

外研社 高等英语教育学术会议文集

跨课程的中国英语写作教学与研究 ——第五届中国英语写作教学与研究 国际研讨会论文集

Teaching and Researching EFL Writing Across the Curriculum in China
— Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Teaching & Researching
EFL Writing in China

李炳林 编

Teaching
Researching
EFL
Writing

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前言

英语写作教学是一门艺术，可以说是一门遗憾的艺术，因为要想把写作教好不容易。但这门艺术有着永不衰减的活力，其生命力就在于它的风格。风格是指写作和说话的方式，做某事的方式。风格与教学法是有必然联系的，甚至可以说教学风格就是教学法。英语写作教学法有多少？从广义上讲，有多少位写作教师就可能有多少种教学法，有多少个班级就可能有多少种教学法，这是因为各位教师的教学风格不可能完全一样，即使他们是在使用同一教本。同一教师在教两个班级的同一课程时，他所使用的方法也不完全一样，因为课堂教学环节会因为教学背景的不同而有所调整，这种调整就体现为略有不同的教学方法。

英语写作教学法是多样化的，其展示方式也具有多样性。举办国际研讨会就是展示教学法的一种方式。中国英语写作教学与研究国际研讨会的召开给我国的英语写作教师提供了一个展现自己英语写作教学方法的极好机会，大家聚集一堂，互相交流，彼此学习，切磋教艺。中国英语写作教学与研究大会已经举办了五届。第一届在广东外语外贸大学举行，由中国学者、专家、教授、教师参加；第二、三、四、五届分别在西安外国语大学、武汉大学、对外经济贸易大学和贵州大学举行，并邀请了国外写作专家作大会主题发言。因此，邀请几个国家的专家作大会发言的会议应该算是国际研讨会，这是一个惯例，也为国内的英语写作教师提供了一个参加国际会议的机会。

在贵州大学召开的第五届中国英语写作教学与研究国际研讨会共有来自全国60多所大专院校的160多位第一线的英语写作教师参加，共收到论文摘要130多份，定稿论文30多篇。本论文集收集的论文共22篇，按篇名排列。收到的130多份论文摘要涵盖了下列大会议题：英语写作理论研究 (Studies of English Writing Theories)、修辞与英语写作 (Rhetoric and English Writing)、跨课程的英语写作教学与研究 (Teaching and Researching EFL Writing Across the Curriculum)、英语写作教师的发展 (The Development of EFL Writing Teachers)、英语写作方法研究 (Methods of Teaching EFL Writing)、英语写作及其测试、评估 (English Writing Testing and Assessment)、计算机与英语写作 (Computer and EFL Writing)、英语学术写作 (Academic English Writing)、文学与英语写作及教学 (Literature and English Writing & Teaching) 和其他英语写作教学与研究的前沿课题 (Other Frontier Subjects)，体现了这次大会的主题——跨课程的中国英语写作教学与研究 (Teaching and Researching EFL Writing Across the Curriculum in China)。

跨课程的英语写作 (WAC: Writing Across the Curriculum), 也称跨学科的写作 (WAD: Writing Across the Discipline) 在美国写作界研究得较多, 更不乏名人的参与, 如James L. Kinneavy。Kinneavy (1983) 认为: “Writing across the curriculum takes two forms: (1) writing-intensive courses in all departments, and (2) courses in writing for other disciplines offered by the English or writing department. In the first kind of program, the teacher is an expert in the discipline and knows its vocabulary and genres. Students can thus use highly technical language and discipline-specific forms of writing.” (“Writing across the curriculum”, *ADE Bulletin* 76, Winter)。David Hamilton (1980) 认为, 跨课程写作的目的是 “prepare students for all of their college courses”, 写作教师 “不应该只改正学生作文中的错误……而应该把写作过程作为学习模式展示给学生……” (“Interdisciplinary writing”, *CE* 41, March)。Elaine P. Maimon (2000)也认为: “The development of writing-across-the-curriculum programs has been an effort to make writing an integral part of the learning process in all courses. This effort reinforced the shift in composition pedagogy from a product to a process orientation, for the learning process and the writing process work together. Writing across the curriculum has also promoted collaborative learning techniques.” (“Writing across the curriculum: Past, present, and future” in C. W. Griffin (ed.). *Teaching Writing in All Disciplines.*)。Judy Kirscht等人 (1994) 在其 “Evolving paradigms: WAC and the rhetoric of inquiry” (*CCC* 45, October) 说: “The WAC Movement continues to be divided between the writing-to-learn model in which writing is seen as an integral part of the learning process in all disciplines and the writing-in-the-disciplines model which studies the discourse communities of the disciplines and brings that knowledge to the writing class.” David R. Russell (1991) 在其 *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870 to 1990: A Curricular History* 中通过研究认为: “...Writing across the curriculum has been more influential since 1970.”

我们今天的英语写作仍然具有跨课程的性质, 因为 “在大学里, 所有的课程都是写作课……写作是一种社会行为, 用英语写作则是一种国际社会行为” (李炳林, 2000)。就外语 (英语) 学院/系而言, 所开设的每门课都离不开写作, 课程之间有其共性, 即怎样用书面语言表达课程内容。本次收到的会议论文就体现了这一点。论文涵盖了对比修辞、论文思维、机辅写作、写作评估、写作策略、写作教学法、写作教师、课程发展等微学科。跨课程的英语写作教学具有多种风格因素, 这些因素融汇在写作过程与成果之间。

跨课程/学科的英语写作是常规英语写作与各应用学科之间的有机结合, 既需要英语文学写作功底, 又需要特殊行业英语写作知识。篇章结构学专家Vijay Bhatia (2007) 在其所作的大会主题报告中指出, 跨学科英语写作核心能力应被划分为四个层次: 第一个层次是英语语言应用能力, 也就是学生对词汇、语法等方面已达到熟练掌握的程度; 第二个层次是学生自身的写作能力, 即学生本身母语写作水平的高低对其英语写作能力有着潜移默化的影响; 第三个层次是专业英语写作能力, 这种专业英语能力与学生的专业直接挂钩, 涉及经济、管理、金融、法律等多个学科的专业知识; 第四个层次是跨文化社交能力, 是前三个层次的升华, 揉合了多种学科知识, 在写作上体现了跨学科性、社会性、批判性和观点性。王立非 (2007) 认为, 国内跨学科英语写作教学

与研究现在还停留在Bhatia所阐述的四个层次的前两个之上，尚处于初级阶段。他还认为，国内该领域研究要想达到国际先进水平，必须实现教研上的突破，这个突破在于完成从常规意义上的英语写作教研到专业英语写作教研的转变。

不管这个突破最终能达到什么程度，不管英语写作教学是否是一门看似遗憾的艺术，其生命力还仍然在其风格的多样性和跨课程/学科的特点，其原则就是适应性原则。我们在今后的英语写作教学中涌现出更多的教学风格，以保持英语写作教学这门艺术的活力。

李炳林

2008年7月于新西兰梅西大学

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A Contrastive Study of Indirectness in English Business Correspondence by Chinese and English Natives

Peng Linxia

Huang Li

Jiangnan University Wuhan University

Abstract: Politeness is one of the principles in business correspondence writing besides clearness and conciseness. Politeness is usually realized by indirectness, but overuse of indirectness will sacrifice the conciseness and clearness principles, so it is practical to study this phenomenon in business context. This study, framing on Searle's taxonomy of speech acts and his notion of indirect speech act, inquires into indirectness at not only the speech act level but also the discourse level in business correspondence, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Through the quantitative studies, it is revealed that at the speech act level, there is no significant difference in indirectness between the Chinese sample and the native sample, though the former adopts slightly less indirect speech acts than the latter; while at the discourse level, the Chinese sample is significantly more indirect, though indirectness at this level is not their peculiarity. Through the qualitative studies, it is discovered that Chinese and English natives differ in both their choice of indirectness strategies and the extent of indirectness, either in terms of speech act categories or in terms of business correspondence types. Then the results of the contrastive study are interpreted and discussed, with the underlying cultural factors explored from the following aspects: the value system, politeness and face, and language functions. At last, the theoretical and practical implications are explored based on the findings of the investigation.

Key words: English business correspondence, indirectness speech act, cultural difference

1. Introduction

Business communication has been regarded as the lifeline of modern business, and business correspondence is the most frequently used communication means in international trade. The essential qualities of business letters can be summarized as the "Three C's", namely, *clearness*, *conciseness*, and *courtesy* (Gan 1997), the last of which is compared to a powerful weapon in the war of business (Chen 1996). Courtesy or politeness is usually achieved by indirectness, and indirectness is usually politeness-motivated. Nearly all the major studies on indirectness and/or politeness assert a positive correlation between the two concepts (Lakoff 1973; Searle 1975; Fraser 1978; Leech 1983; Brown & Levinson 1987).

However, overuse of indirectness will go against the principles of clarity and conciseness, rendering the correspondence less efficient and even ineffective as suggested by the name of the Brown and Levinson's last and most indirect strategy "don't do the FTA". There have always been heated debates on whether Chinese with their collectivist orientation and high-context culture communicate in a more indirect manner than the Westerners who are typically characterized as individualistic and have a low-context culture (Tannen 1984; Ting-Toomey 1994; Gudykunst 1994; Engholm 1994; Kirkpatrick 1991; Yeung 1997; Gao & Ting-Toomey 1998; Skewis 2002; Beamer 2003; etc.). However, most of the studies on indirectness as well as politeness have concentrated on individual speech act and discrete politeness strategies adopted at the sentential level. With the belief that the speech act theory can be applied to discourse analysis (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975; Labov & Franshel 1977), and that the speech act, though a valuable starting point, will only be able to provide a full account of the politeness strategies if a sequential perspective is adopted (Pelegaard 1997), this study, after a comprehensive analysis of the indirectness of the individual speech acts, moves beyond to examine the management of indirectness at the discourse level in the enactment of politeness in order to ensure an overall revelation of the similarities and differences of indirectness from not only the micro-perspective but also macro-perspective.

2. Literature review

2.1 Conceptualizations of indirectness

Indirectness is a universal linguistic phenomenon, which is quite common in all cultures. According to *Collins Essential English Dictionary*, indirectness is something that is not done or caused directly, but by means of something or someone else. In our daily life, indirectness is generally understood as a kind of politeness-motivated strategy where people say one thing and mean another implicitly and in a roundabout way, as opposed to the direct strategy where people say something and just mean it explicitly and in a straightforward manner. In theoretical studies, indirectness has been defined from different perspectives. Searle (1975: 31) defines indirect speech acts as cases in which "one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another", while according to Grice, indirectness means deliberately breaching the cooperative maxims, hence giving rise to an intended non-conventional meaning which communicates more than what is actually said (Grice 1975). Brown and Levinson say that indirectness is communicative behavior, verbal or nonverbal, that conveys something more than or different from what it literally means, which in context could not be defended as ambiguous between literal and conveyed meaning(s), therefore provides no line of escape to the speaker or the hearer (Brown & Levinson 1987: 134). To sum up, indirectness occurs when there is a mismatch between the expressed meaning and the implied meaning (Thomas 1995). Indirectness has been predominantly defined from the aspect of individual speech acts in Western cultures, yet in Chinese culture where people are inclined to see

things from a more holistic point of view, indirectness seems to be more complicated. He Zhaoxiong, for instance, defines indirectness as talking in a roundabout way (He 2000). With the belief that indirectness can be realized not only in individual speech acts but also in the discourse structure, and that indirectness is largely a matter of degree (Leech 1983), in this cross-cultural contrastive investigation, the concept of indirectness is defined from two aspects as the extent to which the speaker's intention is implicit (at the speech act level) and the extent to which the speaker's intention is delayed (at the discourse level).

2.2 Indirectness and politeness

Indirectness is commonplace in communication because it enables speakers and writers to reconcile two opposing goals in discourse, to maneuver between what Lakoff (1975) calls the "Scylla and Charybdis" of communication: clarity and politeness. Generally speaking, clarity calls for explicit, direct communication, while politeness, on the other hand, calls for less explicit and more indirect communication. Politeness is always correlated or even equated with indirectness, and nearly all the major studies on indirectness and politeness assert a positive correlation between the two concepts; the most influential politeness theories have tended to present indirectness and politeness as "scaleable and parallel dimensions" (Blum-Kulka 1987: 131). Politeness is believed to be the chief motivation behind indirect language use (Searle 1975); and indirectness is the essence in the two most influential politeness theories¹. Leech (1983), for instance, put forward his politeness principles (PP) as the underlying mechanism of the conversational implicature; Leech patterns his PP theory after Grice's CP but claims that though the CP has a function of regulating what people say so that it contributes to some assumed illocutionary or discoursal goal, the CP itself cannot explain why people are often so indirect in expressing what they mean. Only the PP, which has a higher regulative role than the CP, can "rescue the CP from serious trouble" as a necessary complement (p. 80). Leech defines politeness as forms of behavior that are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of comity. He proposes that the PP aims to "minimize the expression of impolite beliefs" (p. 81). Like Searle, Leech also believes that politeness is the motivation of indirectness because indirect illocutions increase the degree of optionality. The more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tends to be (p. 108).

Similarly, in Brown & Levinson's (1987) face-saving theory, politeness is correlated with indirectness. Based on the notion of face raised by Goffman (1959), Brown & Levinson claim that face is something that is emotionally invested, which can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to be in interaction. Brown & Levinson believe that most speech acts are intrinsically face-threatening

1 The four approaches to politeness refer to 1) the social-norm view; 2) the conversational-maxim view; 3) the face-saving view; and 4) the conversational-contract view. Among these four approaches, the most influential ones are Leech's politeness principles and the face-saving theory put forward by Brown & Levinson.

called face-threatening acts (FTAs), threatening to the interactant's positive and/or negative face. Therefore they define politeness as a strategic redressive action taken by every model person to counter-balance the disruptive effect of FTAs. According to the different levels of indirectness, Brown & Levinson distinguish a hierarchy of five scales of politeness strategies from the most direct to the most indirect, namely, 1) without redressive actions, baldly; 2) positive politeness; 3) negative politeness; 4) off record; and 5) don't do the FTA, to be selectively adopted according to the weightiness of the FTA codetermined by the social distance between the interactants $D(S, H)$, the relative power of the hearer over the speaker $P(H, S)$ and the absolute ranking of the imposition R_x . The weightier the FTA, the more indirect strategies preferred.

Despite the unanimous agreement on the correlation of politeness and indirectness in the major theories, different arguments are still available, particularly in the descriptive studies on conventional and non-conventional directive discourses. Blum-Kulka & House (1989), for instance, in their CCSARP, found out that conventional indirect strategies are the dominant choice in making requests in five languages, where conventional indirect discourse (CID) is allocated with higher politeness ratings than the more indirect non-conventional indirect discourse (NCID) (House 1986; Blum-Kulka 1987). Furthermore, Kasper (1994) suggests that there are cultures in which directness, rather than indirectness is paradigmatic of politeness. In China, a number of studies have been conducted on the relationship between indirectness and politeness in spoken as well as written Chinese and EFL. In an application of the CCSARP framework to Chinese, CID is found to be both the most commonly used and the most polite form in making requests (Zhang 1995a, 1995b; Zhang & Wang 1997). Other researches (Kirkpatrick 1991; Hong 1996) seem to suggest that Chinese politeness does not necessarily lie in the indirectness of the speech act proper; rather, it is more often associated with the context: the information sequencing, the pregrounders and the amount of supportive moves that precede a request. Still others such as Skewis (2003) demonstrate that direct, bald on-record strategies are the most frequently used types in Chinese, and that in Chinese, politeness is primarily conveyed by linguistic tools that weaken the illocutionary verb force such as particles and reduplication, and by other lexical means such as terms of address and politeness markers.

2.3 Contrastive studies on politeness in business correspondence

The pragmatic aspects of learners' language have been receiving more and more attention as researchers are becoming increasingly aware that the goal of second language acquisition (SLA) research is to describe and explain not only learner's linguistic competence, but also their pragmatic competence. Business correspondence is a type of professional communication in the written form, in which "the local socio-cultural constraints play a significant role in the linguistic realization" (Bhatia 1993). Successful business communication across cultures requires both linguistic proficiency and cross-cultural awareness, which can be enhanced by contrasts between the mother tongue and the second language (L2).

As politeness is of primary concern in business letter writing, most researches on the pragmatic

aspects of business correspondence written by Chinese English learners have been concentrated on politeness studies. Liu (2005), for example, in her contrastive studies of politeness strategies in English business letters written by Chinese and Westerners, reveals that the Chinese adopt significantly less negative politeness strategies than the English natives, and claims that this is due to the lack of counterpart to the Western concept of negative face in China; Cai (2003), by equalizing the Chinese maxims of agreement and maxim of virtue in Chinese business letters with Brown & Levinson's positive and negative politeness strategies in English business letters, also finds that Chinese people adopt significantly less politeness strategies than the native English speakers in business letter writing. Yeung (1997), in her study of the effect of the three factors of imposition, social distance and relative power on the politeness strategies in English and Chinese business correspondence written by Hong Kong people, discovers that only the factor of imposition alone has a statistically significant impact on linguistic choice in the letters in English while none of the factors shows any significance in the letters in Chinese, combined or single.

Politeness is usually realized by indirectness, yet research on indirectness is rarely (but not nonexistent) carried out in the field of business correspondence. Beamer (2003) in her study of business correspondence written by Chinese in the 19th century finds that the Chinese tend to be more direct in both making requests and transferring information. She concludes that these Chinese business personnel chose to communicate in a rather direct style in order to develop and maintain intimacy. However, the only study available on indirectness in business correspondence comes to its conclusion not by strict quantitative contrasts, but more through personal judgments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the indirectness at both the speech act level and the discourse level in English business correspondence. At each level, a quantitative study of indirectness is made in general to address the research question, and a qualitative study is made in detail as a complement.

First, Searle's taxonomy of speech acts and his notion of indirect speech acts are applied systematically to all the speech acts in every correspondence to identify the speech act type and then the directness/indirectness of each speech act in order to compare and contrast indirectness at the speech act level in the two samples. Then the head act in each business letter is identified, and the number of speech acts preceding it is counted and compared to examine the similarities and differences in indirectness at the discourse level in the two samples. At last, an analysis of the underlying cultural factors is made regarding the findings of the first two research questions, which constitutes the third research question of the investigation.

Hence, the three research questions that guide the investigation are specified as follows:

1) From a micro-perspective, do Chinese people communicate more indirectly at the speech act level in business letter writing? This is quantified as: are indirect speech acts adopted more frequently in the business correspondence written by the Chinese than in those by the native English speakers?

2) From a macro-perspective, do Chinese people communicate more indirectly at the discourse level in business letter writing? This is quantified as: are there more speech acts prior to the head acts in the business correspondence written by the Chinese than those by the native English speakers?

3) What are the cultural factors underlying the features of indirectness revealed by the above two research questions? This is addressed by introspection on the contributing cultural factors to the results of the first two research questions, and thus is exploratory in nature.

3.2 Research materials

20 letters are chosen at equal interval from each of four groups of English business letters respectively labeled as collaborative, convivial, competitive and conflictive in both the Chinese-authored sample and the English-speaker-authored sample collected from foreign trade companies offered for academic research only.

3.3 Procedure

First, all the speech acts in the business correspondence were identified in terms of direct or indirect speech act, and the category to which they pertained according to Searle's taxonomy. After that the head act in each letter was located with considerations of the type of business correspondence the letter belongs to. After these two procedures, an Excel perspective program was run in order to obtain the numbers of indirect speech acts and the numbers of speech acts prior to the head act in each and every business correspondence for further analysis.

The data derived from the above-mentioned methods were analyzed in the following steps to address the research questions in this investigation.

Firstly, in order to test whether or not Chinese are more indirect than native English speakers at the speech act level, an independent samples t-test for equality of means was run to find out the frequencies and standard deviation of indirect speech acts in the two samples, and to test the null hypothesis of the first research question. After the t-test, the degrees of indirectness was also compared in terms of speech act categories and business correspondence types in the two samples to probe into the similarities and differences in more specific aspects.

After this procedure to test the indirectness at the speech act level, the same t-test program was repeated to find out the means and standard deviation of the numbers of speech acts prior to the head act

in each sample, in order to test the null hypothesis of the second research question. This procedure is quite similar to the previous one. After the comparison in general, the numbers of speech acts prior to the head acts in terms of business correspondence types were compared in specific, the results of which were analyzed and interpreted.

After all these comparisons and contrasts, the similarities and differences revealed were analyzed and discussed, and then the cultural aspects that exert the most important influence on language use were explored in detail.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Results at the speech act level

At this level, indirectness is represented by the number as well as percentage of indirect speech acts. It is found that 24.91% (144 out of 578) of speech acts in the Chinese sample are indirect, while 29.07% (157 out of 540) of the native authored sample are indirect. Therefore, the native sample appears to be a little more indirect than the Chinese sample with more indirect speech acts, though both are rather direct at large. In order to determine whether this difference is of statistical significance, the independent samples t-test of equality of means is applied, which puts out the following results as shown in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 as follows:

Table 4.1 Frequency of indirect speech acts in the two samples

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The native sample	80	1.96	1.141	0.128
The Chinese sample	80	1.80	1.277	0.143

Table 4.2 Results of the independent samples t-test for equality of means

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.268	0.134	0.849	158	0.397	0.16	0.191	-0.216	0.541

(To be continued)

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Equal variances not assumed			0.849	156.048	0.397	0.16	0.191	-0.216	0.541
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As demonstrated above, the result for Levene's test of equality of variances is proved to be insignificant, and thus equal variance is assumed. The absolute t-value is smaller than the critical value with 158df, and $p > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the first research question that there is no difference of indirectness at the speech act level cannot be rejected. This means Chinese people do not communicate significantly more directly or indirectly than the native speakers at the speech act level in business letter writing, though in this investigation the Chinese sample adopts slightly less indirect speech acts than the native sample.

4.1.2 Results at the discourse level

At this level, indirectness is represented by the number of speech acts prior to the head acts. When the numbers of the speech acts prior to the head acts are calculated, it is found that business correspondence in the Chinese sample in general contains more speech acts prior to the head acts. Hence, Chinese business letters tend to be more indirect in discourse structure than those written by the native English speakers. A run of the independent samples t-test of equality of means turns out the following results as presented in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 below:

Table 4.3 Speech acts prior to the head acts

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The Chinese sample	80	2.46	1.517	0.170
The native sample	80	1.83	1.394	0.156

Table 4.4 Results of the independent samples t-test for equality of means

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper

(To be continued)

(Continued from previous page)

Equal variances assumed	2.291	0.132	2.767	158	0.006	0.64	0.230	0.182	1.093
Equal variances not assumed			2.767	156.880	0.006	0.64	0.230	0.182	1.093

As shown in Table 4.3, the native sample has averagely 1.83 speech acts prior to the head act per letter, while the number in the Chinese sample amounts to 2.46, exceeding its native counterpart by 0.63 speech act. In Table 4.4, it can be found that equality of variances is assumed as Levene’s test turns out an insignificant value (0.132), then the t value with degree of freedom being 158 is 2.767, exceeding the critical value at this level (1.96), and $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the Chinese sample uses significantly more speech acts prior to the head acts, and thus the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in indirectness at the discourse level must be rejected. Meanwhile, as the Chinese sample has averagely more speech acts prior to the head act, the alternative hypothesis that Chinese communicate significantly more indirectly than native English speakers at the discourse level in business correspondence must be true.

In terms of specific types of business correspondence, it is found that the Chinese sample excels in indirectness in every type of business correspondence in different degrees as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

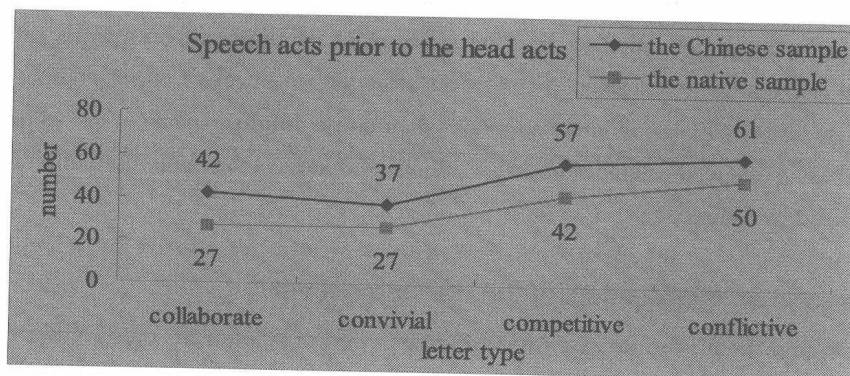


Figure 4.1 Number of speech acts prior to the head acts in terms of letter types

As Figure 4.1 demonstrates, in either sample the conflictive group exhibits the highest degree of indirectness with the largest number of speech acts prior to the head acts, which is then followed by the competitive group, while the collaborative group and the convivial group are less indirect with smaller number of speech acts prior to the head acts. However, one minor difference emerges that in the Chinese sample, the convivial group is apparently the most direct one with five speech acts less than the collaborative group, while in the native sample, these two groups share an identical number of speech acts prior to the head acts.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Discussions on indirectness at the speech act level

In our daily communication, it is indirect speech acts rather than direct speech acts that are usually more preferable. As Thomas points out, "People do not always or even usually say what they mean" (Thomas 1995). In this investigation, however, both samples of business correspondence seem to favor direct speech acts more than indirect speech acts; a scrutiny of the samples in terms of speech act categories finds that in fact both samples are more indirect than direct in all categories of speech acts but the assertives and the expressives. This is roughly in line with the findings of Hassell, Beecham & Christensen's research of indirect speech acts in business communication, where directives and commissives are twice as likely to be performed indirectly as to be performed directly, and over 96% of the declarations are indirect speech acts.

Compared with the native sample, the Chinese sample on the whole uses less indirect speech acts and more direct speech acts, indicating that the Chinese are not more indirect at the speech act level than native English speakers in business writing, which is contrary to the common wisdom that Chinese people express more implicitly and indirectly than Westerners. Although it is quite an unexpected result, similar results can still be found in previous researches in this field. Beamer (2003), for instance, finds that Chinese people communicated rather directly in order to indicate intimacy in her studies of business letters written by some Chinese business personnel in the 19th century. The findings of both Cai's (2003) and Liu's (2005) cross-cultural contrastive studies of politeness strategies in business correspondence that Chinese people tend to use less negative politeness strategies than native English speakers in business writing can also be regarded as a beneficial reference to this result, as politeness is the main motivation for indirectness and is often realized by indirectness.

4.2.2 Discussions on indirectness at the discourse level

At the discourse level, the degree of indirectness is represented by the number of speech acts preceding the head acts that express the core information of the correspondence. With a comparison of the numbers of speech acts prior to the head acts, this investigation reveals that in general, the Chinese people are significantly more indirect at this level than native English speaker in business letter writing. This confirms the hypothesis of the second research question as well as the common belief that Chinese communicate more indirectly than Westerners. Besides, Chinese people also prefer to use more greetings, expressions of thanks or regret as well as some other remarks to attend to the addressee in order to foster a friendly atmosphere before getting down to business. Therefore, the Chinese business correspondence tends to be lengthier with a more indirect organization than the native English sample.

Apart from the larger number of speech acts in total, an analysis in terms of the letter types shows