

MANAGING THE EXPRESSION OF POLITENESS. A DIACHRONIC APPROACH TO THE GERMAN AND ROMANIAN PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

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Abstract The present study aims to explore the linguistic journey of polite communication in the last two centuries. For this purpose, the article scrutinises German and Romanian professional correspondence and identifies the transformations letter writing has undergone by defining the most relevant patterns of politeness: semantic typology, idiosyncratic language, epistemic and deontic modalities. We conclude that polite interactions unfold in a multitude of eloquent and expressive formulations in earlier letters, whereas modern writings orientate themselves towards the mundane, seek simplicity and are stripped off from ornaments and redundant formulations.

Keywords Professional correspondence, diachronic linguistics, politeness, German and Romanian letters.

Introduction

Correspondence, in all its types, such as family, official, business and professional, is highly valued by researchers in humanities, as it vividly mirrors in depth the social, cultural and anthropological aspects of an epoch. Therefore, letters are of interest to several sciences and can be analysed from a multi- or pluridisciplinary standpoint, the result being a developing “culture of epistolarity from different perspectives.”¹

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¹ Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti, “Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern Culture: An Introduction,” *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, no. 3 (2014): 17-35.

This study examines the expression of politeness through a qualitative approach in the context of German and Romanian professional correspondence. The focus of our diachronic research has been on the evolution of the role of politeness and its linguistic expression in a corpus of German and Romanian correspondence over a period of almost 200 years (1835 – present day). We have identified such elements of linguistic and pragmatic remodelling of politeness as semantic typology, idiosyncratic language, epistemic and deontic modality.

Literature Review

As already indicated, epistles lend themselves to being studied from various angles, e.g., as “sociocultural praxis”, or a “means of communication” or a “rather complex category of historical sources.”² In other research, the emphasis is on social relationships between the correspondents, as “information, power and persuasion”³ or as “stance and authority.”⁴ Similarly, letters have been surveyed in terms of linguistic relevance, such as textual strategies⁵, secretary language⁶ and politeness⁷. Referring to the diachronic presentation of correspondence, diverse studies show a direct correlation between the linguistic and the socio-cultural aspect of an ESP (English for Specific Purposes) text. In this respect, Banks identifies linguistic features demonstrating this correlation, such as semantic typology of topical themes, types of modality – epistemic modality and deontic modality.⁸

Along with the subject of correspondence in itself, the topic of politeness in business and professional letters is basically related to the historical, social, cultural and anthropological layers of a specific community. This article does not consider politeness strictly under the

² “Introduction,” in *Reading, Interpreting and Historicizing: Letters as Historical Sources*, eds. Regina Schulte and Xenia von Tippelskirch (San Domenico (FI): European University Institute, 2004), 5.

³ Susan M. Fitzmaurice, “Diplomatic Business: Information, Power, and Persuasion in Late Modern English Diplomatic Correspondence,” in *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, eds. Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 77.

⁴ Dossena Marina, “Stance and Authority in Nineteenth-century Bank Correspondence – a Case Study”, in *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, eds. Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 175.

⁵ Urszula Okulska, “Textual Strategies in the Diplomatic Correspondence of the Middle and Early Modern English Periods: The Narrative Report Letter as a Genre” in *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, eds. Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 47.

⁶ Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, “Edward Pearson Esq^r.: The Language of an Eighteenth-century Secretary” in *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, eds. Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 129.

⁷ Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti, “Conduct yourself towards all persons on every occasion with civility and in a wise and prudent manner; this will render you esteemed”: Stance Features in Nineteenth-century Business Letters” in *Business and Official Correspondence: Historical Investigations*, eds. Marina Dossena and Susan M. Fitzmaurice (Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006), 153.

⁸ David Banks, “Diachronic ESP: at the interface of linguistics and cultural studies,” *Approches des domaines spécialisés en anglais de spécialité*, no. 61 (2012): 55-70.

Goffman's theory of *face*⁹ or Brown and Levinson's politeness theory.¹⁰ In our view, politeness is a concept, a phenomenon and a practice highly linked to the societal environment. Our premise is that the linguistic devices used in one epoch to express politeness are different compared to those of a different epoch. Therefore, this paper exhibits and discusses the transformations that occurred in the linguistic management of politeness in German and Romanian professional letters from 1835 to present time.

Research Methodology & Corpus

This part features the expression of politeness in German and Romanian professional correspondence from three different periods, namely from 1835 to 1900, from 1900 to 1970 and from 1970 to the present day. This division in time has been made according to the lexical and semantic complexity of structures. As such, at the linguistic level, the article ponders the alterations letter writing has suffered over the last two centuries, by outlining the most tangible attributes based on which polite interactions may chronicle themselves. In this section, we proceed with a qualitative study of German and Romanian professional correspondence, our approach being underpinned by both the description and the interpretation of data.

The research corpus for the first two periods represents, on the one hand, the correspondence between prominent personalities of the age, which bears a special value for the facets and directions of letter writing in general and politeness strategies in particular. On the other hand, for the period between 1970 to the present day, we have utilised textbooks of business and professional correspondence, which provide more definite guidelines for the conception of letters.

Findings and Discussion

German Professional Correspondence

Letters between 1835 – 1900

The following patterns of politeness emerge at the linguistic level:

⁹ Erving Goffman, "On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction", *Psychiatry*, no. 18 (1955): 213-231.

¹⁰ Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

- formal salutations: "Sehr verehrter Herr."¹¹ ("Highly Esteemed Sir")¹²; "Euer Majestät! Allergnädigster Kaiser und Herr!"¹³ ("Your Majesty! Most Gracious Emperor and Lord"); "Durchlauchtig-Hochgeborner Fürst!"¹⁴ ("Most Serene Highborn Prince");

- formal closings: "Mit dem Ausdruck meiner vorzüglichsten Hochachtung"¹⁵ ("With the expression of my highest consideration"); "Euerer Durchlaucht gehorsamster Diener"¹⁶ ("Your Serene Highness' most obedient servant"); "Genehmigen Euere Durchlaucht den aufrichtigen Ausdruck der hohen Verehrung und unerschütterlichen Anhänglichkeit Ihres ergebensten Dieners"¹⁷ ("Allow, Your Serene Highness, the sincere expression of the high reverence and unwavering loyalty of your most devoted servant");

- semi-formal and informal greetings: "Mein lieber Graf!"¹⁸ ("My dear Count");

- semi-formal and informal endings: "Erhalten Sie mir Ihre Freundschaft, wie ich Ihnen Bürge für die meinige bin."¹⁹ ("Preserve your friendship for me, as I am your guarantor for mine."); "Empfangen Sie nebstbey die Versicherung meiner ebenso aufrichtigen Hochachtung als unverbrüchlichen Freundschaft."²⁰ ("Please also receive the assurance of my equally sincere esteem and unswerving friendship.");

- courteous introductory sentences, announcing the reasons for exchanging letters: "Für die freundliche Uebersendung Ihrer Abhandlung [...] drücke ich Ihnen meinen ergebensten Dank aus."²¹ ("For the kind sending of your treatise [...] I express my most sincere thanks."); "Entschuldigen Sie gütigst die Freiheit, mit der ich es mir erlaube, die folgenden

¹¹ *Die orientalische Gelehrtenrepublik am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Willi Bang (-Kaup) und Friedrich Carl Andreas aus den Jahren 1889 bis 1914*, in *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Neue Folge*, Band 20, eds. Michael Knüppel and Alois von Tongerloo (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2012), 27.

¹² The translation of the German examples is our own throughout the article unless cited from original sources. Original translations are mentioned in footnotes. For a better understanding, the translation of the examples is provided in contemporary English.

¹³ Balthasar Schmadl, "Donauschwaben, Banater Schwaben 1848 – 1945. Die ungarische 48er Revolution", in *Nitzkydorf. Chronik und Heimatbuch einer deutschen Gemeinde im Banat 1785 – 1992*, eds. Dr. Balthasar Schmadl, Georg Schmadl and Peter Konrad (München: Heimatortsgemeinschaft Nitzkydorf, 1994), 275.

¹⁴ *Metternich-Hartig. Ein Briefwechsel des Staatskanzlers aus dem Exil. 1848 – 1851* (Wien, Leipzig: Wiener Literarische Anstalt, 1923), 24.

¹⁵ *Die orientalische Gelehrtenrepublik am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Willi Bang (-Kaup) und Friedrich Carl Andreas aus den Jahren 1889 bis 1914*, 27.

¹⁶ *Metternich-Hartig. Ein Briefwechsel des Staatskanzlers aus dem Exil. 1848 – 1851*, 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ *Briefwechsel Cantor – Dedekind*, eds. E. Noether and J. Cavaillès (Paris: Hermann & C^{ie}, 1937), 12.

Zeilen an Sie zu richten.”²² (“Please accept my apologies for taking the liberty of addressing the following lines to you.”); “Wenn ich Ihnen, [...], für Ihr freundliches Geschenk noch immer nicht gedankt habe, so müssen Sie das den Umständen zu Gute halten.”²³ (“If I have still not thanked you, [...], for your kind gift, you must credit the circumstances”);

- attentive, considerate and humble modalities of expressing requests for consent and permission: “Gestatten [...] Sie mir, Ihnen eine Frage vorzulegen”²⁴ (“Allow me [...] to submit a question to you”); “Indessen bitte ich Sie mir die Bemerkung zu erlauben”²⁵ (“Meanwhile, please allow me to make the following comment”); “so wagen auch wir demütigst Gefertigte im Namen aller deutschen Gemeinden kniefällig zu bitten:”²⁶ (“We, too, humbly dare to ask on our knees in the name of all German communities:”); “Im Anschlusse erlaube ich mir Euerer Durchlaucht eine kleine Denkschrift [...] zu übersenden.”²⁷ (“Subsequently, I take the liberty of sending Your Serene Highness a small memorandum [...]);

- admiration and recognition: “In der Erwartung Ihrer gütigen Antwort”²⁸ (“Awaiting your gracious reply”); “Sie die liebenswürdige Güte gehabt haben”²⁹ (you have had the gracious kindness); “dem großen Staatsmanne, dessen Herz so hoch für das Vaterland schlägt”³⁰ (“to the great statesman whose heart beats so warmly for the fatherland”).

As the above examples from the period 1835 – 1900 illustrate, politeness prevails in a conglomerate of refined and cultivated linguistic structures, ranging from formal and informal salutations and appropriate closings to considerate lead-in sentences and cordial requests for permission, richly embellished with expressions pertaining to deep respect, honour and devotion towards the recipient of the letters. It takes shape in a multitude of positive and supportive adjectives, some of them even used in the superlative degree, and in a wide range of verbs introducing the idea of permission (e.g. “allow”, “take the liberty”, “dare to ask”). Not only can an undivided attention be observed towards the addressee, but humility, compliance and helpfulness are also to be discerned in the writer’s attitude.

²² *Die orientalische Gelehrtenrepublik am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Willi Bang (-Kaup) und Friedrich Carl Andreas aus den Jahren 1889 bis 1914*, 27.

²³ Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *Sämtliche Briefe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe. Briefe 1805 – 1838*, ed. Winfried Woesler (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1987), 192.

²⁴ *Briefwechsel Cantor – Dedekind*, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁶ Schmadl, “Donauschwaben, Banater Schwaben 1848 – 1945. Die ungarische 48er Revolution”, 277.

²⁷ *Metternich-Hartig. Ein Briefwechsel des Staatskanzlers aus dem Exil. 1848 – 1851*, 25.

²⁸ *Die orientalische Gelehrtenrepublik am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Willi Bang (-Kaup) und Friedrich Carl Andreas aus den Jahren 1889 bis 1914*, 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁰ *Metternich-Hartig. Ein Briefwechsel des Staatskanzlers aus dem Exil. 1848 – 1851*, 35.

Letters between 1900 - 1970

Politeness comes to the foreground in the linguistic constructions below:

- formal greetings: "Sehr geehrter Herr"³¹ ("Dear Mr")³²; "Hochgeehrter Herr Doktor"³³ ("Honourable Doctor"); "Werter Herr Professor Oberth!"³⁴ ("Dear Professor Oberth"); "Euere Exzellenz, Hochverehrter Herr Landesbischof!"³⁵ ("Your Excellency, Most Reverend Bishop");

- official forms of signing off: "Mit den besten Grüßen Ihr sehr ergebener"³⁶ ("With best regards, yours very devoted"); "Mit dem Ausdruck meiner besonderen Hochachtung"³⁷ ("With the expression of my highest consideration"); "In der Hoffnung baldigst freudige Antwort über [...] zu hören, bin ich Ihr ergebener Dr. Franz Höfft"³⁸ ("In the hope of hearing a joyful answer about [...] as soon as possible, I am yours devoted Dr Franz Höfft");

- semi-formal and informal salutations: "Lieber Kollege!"³⁹ ("Dear Colleague"); "Lieber Herr Einstein!"⁴⁰ ("Dear Mr Einstein");

- semi-formal and informal closings: "Ich grüße Sie herzlich"⁴¹ ("I greet you cordially"); "Mit herzlichstem Gruß"⁴² ("With the warmest greetings");

- respectful and considerate openings stating the purpose of the writing: "Ihr geschätztes Schreiben vom 15/I 24 erhielt ich gestern. Besten Dank für die Liebenswürdigkeit"⁴³ ("I received your esteemed letter of 15/I 24 yesterday. Many thanks for

³¹ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec's Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, eds. Stelian Mândruț and Rudolf Gräf, (Cluj-Napoca / Klausenburg: Academia Română / Rumänische Akademie, 2010), 155.

³² The English translation cannot properly render the exact meaning of "Sehr geehrter / Sehr geehrte", which implies additional nuances like "honourable" or "highly esteemed".

³³ Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister, *Briefe 1909 – 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1965), 11.

³⁴ Hermann Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Hans Barth, I Band (Bukarest: Kriterion Verlag, 1979), 25.

³⁵ Joachim Wittstock, "Nationale Pathologie. Unduldsames Verdrängen des Jüdischen.", in *„Bitte um baldige Nachricht“. Alltag, Politik und Kultur im Spiegel südostdeutscher Korrespondenz*, eds. Joachim Wittstock and Stefan Sienerth, Wissenschaftliche Reihe (Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte), 97, (München: IKGS Verlag, 2003): 44.

³⁶ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 9.

³⁷ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec's Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, 156.

³⁸ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ Albert Einstein and Hedwig und Max Born, *Briefwechsel 1916 – 1955* (München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1969), 58.

⁴¹ Freud and Pfister, *Briefe 1909 – 1939*, 26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴³ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 10.

your kindness”); “Ich erlaube mir anzufragen, bis wann wir auf Ihren geschätzten Beitrag rechnen dürfen”⁴⁴ (“Might I kindly ask you when we can expect your esteemed contribution”); “Aus Ihren werten Zeilen habe ich gerne ersehen”⁴⁵ (“From your valuable lines I have gladly seen”); “In der Beilage darf ich Ihnen meinen Aufsatz [...], zusenden”⁴⁶ (“I may enclose my essay [...], which I would like to send to you”); “Ihr Brief hat meine Freude an der von Ihnen inaugurierten Wissenschaft noch bestärkt.”⁴⁷ (“Your letter has further strengthened my pleasure in the science you inaugurate”);

- inversion through which the focus shifts from the doer of the action to the verb to render the message less writer-centered: “Erwähnen möchte ich noch”⁴⁸ (“I would also like to mention”)⁴⁹; “Werde mir Mühe geben”⁵⁰ (“Will make an effort”);

- second conditional clauses for polite requests: “Ich würde Ihnen sehr dankbar sein, wenn Sie in der Deutschen Akademie eine Besprechung [...] drucken würden.”⁵¹ (“I would be grateful if you would print a review [...] in the German Academy.”); “Verehere ich doch in Ihnen”⁵² (“I admire in you”);

- the subjunctive mood for polite offers, recommendations, appeals and invitations: “Ich würde Ihnen auch empfehlen”⁵³ (“I would also recommend to you”); “Sie dürften jedenfalls versichert sein,”⁵⁴ (“You should in any case be insured”);

- indirect ways of expressing requests for permission: “Zugleich nehme ich mir die Freiheit auf einen Gegenstand zurückzukommen”⁵⁵ (“At the same time I take the liberty of returning to a subject”); “Ich erlaube mir, Ihnen den Abdruck meines Aufsatzes zuzusenden”⁵⁶ (“I take the liberty of sending you the imprint of my essay”);

⁴⁴ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec’s Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, 157.

⁴⁵ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 21.

⁴⁶ “Auszug aus dem unveröffentlichten Briefwechsel zwischen Martin Heidegger und Otto Pöggeler” *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 1, no. 3-4 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2001): 20.

⁴⁷ Freud and Pfister, *Briefe 1909 – 1939*, 14.

⁴⁸ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 49.

⁴⁹ The English translation cannot properly render the idea of inversion.

⁵⁰ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 75.

⁵¹ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec’s Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, 161.

⁵² Stefan Sienerth, “Den Humor noch nicht verloren. Zuschriften von Gustav Kisch an Friedrich Teutsch”, in *Bitte um baldige Nachricht. Alltag, Politik und Kultur im Spiegel südostdeutscher Korrespondenz*, eds. Joachim Wittstock and Stefan Sienerth, Wissenschaftliche Reihe (Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte), 97, (München: IKGS Verlag, 2003): 271.

⁵³ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 52.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁵ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec’s Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, 159.

⁵⁶ *Ist der Sozialismus zu retten? Briefwechsel zwischen Georg Lukács und Werner Hofmann*, ed. György Iván Mezei (Budapest: T-Twins, 1991), 19.

- appreciation and praise: "Ihre geschätzten Briefe"⁵⁷ ("Your esteemed letters"); "Mit dem Ausdruck meiner aufrichtigen Dankbarkeit"⁵⁸ ("With the expression of my sincere gratitude"); "Ihre liebenswürdigen Zeilen"⁵⁹ ("Your gracious lines").

The extracts from professional correspondence of the period 1900 – 1970 indicate an abundant presence of politeness conveyed through conditional clauses, less direct offers, suggestions, requests in the subjunctive mood, as well as more subtle and fine-drawn modalities of asking for permission. Through inversion the focus switches to the addressee, the writer taking thus a backstage position. As prevalent qualities, gratitude, devotion and recognition further permeate polite structures.

Letters between 1970 – to Present Day

Politeness is rendered as follows:

- formal openings: "Sehr geehrter Herr Direktor!"⁶⁰ ("Dear Mr Director"); "Sehr geehrte Frau...", "Sehr geehrter Herr...", "Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren"⁶¹ ("Dear Mrs / Ms...", "Dear Mr...", "Dear Sir or Madam");

- formal closings: "In Erwartung Ihrer baldigen Antwort verbleiben wir", "Für eine baldige Antwort wären wir Ihnen sehr verbunden."⁶² ("We look forward to your reply as soon as possible", "We would be much obliged for an early reply."); "Wir freuen uns auf eine gute Zusammenarbeit.", "Wir sind neugierig (gespannt), wie Sie unsere Vorschläge beurteilen."⁶³ ("We are looking forward to a good cooperation.", "We are curious (excited) to see how you rate our proposals"); "Für Ihre Bemühungen herzlichen Dank."⁶⁴ ("For your efforts sincere thanks.")⁶⁵, "Es wäre schön, wenn Sie"⁶⁶ ("It would be perfect if you")⁶⁷; "Herzliche Grüße", "Mit besten Grüßen", "Hochachtungsvoll"⁶⁸ ("Kind regards", "With best regards", "Yours

⁵⁷ Oberth, *Briefwechsel*, 55.

⁵⁸ *Die orientalische Gelehrtenrepublik am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Willi Bang (-Kaup) und Friedrich Carl Andreas aus den Jahren 1889 bis 1914*, 35.

⁵⁹ *Între știință și politică. Fritz Valjavec și corespondenții săi români (1935 – 1944) / Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik. Fritz Valjavec's Briefwechsel mit rumänischen Gelehrten (1935 – 1944)*, 158.

⁶⁰ Elisabeta Barbu, *Correspondență comercială în limba germană* (Bucharest: Academia "Ștefan Gheorghiu", 1984), 11.

⁶¹ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, (Mannheim, Leipzig, Wien, Zürich: Dudenverlag, 1997), 147.

⁶² Barbu, *Correspondență comercială în limba germană*, 16.

⁶³ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 148.

⁶⁴ *Englisch für den Beruf*, (Köln: Serges Medien GmbH, 2000), 10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁸ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 148.

respectfully"); "Geben Sie uns bald Bescheid?", "Über eine schnelle Lösung freuen wir uns."⁶⁹ ("Will you let us know soon?", "We look forward to a quick solution."); "Konnten wir Ihr Interesse wecken?"⁷⁰ ("Could we arouse your interest?");

- semi-formal and informal greetings: "Liebe Frau Hoffmann!", "Lieber Herr Hoffmann!"⁷¹ ("Dear Mrs / Ms Hoffmann", "Dear Mr Hoffmann")⁷²; "Guten Tag, Frau..."⁷³ ("Good day / afternoon Mrs / Ms ..."); "Liebe(r)", "Hallo"⁷⁴ ("Dear", "Hello");

- semi formal and informal endings: "Mit besten Grüßen aus", "Mit besten Grüßen nach"⁷⁵ ("Best regards from", "Best regards to"); "Ich wünsche Ihnen noch eine erfolgreiche Restwoche und gute Erholung"⁷⁶ ("I wish you a successful remaining week and good rest"); "Herzlichst", "Liebe Grüße"⁷⁷ ("Warmly", "Lovely greetings");

- polite first sentences introducing the reasons for writing: "Hiermit teilen wir Ihnen mit, daß ...", "Wir gestatten / erlauben uns, Ihnen mitzuteilen, daß ..." ⁷⁸ ("We hereby inform you that...", "We take the liberty / permission to inform you that ..."); "Bezug nehmend auf Ihren Brief vom ..." ⁷⁹ ("With reference to your letter of ..."); "Ihre Anfrage interessiert uns sehr", "Wir freuen uns über Ihre Anfrage"⁸⁰ ("We are very interested in your enquiry", "We look forward to your enquiry"); "Ihrem Wunsch, Ihnen ein detailliertes Angebot zu übersenden, kommen wir gerne nach."⁸¹ ("We are pleased to send you the detailed offer you requested.")⁸²; "Heute erhalten Sie", "Herzlichen Dank für die schnelle Antwort.", "Mit Ihrem

⁶⁹ Irmtraud Schmitt, *Geschäftsbriege und E-Mails – Schnell und professionell. Moderne Korrespondenz leicht gemacht* (Göttingen: Business Village Update your Knowledge!, 2010), 41.

⁷⁰ Susanne Siekmeier, *Professionelle Korrespondenz. Moderne Geschäftsbriege und E-Mails mit Wirkung* (Göttingen: BusinessVillage GmbH, 2021), 42.

⁷¹ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 12.

⁷² In German, greetings with "Liebe / Lieber" are more informal than "Sehr geehrte Frau / Sehr geehrter Herr". The English translation does not distinguish between these nuances.

⁷³ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 147.

⁷⁴ Ingrid Stephan, *Geschäftskorrespondenz. Briefe, E-Mails und Kurznachrichten professionell schreiben* (Berlin: Dudenverlag, 2021), 41. as quoted in Réka Kovács, "Unsere tägliche Geschäftskorrespondenz – An der Schnittstelle zwischen dem formellen und informellen Stil," *Studii de Știință și Cultură* XVIII, no. 4 (December 2022): 240.

⁷⁵ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 148.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷⁷ Stephan, *Geschäftskorrespondenz. Briefe, E-Mails und Kurznachrichten professionell schreiben*, 52. as quoted in Kovács, "Unsere tägliche Geschäftskorrespondenz – An der Schnittstelle zwischen dem formellen und informellen Stil," 240.

⁷⁸ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁰ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 147.

⁸¹ *Englisch für den Beruf*, 14.

⁸² Ibid., 15.

Brief vom ... haben Sie uns eine große Freude gemacht. Vielen Dank!“⁸³ (“Today you receive”, “Thank you very much for the quick reply.”, “With your letter of ... you have given us great pleasure. Thank you very much!”);

- modal verbs for polite requests and suggestions: “Nun möchten wir gerne anfragen“⁸⁴ (“Now we would like to enquire”); “möchten wir Sie bitten,”⁸⁵ (“we would like to ask you”); “Sie können Herrn Turner, [...] anrufen.“⁸⁶ (“You can call [...] Mr Turner.”);

- first and second conditional clauses for polite requests: “Wir wären Ihnen ferner dankbar, wenn Sie“⁸⁷ (“We would also be grateful if you”); “Ich würde mich freuen, wenn Sie mich zu einem Gespräch einladen würden“⁸⁸ (“I would be glad if you could invite me for an interview.”)⁸⁹; “Falls noch weitere Fragen bestehen, bitten wir um entsprechende Mitteilung.“⁹⁰ (“If there are any further questions, please let us know.”); “Rufen Sie mich einfach an, wenn Sie weitere Informationen wünschen.“⁹¹ (“Just give me a call if you would like more information.”);

- the indicative and / or imperative mood for polite requests and invitations: “Bitte senden Sie uns das ausgefüllte Formular wieder zu.“⁹² (“Please send the completed form back to us.”); “Wir bitten Sie, uns ein Angebot [...] zu übersenden.“⁹³ (“We ask you to send us an offer [...].”); “Wir bieten Ihnen an”, “Gerne laden wir Sie nach Mannheim ein.“⁹⁴ (“We offer you”, “We are happy to invite you to Mannheim.”);

- the expression of respect and recognition: “Der Vorstand dankt Ihnen für zustimmende und abweichende Hinweise. Sie waren für alle Entscheidungen wichtige Hilfen.“⁹⁵ (“The executive board would like to thank you for your affirmative and divergent suggestions. They were important aids for all decisions.”); “Auf eine gute Zusammenarbeit

⁸³ Schmitt, *Geschäftsbriebe und E-Mails – Schnell und professionell. Moderne Korrespondenz leicht gemacht*, 40.

⁸⁴ Paul Hartley and Gertrud Robins, *Germana pentru oamenii de afaceri* (Bucharest: Teora, 1997), 95.

⁸⁵ *Englisch für den Beruf*, 12.

⁸⁶ *Langenscheidts Musterbriefe. 100 Briefe Deutsch. Für Export und Import*, (Berlin, München: Langenscheidt KG, 2001), 43.

⁸⁷ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 24.

⁸⁸ *Englisch für den Beruf*, 62.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁰ *Langenscheidts Musterbriefe. 100 Briefe Deutsch. Für Export und Import*, 35.

⁹¹ Jutta Sauer, *Praxishandbuch Korrespondenz. Professionell, positiv und kundenorientiert formulieren* (Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler, 2017), 33.

⁹² *DUDEN. Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 136.

⁹³ Ramona Măduța, *Alfabetul germanei comerciale*, (Oradea: TAGORE, 2007), 7.

⁹⁴ Schmitt, *Geschäftsbriebe und E-Mails – Schnell und professionell. Moderne Korrespondenz leicht gemacht*, 56.

⁹⁵ *DUDEN. Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 149.

freuen sich...”, “Viel Erfolg wünscht Ihnen...”⁹⁶ (“We look forward to a good cooperation...”, “Wishing you much success...”).

Apparently, according to our research, German professional correspondence has experienced the most notable changes within the last fifty years. Concerning salutations one can remark the radical curtailment of informal greetings, with versions like “Guten Tag, Frau...”⁹⁷ (“Good day / afternoon Mrs / Ms...”), “Hallo” (“Hello”) gaining popularity.⁹⁸ Whereas formal openings, lead-in sentences and closings from the 1980s and 1990s display a more polished and complex vocabulary and grammar, contemporary examples aim at greater simplicity and directness expressed in succinct structures and even interrogative sentences to indicate a close rapport with the recipient (e.g. “Heute erhalten Sie”⁹⁹ (“Today you receive”); “Konnten wir Ihr Interesse wecken?”¹⁰⁰ (“Could we arouse your interest?”). Likewise, the polite requests from the 1980s and the early 2000s have morphed into weaker versions with modal verbs and second conditional clauses being eclipsed by verbs in the indicative and the imperative mood or first conditional sentences in present-day writings.

To conclude, in light of the three corpora of German letters explored above, three common linguistic elements can be discovered: semantic and lexical typology constructed around the idea of respect, politeness and courtesy; idiosyncratic formulas specific to epistolographic use; modalities – epistemic modality, comprising statements / questions for various degrees of possibility and deontic modality, i.e., phrases for the expression of obligation and necessity to persuasion.

Romanian Professional Correspondence

Letters between 1835 – 1900

Politeness is depicted in the subsequent linguistic structures:

- formal formulas of greeting: “Stimate domnule redactor!”¹⁰¹ (“Dear / Esteemed Mr Editor”)¹⁰²¹⁰³; “Preastimate domnule redactor!”¹⁰⁴ (“Highly Esteemed Mr Editor”);

⁹⁶ Siekmeier, *Professionelle Korrespondenz. Moderne Geschäftsbriefe und E-Mails mit Wirkung*, 49.

⁹⁷ DUDEN. *Das Sekretariatshandbuch. Ratgeber für Büro, Sekretariat und Verwaltung*, 147.

⁹⁸ Stephan, *Geschäftskorrespondenz. Briefe, E-Mails und Kurznachrichten professionell schreiben* (Berlin: Dudenverlag, 2021), 41. as quoted in Kovács, “Unsere tägliche Geschäftskorrespondenz – An der Schnittstelle zwischen dem formellen und informellen Stil,” 240.

⁹⁹ Schmitt, *Geschäftsbriefe und E-Mails – Schnell und professionell. Moderne Korrespondenz leicht gemacht*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Siekmeier, *Professionelle Korrespondenz. Moderne Geschäftsbriefe und E-Mails mit Wirkung*, 42.

¹⁰¹ George Bariț și contemporanii săi. *Corespondență primită*, eds. Iosif Marin Balog, Daniela Deteșan, Lóránd Mádly, Mirela Popa-Andrei and Simion Retegan (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2022), 50.

¹⁰² The translation of the Romanian examples is our own throughout the article.

¹⁰³ For a better understanding, the translation of the examples is provided in contemporary English.

¹⁰⁴ George Bariț și contemporanii săi. *Corespondență primită*, 50.

- official endings: “Pre lângă profund respect, am rămas al il[ustrei] d-voastre deoblegat”¹⁰⁵ (“In addition to my deep respect, I remain your highly obliged”); “Pre lângă stima profundă, rămân al preast[imatei] d[omniei] voastre stimătoriu”¹⁰⁶ (“In addition to my profound esteem, I remain your honourable admirer”); “Cu deosebită stimă sum”¹⁰⁷ (“With kind regard I am”); “Priimiți [...] asigurarea distinsei mele considerații”¹⁰⁸ (“Please accept [...] the assurance of my highest consideration”); “Primiți, Domnule Președinte al Consiliului, expresia stimei mele”¹⁰⁹ (“Please accept, Mr President of the Board, the expression of my highest consideration”);

- semi-formal and informal salutations: “Dragă prietene,”¹¹⁰ (“Dear friend”)¹¹¹; “Nobilul meu prieten,”¹¹² (“My noble friend”);

- semi-formal and informal closings: “A dumitale devotată prietenă”¹¹³ (“Your devoted friend”);

- gracious, attentive and courteous first sentences, hinting at the reasons for writing: “Amăsurat promisiunei mele din 13/5 a.c., am onoare a vă comunica”¹¹⁴ (“In accordance with my promise of 13/5 this year, I have the honour to inform you”); “Mulțemindu-vă pentru amabila scrisoare ce mi-ați trimis, găsesc o adevărată satisfacere de a vă declara”¹¹⁵ (“Thanking you for your kind letter to me, I find it a real satisfaction to declare”); “voiesc a-ți spune toată mulțumirea ce mi-au pricinuit starea instituțiilor noastre”¹¹⁶ (“I want to tell you how pleased I am with the state of our public charities”);

- clauses containing verbs in the infinitive for polite requests: “Deci, mă rog a se espedia sub adresa”¹¹⁷ (“So, please send it to me under the address”); “vă rog să binevoiți a-i încunoștiința retragerea mea”¹¹⁸ (“please kindly notify them of my withdrawal”); “Binevoiți a-mi răspunde categoric”¹¹⁹ (“Please answer me categorically”);

¹⁰⁵ *George Bariț și contemporanii săi. Corespondență primită*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁸ V. Alecsandri, *Scrisori, însemnări* (Bucharest: Editura pentru literatură, 1964), 33.

¹⁰⁹ Principesa Elena Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909* (Iași: Editura Junimea, 2020), 208.

¹¹⁰ Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909*, 67.

¹¹¹ In Romanian, greetings with “Drag / Dragă” are more informal than “Stimată / Stimate”. The English translation does not distinguish between these nuances.

¹¹² Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909*, 68.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹⁴ *George Bariț și contemporanii săi. Corespondență primită*, 50.

¹¹⁵ Alecsandri, *Scrisori, însemnări*, 129.

¹¹⁶ Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909*, 212.

¹¹⁷ *George Bariț și contemporanii săi. Corespondență primită*, 52.

¹¹⁸ Alecsandri, *Scrisori, însemnări*, 111.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

- second and first conditional clauses for polite appeals, invitations and offers: “Ți-aș fi foarte recunoscător dacă ai putea”¹²⁰ (“I would be grateful if you could”); “Făcînd acestea, ți-ai cîștiga un loc însemnat”¹²¹ (“By doing this, you would gain a significant place”); “Țmi veți face o mare mulțumire ajutându-le”¹²² (“You will do me a great favour by helping them”);

- adjectives and nouns to convey feelings of admiration, devotion and gratitude: “La prețuita-ți epistolă”¹²³ (“To your precious epistle”); “binefacerile dumneavoastră”¹²⁴ (“your benefactions”); “regretul meu este de a nu vă putea arăta prin viu grai adîncă mea recunoștință”¹²⁵ (“my regret is not to be able to show you in words my deepest gratitude”); “să-ți arăt toată recunoștința mea”¹²⁶ (“to show you all my gratitude”).

In summary, from a linguistic perspective, the Romanian correspondence from this period abounds in polite formulations with emphasis on showing high esteem, reverence and commitment towards the addressee. These attitudes materialise in the frequent employment of phrases containing verbs (e.g., “have the honour”, “remain [...] highly obliged”, “accept [...] the assurance”), in the use of adjectives and nouns denoting appreciation and respect, and courteous requests in first and second conditional clauses.

Letters between 1900 – 1970

In this corpus of letters, politeness comes to light by means of the linguistic patterns below:

- greetings in an official tone: “Onorat comitet”¹²⁷ (“Honourable Committee”); “Stimate Domnule Petrovici,”¹²⁸ (“Dear Mr Petrovici”)¹²⁹; “Stimate tovarășe Antonescu,”¹³⁰ (“Dear Comrade Antonescu”);

- respectful and courteous endings: “Vă trimitem pe lângă asigurarea distinsei noastre stime”¹³¹ (“In addition to the assurance of our highest consideration, we send you”); “Al D-

¹²⁰ Alecsandri, *Scrisori, însemnări*, 27.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹²² Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909*, 212.

¹²³ George Bariț și contemporanii săi. *Corespondență primită*, 53.

¹²⁴ Alecsandri, *Scrisori, însemnări*, 28.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹²⁶ Cuza, *Corespondență și acte 1840 – 1909*, 68.

¹²⁷ Teodor Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan* (Cernăuți: Tipografia „Mitropolitul Silvestru”, 1943), 25.

¹²⁸ Petre Andrei and Petru P. Andrei, *Memorii și istorii* (Iași: Institutul European, 2022), 40.

¹²⁹ The English translation cannot properly render the exact meaning of “Stimate / Stimată”, which implies additional nuances like “honourable” or “highly esteemed”.

¹³⁰ Nae Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura MEGA, 2022), 30.

¹³¹ Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan*, 40.

Voastre devotat.”¹³² (“Yours devoted”); “Cu stimă”¹³³ (“Yours sincerely”); “Cu cele mai distinse sentimente, în așteptare, a Dvs”¹³⁴ (“With the most distinguished feelings, awaiting, Yours”);

- semi-formal and informal openings: “Iubite Domnule Meissner,”¹³⁵ (“Dear Mr Meissner”)¹³⁶; “Stimate Domnule Coleg,”¹³⁷ (“Dear Colleague”);

- semi-formal and informal closings: “Cu dragoste frățească”¹³⁸ (“With brotherly love”); “Vă mulțumesc și Vă salut cu tot respectul”¹³⁹ (“I thank you and respectfully greet you”); “În așteptarea răspunsului dvoastre, vă mulțumim pentru”¹⁴⁰ (“While awaiting your reply, we thank you for”); “Cu salutări tovarășești,”¹⁴¹ (“With comradely greetings”);

- polite introductory sentences naming the reasons for writing: “Ne grăbim a Vă răspunde că [...] alese de D-Voastră [...] ne convin pe deplin”¹⁴² (“We hasten to reply that [...] chosen by you [...] fully satisfy us”); “De aceea, trimet această scrisoare pentru vă ruga din tot sufletul și cu toată insistența ca”¹⁴³ (“Therefore, I am sending this letter to ask you most earnestly and insistently that”); “Îmi permit să vă recomand călduros”¹⁴⁴ (“I can warmly recommend”); “Vă facem cunoscut că lucrarea dv. a sosit la timp”¹⁴⁵ (“We would like to inform you that your paper arrived on time”);

- infinitive and subjunctive structures¹⁴⁶ for polite requests: “Vă rugăm să binevoiți a ne înștiința”¹⁴⁷ (“Please kindly inform us”); “binevoiți a ne trimte”¹⁴⁸ (“please send us”);

- first, second and third conditionals for polite requests, offers and regrets: “N’ar strica poate dacă le-ați atrage atenția din nou.”¹⁴⁹ (“It would not hurt if you drew their attention again.”); “Dacă nu v-aș deranja aș avea o rugămintă”¹⁵⁰ (“If you do not mind, I would have a

¹³² Ibid., 65.

¹³³ Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 29.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 41.

¹³⁵ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 42.

¹³⁶ In Romanian, greetings with “Iubite / Iubită” are more informal than “Stimate / Stimată”. The English translation does not distinguish between these nuances.

¹³⁷ Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 48.

¹³⁸ Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan*, 104.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴⁰ Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴² Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan*, 40.

¹⁴³ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 40.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 194.

¹⁴⁵ Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ The subjunctive mood in these sentences refers to the subjunctive mood of the Romanian language and is not equivalent to the English subjunctive.

¹⁴⁷ Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan*, 40.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵⁰ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 55.

request"); “aș fi avut toată plăcerea să vă servesc, dar mai presus de mine e legea.”¹⁵¹ (“I would have been pleased to serve you, but above me is the law.”);

- the subjunctive mood for more polite and presumptive requests: “ne-ați putea trimite”¹⁵² (“you could send us”); “Ne-ar interesa în deosebi”¹⁵³ (“We would be particularly interested in”); “Aș vrea să fiți de acord”¹⁵⁴ (“I would like you to agree”);

- the indicative mood for appeals, calls for action and apologies: “vă rugăm să ne comunicați”¹⁵⁵ (“please inform us”); “Vă rog în același timp să cereți răspuns”¹⁵⁶ (“At the same time, please ask for an answer”); “Vă rog foarte mult să mă scuzați”¹⁵⁷ (“Please excuse me”);

- vocabulary that expresses gratitude, interest and admiration: “Convinși de zelul cu care aveți intenția”¹⁵⁸ (“Convinced of your zeal for the purpose”); “Să adăugați, din comoara ce posedăți încă o revistă”¹⁵⁹ (“Add another journal to the treasure you possess”); “sunt sigur că îmi veți păstra un colț din sufletul D^{voastră}”¹⁶⁰ (“I am sure you will keep me in a corner of your soul”).

In line with the conclusion in the previous section, this age is characterised by the usage of first, second and third conditional clauses and by courteous requests in the subjunctive and infinitive mood. Nevertheless, we can detect some more specific and determined appeals in the indicative mood, which describe the purpose of the writer more accurately. Salutations, endings, verbs and adjectives designating honour and respect reflect the most particular patterns of politeness.

Letters between 1970 – to Present Day

Politeness surfaces in the following constructions:

- formal greetings: “Stimată Doamnă”, “Stimate Domn”¹⁶¹ (“Dear Madam”, “Dear Sir”); “Domnule ...”, “Doamnă ...”¹⁶² (“Mr ...”, “Mrs / Ms”);

¹⁵¹ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 60.

¹⁵² Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 120.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵⁸ Balan, *Corespondența lui Gheorghe Tofan*, 40.

¹⁵⁹ Antonescu, *Corespondență primită (1960 – 1969)*, 24.

¹⁶⁰ Andrei and Andrei, *Memorii și istorii*, 42.

¹⁶¹ Eugenia Câmpeanu-Sonea and Adrian Sonea, *Comunicare, conflict și dialog în procesul managerial* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2005), 65. as quoted in Kovács, “Unsere tägliche Geschäftskorrespondenz – An der Schnittstelle zwischen dem formellen und informellen Stil,” 240.

¹⁶² Niculina Vârgolici, *Redactare și corespondență* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2009), 46.

- formal closings: “Vă mulțumim anticipat și vă rugăm să primiți salutările noastre.”, “Suntem foarte bucuroși să știm că [...] și vă rugăm să primiți asigurarea întregii noastre stime.”¹⁶³ (“Thank you in advance and please accept our greetings.”, “We are very happy to know that you [...] and please receive the assurance of our highest esteem.”); “Primiți, domnilor, distinsele noastre salutări.”¹⁶⁴ (“Gentlemen, we send you our best regards.”); “Sperăm să ne onorați cu o comandă și vă transmitem salutările noastre respectuoase.”¹⁶⁵ (“We hope you will honour us with an order and send you our respectful greetings”); “Cu respect”, “Cu deosebită stimă”¹⁶⁶ (“Respectfully”, “Yours sincerely”);

- semi-formal and informal salutations: “Stimați colegi”¹⁶⁷ (“Dear colleagues”); “Dragi colegi”¹⁶⁸ (“Dear colleagues”);

- semi-formal and informal closings: “Cu multe salutări”, “Sincere salutări”¹⁶⁹ (“With best regards”, “Best regards”); “Vă mulțumesc pentru colaborare și vă doresc mult spor în activitățile curente.”¹⁷⁰ (“I thank you for your cooperation and wish you good luck in your current activities.”);

- polite first sentences: “Confirmăm prin prezenta primirea comenzii dv.”¹⁷¹ (“We hereby confirm the receipt of your order.”); “Am luat în considerare cererea dumneavoastră exprimată în scrisoarea din ...” (“We have taken into account your request expressed in your letter of...”); “Ca urmare a discuției noastre telefonice de astăzi, vă informăm că...”¹⁷² (“Further to our telephone conversation today, we would like to inform you that...”); “Prin prezenta vă aducem la cunoștință faptul”¹⁷³ (“We hereby bring to your attention that”); “Vă invităm să participați”¹⁷⁴ (“We invite you to participate”); “Vă transmit atașat”¹⁷⁵ (“I am sending you attached”);

¹⁶³ Georges Vivien and Veronique Arne, *Secretara perfectă. Ghid practic de corespondență comercială și administrativă* (Bucharest: Sigma Primex, 1995), 27.

¹⁶⁴ Michaela Gulea, Gabriela Lupchian and Alina Ciocianu, *Scrisoarea comercială. Modele, formule, scrisori autentice. La lettre commerciale. Modèles, formules, lettres authentiques* (Bucharest: OSCAR PRINT, 1999), 16.

¹⁶⁵ Gulea, Lupchian and Ciocianu, *Scrisoarea comercială. Modele, formule, scrisori autentice. La lettre commerciale. Modèles, formules, lettres authentiques*, 18.

¹⁶⁶ Vârgolici, *Redactare și corespondență*, 51.

¹⁶⁷ Andreea Borca, email to authors, June 16, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Diana Zelter, email to authors, June 14, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Vivien and Arne, *Secretara perfectă. Ghid practic de corespondență comercială și administrativă*, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Zelter, email to authors, June 14, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 92.

¹⁷² Vivien and Arne, *Secretara perfectă. Ghid practic de corespondență comercială și administrativă*, 9.

¹⁷³ Simion Răchișan and Daniela Todericiu, *Corespondență de afaceri. Corrispondenza d'affari* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura PRO VITA, 2003), 27.

¹⁷⁴ Borca, email to authors, June 16, 2023.

¹⁷⁵ Borca, email to authors, June 19, 2023.

- the indicative and subjunctive mood¹⁷⁶ for polite requests: “vă rugăm să trimiteti”¹⁷⁷ (“please send us”); “Vă rugăm să confirmați”¹⁷⁸ (“Please confirm”); “Vă rugăm să diseminați”¹⁷⁹ (“Please disseminate”);

- the subjunctive mood for courteous requests: “Am dori deci să primim informații mai cuprinzătoare cu privire la”¹⁸⁰ (“We would therefore like to receive more comprehensive information on”); “Am dori să primim ultimele dvs. cataloage”¹⁸¹ (“We would like to receive your latest catalogues”); “v-am ruga”¹⁸² (“we would ask you”);

- first and second conditionals for polite requests: “ne-am bucura dacă am primi”¹⁸³ (“we would be happy if we received”); “Dacă doriți informații suplimentare [...], vă stau oricând la dispoziție”¹⁸⁴ (“If you need further information [...], I shall be at your disposal any time”);

- language showing appreciation and respect: “Sîntem siguri că veți fi mulțumiți [...] și că vom putea număra în continuare printre clienții noștri.”¹⁸⁵ (“We are sure that you will be satisfied [...] and we can continue to count on you among our customers”); “interesul dumneavoastră cu privire la produsele noastre”¹⁸⁶ (“your interest in our products”); “Sperăm că această reducere de prețuri să vă ajute la dezvoltarea afacerii dumneavoastră”¹⁸⁷ (“We hope this price reduction will help your business grow”).

To conclude, in the last decades, the Romanian professional correspondence has experienced several changes and adjustments in terms of politeness and of its potential expressions. Basically, a tendency towards simplification and word economy can be observed in a preference for polite requests in the indicative over the subjunctive, in the elimination of formal formulas like “We hereby confirm”, “Further to our telephone conversation” and the employment of more concise and explicit constructions, such as “We invite you to participate”.

As previously summarised in the case of German epistles, the same common linguistic structures, namely semantic and lexical typology focused on the idea of politeness,

¹⁷⁶ The subjunctive mood in these sentences refers to the subjunctive mood of the Romanian language and is not equivalent to the English subjunctive.

¹⁷⁷ Răchișan and Todericiu, *Corespondență de afaceri. Corrispondenza d'affari*, 13.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Borca, email to authors, June 16, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Gulea, Lupchian and Ciocianu, *Scrisoarea comercială. Modele, formule, scrisori autentice. La lettre commerciale. Modèles, formules, lettres authentiques*, 14.

¹⁸¹ Adriana Chiriacescu, Virginia Barghiel, Laura Mureșan and Alexander Hollinger, *Corespondență de afaceri în limbile română și engleză* (Bucharest: Teora, 1998), 55.

¹⁸² Chiriacescu, Barghiel, Mureșan and Hollinger, *Corespondență de afaceri în limbile română și engleză*, 57.

¹⁸³ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Răchișan and Todericiu, *Corespondență de afaceri. Corrispondenza d'affari*, 17.

¹⁸⁵ Barbu, *Corespondență comercială în limba germană*, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Vârgolici, *Redactare și corespondență*, 77.

¹⁸⁷ Răchișan and Todericiu, *Corespondență de afaceri. Corrispondenza d'affari*, 69.

idiosyncratic expressions, epistemic and deontic modalities are noticed in the Romanian correspondence over the three investigated periods.

Conclusions

Tracing the lineage of polite patterns from 1835 to our days in the case of German and Romanian professional correspondence, our diachronic study identifies the linguistic structures of politeness and expounds the evolution they have undergone. In both languages, professional letters from 1835 to 1900 are amplified by courteous formulations signalling admiration, praise and profound recognition. In these letters, a series of reassuring and encouraging adjectives and verbs serve for conveying humble, respectful, glorifying, sometimes even submissive messages. Between 1900 and 1970 more genteel and indirect requests in the subjunctive pervade the analysed texts. Eventually, present-day correspondence is marked by quotidian writing practices, where simplification, clarity and explicitness are bound to become the norm.

In light of our findings, we can conclude that simplification takes place at several levels in both languages:

- at the lexical-semantic level, through the loss or reduction of etymons expressing the idea of courtesy, respect, honour, gratitude and devotion, especially in the forms of salutation and in the introductory parts. Relative to the theories of politeness already mentioned, this transformation also brings with itself changes at the pragmatic level (e.g. the cancellation or annihilation of politeness, by renouncing the valorisation of the interlocutor's positive *face*;

- at morphological and syntactic level, by the reducing, shortening of the sentences, by breaking them up into smaller segments, by using elliptical or holophrastic formulas, particularly in the greeting and closing parts of the letter, which provide the text with a dynamic touch and represent, basically, an adaptation to the style of email;

- at the pragmatic-discursive level, by leaving out elements expressing modalities, by opting for the indicative and imperative moods instead of the subjunctive and conditional moods.

Therefore, we can only ponder how much more the official and administrative letter can be simplified and in what ways. In addition, it remains to be asked how correspondence will be altered in the upcoming decades, given the accelerated pace of technology nowadays. Will the changes be of conceptual or of practical order? Will the concept of politeness fade out in time due the fact that our world does no longer believe in politeness in general? Will it become irrelevant in a society that values speed, efficiency and practicality? These are concerns which a more extensive socio-linguistic study could address.