

Lecture 2: Types of Administrative Correspondence and Their Translation

I. Recap and Introduction

In Lecture One, we introduced Administrative and Commercial Translation as a field of specialized, functional translation. This lecture focuses on the first major practical component of the course: administrative correspondence — its types, structure, standard formulas, and the translation techniques required to render it accurately from English into Arabic and vice versa.

Administrative correspondence forms the backbone of institutional communication. A translator working in government, diplomatic, or corporate settings will encounter these documents constantly, so mastering their conventions is essential.

II. What Is Administrative Correspondence?

Administrative correspondence (المراسلات الإدارية) refers to written communication exchanged within or between institutions, government bodies, and organizations for the purpose of conducting official business. Unlike personal letters, it follows strict conventions of format, tone, and structure.

Main Types of Administrative Correspondence

- Official Letters (الخطابات الرسمية): formal letters exchanged between departments, ministries, or organizations.
- Memoranda / Memos (المذكرات الداخلية): internal notes used to communicate within the same institution.
- Circulars (التعاميم): notices distributed to multiple departments or employees announcing a policy or decision.
- Official Notices (الإشعارات الرسمية): formal announcements of decisions, meetings, or deadlines.
- Requests and Applications (الطلبات): formal requests for action, permission, or service.
- Reports (التقارير الإدارية): structured documents presenting findings, updates, or recommendations.
- Certificates and Attestations (الشهادات): documents confirming a fact, status, or qualification.

III. Structure of a Standard Administrative Letter

Most administrative letters, in both English and Arabic, follow a recognizable structure. Understanding this structure helps the translator preserve the correct format in the target language.

Component	English Convention	Arabic Convention
Letterhead	Company/institution name, logo, address	الترويسة: اسم الجهة، الشعار، العنوان
Reference Number & Date	Ref: XX/2026, Date: 31 August 2026	الرقم: التاريخ
Recipient's Address	Name, title, institution, address	المرسل إليه: الاسم، الصفة، الجهة
Salutation	Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Mr.	السادة المحترمون / تحية طيبة وبعد
Subject Line	Re: ... / Subject: ...	الموضوع:
Body	Introduction, purpose, details, request	المقدمة، الغرض، التفاصيل، الطلب
Closing	Yours faithfully / Sincerely	وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير
Signature Block	Name, title, department	الاسم، الصفة، القسم/الدائرة

IV. Standard Formulas and Their Equivalents

Administrative correspondence relies heavily on fixed, formulaic expressions (boilerplate language). A key translation skill is recognizing these formulas and rendering them with the equivalent formulaic expression in the target language, rather than translating word-for-word.

English Formula	Arabic Equivalent	Function
With reference to your letter dated...	بالإشارة إلى كتابكم المؤرخ في...	Opening / referencing prior correspondence
We would like to inform you that...	نود إحاطتكم علماً بأن...	Introducing information
Please be advised that...	يرجى العلم بأن...	Formal notification
We kindly request that...	نرجو التكرم بـ...	Making a formal request
Enclosed please find...	مرفق طيه...	Referring to an attachment
Should you require further information...	وفي حال احتجتم إلى مزيد من المعلومات...	Offering further assistance
We look forward to your prompt response.	نتطلع إلى ردكم السريع.	Closing / prompting action
Thank you for your cooperation.	شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم.	Polite closing

V. Translation Techniques for Administrative Correspondence

1. Formula matching, not literal translation: replace source-language boilerplate with the equivalent target-language boilerplate, even if the wording differs structurally.
2. Register preservation: maintain the same level of formality; administrative Arabic often requires a higher degree of formality than a literal English rendering would suggest.
3. Consistency in terms and titles: job titles, department names, and institutional names should be translated consistently throughout the document (and ideally across all documents from the same institution).
4. Preserving numerical and factual accuracy: reference numbers, dates, and figures must be transferred exactly as they appear, adjusting only the calendar or numeral format if required.
5. Maintaining document layout: headers, reference lines, and signature blocks should be positioned in the target document following the target language's conventions (note that Arabic documents are right-aligned and read right-to-left).
6. Neutral, impersonal tone: avoid emotive or colloquial language; administrative texts are impersonal by design.

VI. Common Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Translating fixed formulas word-for-word, producing unnatural or overly literal Arabic (e.g., translating 'Please find enclosed' literally rather than using the natural equivalent 'مرفق طيه').
2. Inconsistent translation of the same institutional title or department name within one document.
3. Omitting or altering reference numbers, dates, or figures during translation.
4. Shifting register — for example, using a casual tone in Arabic when the English source is formal, or vice versa.
5. Ignoring layout conventions, such as failing to adapt the letter format to right-to-left orientation in Arabic.

VII. Worked Example

Source Text (English)

“With reference to your letter dated 15 August 2026, we would like to inform you that your request for a meeting has been approved. Please find enclosed the proposed agenda for your review. Should you require further information, do not hesitate to contact our office. We look forward to your prompt response.”

Target Text (Arabic)

بالإشارة إلى كتابكم المؤرخ في 15 آب 2026، نود إحاطتكم علماً بأنه تمت الموافقة على طلبكم بعقد اجتماع. مرفق طيه جدول الأعمال المقترح للاطلاع عليه. وفي حال احتجتم إلى مزيد من المعلومات، فلا تترددوا بالاتصال بمكتبنا. نتطلع إلى ردكم السريع.

Note how each formulaic expression in the source is matched with its natural Arabic administrative equivalent, rather than a literal word-for-word rendering.

VIII. In-Class / Homework Exercise

Translate the following short memo from English into Arabic, paying attention to formula matching, register, and layout:

“To: All Department Heads — From: Human Resources Department — Subject: Update of Personnel Files — Please be advised that all department heads are required to submit updated personnel files by no later than 10 September 2026. Failure to comply may result in delays in processing annual evaluations. Thank you for your cooperation.”

IX. Steps for Next Session

1. Review of the homework exercise and common translation errors.
2. Introduction to commercial contracts and their key terminology.
3. Comparing contractual language conventions in English and Arabic.

X. Lecture Summary

This lecture examined the main types of administrative correspondence, their standard structure, and the fixed formulas that characterize them in both English and Arabic. We highlighted key translation techniques — formula matching, register preservation, terminological consistency, and layout adaptation — along with common pitfalls translators must avoid. The worked example and exercise demonstrated how these principles apply in practice.

(End of Lecture Two)