This development resulted in the increasingly frequent use of negative politeness strategies, such as, for example, off-record strategies or nonconventional indirectness (Jucker 2012: 430).

It can thus be said that manuals such as Anderson (1860 [1836]) and Williams – Lafont (1860) bear testimony to the ongoing codification of a new politeness culture, in Jucker's terms (2012: 423-424). In this process, according to Bannet, epistolary guides played an important role of "contribut[ing] to the construction of Britons as what Paul Langford has described as 'a polite and commercial people', as well as to what Americanists have called the 'anglicisation of America'" (2005: 23-24).

⁶ The corpora used by Culpeper – Demmen (2012) included ACLEP (*A Corpus of Late 18th Century Prose*), ACLMEP (*A Corpus of Late Modern English Prose*) and CONCE (*A Corpus of Nineteenth-century English*).

4. Concluding remarks

The analysis of two case-studies presented in this paper demonstrated the ways in which specialised nineteenth-century commercial letter-writing manuals aimed at familiarising their target group of readers with the contemporary global business context. This context, as depicted in the model letters dedicated to transnational business transactions, was permeated by solid global commercial networks, which functioned according to rigid norms of appropriate business conduct. The study of a popular specialised correspondence manual (Anderson 1860) has allowed me to show how easily and quickly British guides were exported and circulated in the global nineteenth-century business environment.

Commercial success of a business transaction in the nineteenth century depended to a large extent on the ability of the commercial partners to communicate effectively. However, model letters, offered to young men desirous of starting a career in commerce, not only sought to provide their readers with correct linguistic examples of proper commercial epistolary style. More importantly, the letters attempted to impart British norms and standards of gentlemanly behaviour in the business context, an operation deemed to be a fundamental part of the proper introduction of young learners to the ethics and the values that governed nineteenth-century business communication. A closer study of the rhetorical choices and linguistic conventions prescribed by the manuals shows the importance of strategies of negative politeness in commercial epistolary discourse. The use of specialised business letter-writing manuals would help young clerks, aspiring to become part of a global commercial network, to learn both the norms and the correct linguistic conventions associated with impeccable gentlemanly conduct, considered to be the main asset of the nineteenth-century businessman.

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