

A Special Language for Business Communication: The Case of Business
E- Mails used in three Different Companies

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Sending /..05/..8/ 2021 date	Acceptance date:21/05/2022	date of publication:10/06/2022
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Abstract

The recent electronic device “Internet” has embraced several means of communication. In the present study, the focus is on “electronic mail” which is part of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). The investigation considered business e-mails that are exchanged in business communication taking place in three different companies. We explored the impact of electronic medium on the language. If we consider internet as a revolution, it is extended to the language. The emergence of e-mail as an increasingly popular medium of interaction has brought its own emergent form of discourse that needs to be described, investigated, and understood as prevalent discourse form of the future. Consequently, we assumed that e-mail is not only a medium, but a new style of communication as well. Actually, the corpus based analysis revealed features that make up the pattern of business e-mail, besides the language exponents which include a wide range of abbreviations represented in letter and number homophones, acronyms, and consonant spelling. These features conveyed a novel discourse which embraces a hybrid language including speech and writing.

Keywords: Business communication – CMC – e-mails – hybrid language – discourse – speech – writing

Foreign Language Summary: Times New Roman, volume 12) (Language: arabic only)

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احتضن الجهاز الإلكتروني الحديث "الإنترنت" عدة وسائل اتصال. في هذه الدراسة، ينصب التركيز على "البريد الإلكتروني" الذي يعتبر جزء من الاتصالات الحاسوبية. لقد أخذ بعين الاعتبار رسائل البريد الإلكتروني التجارية المتبادلة في الاتصالات التجارية التي تتم في ثلاث شركات مختلفة. لقد بينت الدراسة مدى تأثير الوسيط الإلكتروني على اللغة. إذا اعتبرنا الإنترنت ثورة، فإنها تمتد إلى اللغة. ظهور البريد الإلكتروني كوسيلة تفاعل شائعة إلى ظهور شكل مميز من الخطاب إذ يستلزم دراسة مفصلة لفهمة والاعتماد عليه مستقبلا. البريد الإلكتروني ليس وسيلة اتصال فحسب بل أسلوب جديد لأتواصل. لقد كشف التحليل المعتمد على مجموعة من النصوص عن مميزات تشكل نمط البريد الإلكتروني الخاص بالعمل، إلى جانب دلالات اللغة التي تتضمن مجموعة واسعة من الاختصارات الممثلة في حروف وأرقام متجانسة، ومختصرات. وبهذا توصلنا إلى اكتشاف خطابا جديدا احتضن لغة هجينة بما في ذلك الكلام والكتابة

الاتصالات التجارية - رسائل البريد الإلكتروني - اللغة الهجينة - الخطاب - الكلام - الكتابة

Foreign language abstract body: Times New Roman, volume 12)

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1. Introduction

Technology can be considered as a tool and simplifies business communication, it assists employees in designing, revising, and improving written correspondence. In fact, all over the world, organizations have higher demand for applicants who are computer literate. As a matter of fact, Internet is known as the information highway. It is a colossal network linking computers all over the world. It is used world-wide because it is the network connecting person to person, persons to organization around the Globe. Consequently, this tool is unavoidable, it is widely used, and this is exhibited by the number of internet users which is amazingly growing.

In this study, we will focus on one protocol which contributes to the transmissions of messages and establishes a business communication. This communication needs a language, and the choice falls on English, the language that makes the business world go round. It also needs technology which a key to aligning and integrating global operations communication. For these reasons, organization with global aspirations have inclined to the use of a common language that is business English, its importance has long been recognized with English being a lingua franca for international trade and business.

The emergence of e-mail as an increasingly popular medium of interaction, has brought forward new areas of concern. In fact, by virtue of the medium, an e-mail belongs to written communication, but researchers have figured out that the message resembles spoken communication. In this study, we will deal with e-mail as a new emerging communication genre which affects the choice of the language taking into

consideration the function which language serves is a feature of variation in language use. A corpus based analysis is at the core of this investigation, 150 business e-mails from three different companies have been subjected to a discourse analysis which has depicted the main features that make the language used as a special language.

2. Business English Characteristics

2.1 Business English as a Specialist Language

A specialist language is considered as “a complete set of linguistic phenomenon occurring within a define sphere of communication and limited by specific subjects, intentions and conditions” (Hoffman,1979. p16). He explained that a specialist language requires to consider a large set of English phenomena. In fact, specialist language is not restricted to a set of specialized terminology, discourse, or jargon. (Hoffman, 1976). Therefore, it is necessary to deal with and investigate this language at all linguistic levels as it is the case of any other naturally occurring language. Hoffman (1976, p.13) argues that “Syntactic and text linguistic features cannot be neglected in a complex analysis of specialist language.”

Bearing in mind Hoffman’s ideas previously mentioned, the researcher asserts that should be amply considered. Actually, Business English as any other specialist language is a simplified, restricted in size and use as its function requires. It flourishes as a means of communication for a special setting including a restricted number of users. Business English is goal oriented based on a planned action among individuals or groups of people allotting a common goal. It is of a paramount importance to indicate business English relies on natural language that cannot be neglected to perform communication tasks, the users have to with between Business English and general English, which elements of the two varieties are fused. Therefore, language material or context in isolation cannot portray the unique qualities of Business English. The elements of an artificial language depicted in business English inserts mono-referential and formal vocabulary. (Gotti, 2003). Lexemes always refer to and specific concepts, it is far from any form of polysemy and ambiguity. Besides a formal style and lack of emotions words. In fact, the words have a precise meaning and purely denotative function. Concepts are concisely expressed within the limits of Business English, the meaning is clear and not context dependent. Contextual independence means that the relevant interpretation can be performed independently of context. Indeed, we can deal with business words in isolation; the occurrence of technical, subject specific, artificially devised

modified lexical innovation make us recognize Business English as a separate language variety mainly used in specialist communication channel. In this case, a conventional setting, a formal style, carefully selected expressions, and predominantly written mode are a prerequisite for a successful communication.

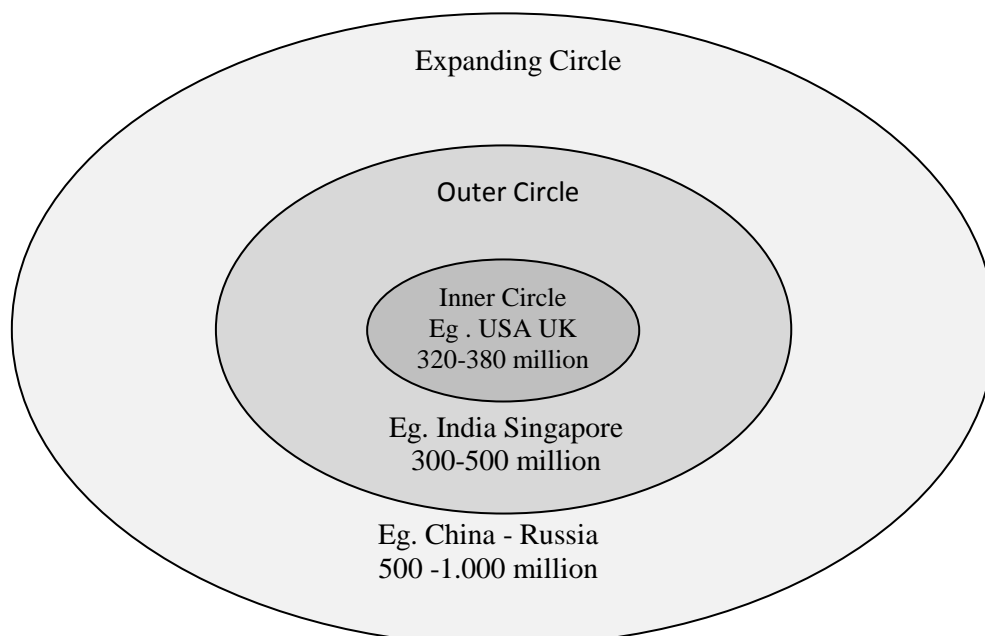
2.2 Users of Business English

Many firms all over the world conduct business using English, for instance, firms in Denmark use English, the French in china use English, even many international companies which have their setting in Arab countries as Algeria use English. Therefore, English has become the international language of business, it is a medium of communication. Indeed, English permits non-native speakers managers understanding each other effortlessly. This case refers to the use of English as a lingua franca, this language has been chosen to be the language of communication that occurs between people who do not share the same mother tongue. Cook (2008, p. 191) explains in this quote: Various terms have been proposed for the peculiar status of English, whether 'International English', 'Global English' or 'World English'- Recent discussion has preferred the term 'English as a lingua franca' English as a means of communication between native speakers of other languages.

English language is represented in every continent all over the world the following figure provides an ample illustration

Fig.1. Kachru's Three Concentric Circles of of English

Adapted from Crystal (2003, p 61)



English internationalizes one's look, compared to other languages of wider communication, knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp. It permits to open the linguistic gates to international business, technology and science. It initiates one into the caste that has power and more important, that controls vital knowledge. English has acquired prestige because of its use in many prominent domains. The convenience of having a lingua franca available to serve global human relations and needs is appreciated by millions. The use of English as lingua franca is imposed; the more important a domain is, the more powerful a language becomes, this is the case of English language.

3. Language, communication and social practice

3.1 Communication scope

The word "communicate" comes from the Latin verb "communicare" that means to impart, to participate, to share or to make common. (Weekley, 1967). On the ground of its Latin origin it is also the source of the English word "common". Therefore, communication is defined as the process of portraying or transmitting a message from one person to another.

In fact, communication is based on human interaction directed by a specific goal and typical of knowledge work of professionals. It is a field in which groups interact and therefore, a channel that can shape the effects of various factors on group decision-making and outcomes. Communication functions as a means for creating social setting in which decision can be made. (Hirokawa & Poole, 2004). Communication occurs at workplaces: "They are institutions where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are plagued out, and professional knowledge is constituted." (Sarangi & Roberts, 1991, p1).

Language and social practices are mutually beneficial, knowledge of the institutional and local socio-cultural is necessary for understanding the goals and objectives of communicative events in the workplace. In fact, it is necessary to invoke institutional and local social details which allow us identifying the participants in a given conversation so that one can reach an accurate analysis of meaning. Indeed, language and social practices are complementary. Being aware of the ethnographic setting, the perception of and characteristics assigned to others, and extensive and local organizational conditions becomes compulsory for an understanding of linguistic- and non- linguistic aspects of communicative events. Through this explanation, we assimilate that business communication is

vital in the work place and should respond to the characteristics mentioned above.

Business communication embeds verbal and written communication, for instance, a manager asks questions to colleagues, performs presentations and provides instructions. Conversely, written communication is performed through different channels and the choice of one over another is prescribed by the goals of the action. The message can be conveyed through different channels as memorandum, reports, contracts, newsletters, bulletin and e-mails. This latter is an element that is part of computer-mediated-communication which is online and takes place on a global, cooperative collection of networks.

As a matter of fact, e-mail has become one of the most common forms of interpersonal communication in our everyday life; it is not excluded from the workplace. It is the most prominent medium for companies of global aspiration and it is substituting or at least reducing the usage of other traditional types of communication such as the conventional letter or the phone call. In this respect Fernandez (2003) stated that digital media has given rise to new or transformed genres based on a novel medium such as the world wide web.

The orality and immediacy which characterize the e-mail have an impact on the language and discourse used in the exchanges. Benito (2003) who thinks that e-mail presents numerous features that indicate the spoken nature of the medium emphasizes on the necessity of considering those elements and deserve to be investigated.

3.2 E-mail along the written/spoken continuum

E-mail as a medium, is one of the most widely used forms of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication). Aside from its use in direct interpersonal communication, just as letters and faxes are used, it is also used for communication among groups that share common interests and goals. Linguistically, the discourse of e-mail has attracted many researchers to depict the characteristics of the e-mail's discourse. They wondered if they could consider the discourse as letters by phones or speech by other means (Baron,1998). These two approaches put e-mail in the mould of existing modalities of communication: otherwise stated, either e-mail is essentially a written message transmitted by a new electronic medium, or it is speech that written to be transferred.

Diversely, language and media specialists have moved to a more conglomerate model known as “mix-and-match” approach, it focuses on the speech like qualities of h in one hand, and other qualities that are more like writing in another. Crystal (2001) pointed that we were on the brink of the biggest revolution in language. He explained that online language is not a monolithic creation, but rather a different set of communication methods as it is exhibited in e-mails.

In the last twenty years, the language of business e-mail has been researched from several perspectives, providing different views on this new emerging communication genre. The medium through which a written message is conveyed can also alter the linguistic content of messages, including orthography, vocabulary choice, syntactic structure, and conventions governing semantic appropriateness. Such effects have been described for the printing press, the telegraph and most recently the computer. Many researchers admit the distinctive set of linguistic features which are not indistinguishable to either speech or writing, fact; it selectively and adaptively exhibits properties of both (Crystal, 2004). The mixing of spoken and written language gives birth to a new form of language, there is a mixture of both orality and literacy. Actually, it resembles a hybrid language that has some characteristics of speech and writing but is neither (Segerstad, 2002). This is because computer mediated discourse is mainly influenced by technology which provides the medium, and the social side that represents the situation where the language is used; here, it has a business function.

The researcher sees that the e-mail as a medium is vigorously linked to social and technological changes. What is interesting in the matter, e-mail is a form of communication where the language embeds the characteristics of both spoken and written discourse (Koriche, 2018). Investigations suggest that e-mail does exhibit distinct properties. Much recent literature describes e-mail as a hybrid of oral and written features (Yates and Orlikowski, 1994). These facts will be amply explained in the corpus based analysis.

4. Corpus based analysis

The analysis based on 150 business e-mails collected from three different companies which basically use e-mail in their business communication. Many items will be considered as the length, the capitalization, and abbreviations.

4.1 Length of e-mails

The length of e-mails that constitute the corpus varies according to the purpose of the message. Inspired by the studies of Orlikowski and Yate (1992) which approaches e-mail as a communicative practice that are conditioned by the communicative purposes and the hierarchical roles, e.g. the organization identified three overall e-mail genres, namely the noticeboard, postman, and dialogue genres.

The dialogue genre is used to exchange information about corporate activities, the postman genre concerns the delivery of other documents in an attachment for information and/or comment, and the notice board genre is to inform employees about workplace issues.

Over 150 e-mails 48 messages consist of one line, it may comprise two words or less. The purpose of these e-mails was to transmit a booking number, ask to contact someone, to check, to urge or even to apologize for a delay. This kind of e-mails resembles face-to-face communication or a conversation over the phone.

E-mails which communicate precise and detailed information to perform a business task as contacting shipper and proceeding with amendment to customs, transmit notification to whom they are concerned. Besides performance issues or protesting about short shipment. This kind of e-mails consists mainly of one or two paragraphs and represents '(e-mails over the corpus.

50 e-mails consist of three or four paragraphs; the concerned employees convey information, to inform about the change of the place of delivery, to negotiate a discount or to transmit information about the consignee and the final receiver of the goods. Through the analyzed corpus, just seven e-mails, including the tree companies, consist of five or more paragraphs. These e-mails are basically administrative; they convey instructions to improve the service or transmit a welcome to the staff.

Table 1. Length of e-mails

One sentence	One/two paragraphs	Three/four paragraphs	Five and more	Total Results
32%	32%	32%	32%	32%
30%	30%	30%	30%	30%
33,33%	33,33%	33,33%	33,33%	33,33%
4,67%	4,67%	4,67%	4,67%	4,67%

Source: H.Koriche

Actually, through the analysis mentioned above, one grasps that e-mails perform different functions, they are not restricted to the transfer of information; in fact, they appeal for action in business context.

4.2 Spelling

Generally, spelling is an important feature that has to be studied and analyzed because it is among the features that characterize the language used in e-mails. In fact, spelling embraces the use of upper and lower cases and non-conventional spelling which deals with abbreviations. Very typically of the language of e-mail and CMC in general, due to the speed with which a message is written, less attention is devoted to spelling.

Through the analyzed corpus, it is detected that over 150 e-mails there is no case where the use of upper and lower case letter is global. Correct upper and lower case is identified in 120 e-mails (80%). This outcome shows that both upper and lower case are appropriately used. In fact, these features are appropriate to business letter. Capital letters are used for names of particular people, places and organizations; the case is true for the first singular pronoun "I".

Inappropriate use of capitalization and lower case is discerned in 30 e-mails. Of those 230 words which are erroneous in terms of case 80 words (34,78%) contain lower case instead of upper letters and five words (2,17%) upper case instead of lower case letters. However, 146 words (63,47%) upper case letters

are used to emphasize. This case is similar to the situation when we transform intentions, thought, feelings into fluently articulated speech by the combinations of tone units and prosodic units. We show and transmit a mood, intentions and state of mind, we need to show the same properties in electronic communication. As a paralinguistic means, through the use of the upper-case we can grasp the state of mind of the sender or receiver.

Table 2. Inconsistent use of capitalization and lower case

Lower case instead of upper case	Upper case instead of lower case	Upper case for emphasize	Total Results
34,78%	34,78%	34,78%	34,78%
2,17%	2,17%	2,17%	2,17%
63,05%	63,05%	63,05%	63,05%

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4.2 Abbreviations

The usage of abbreviations is a frequent phenomenon and allowed in business e-mails, this what the analysis of the corpus revealed. These abbreviations are divided into three main categories: acronyms, consonant spelling and letter and number homophones.

The acronyms stand for specific terms relevant to each company and its different activities, they also represent the documents used to provide the service. Among the 235 abbreviated words, the acronyms are spot in 85 words (36,95%).

On the other hand, the case of consonant spelling is the most frequent, it is an economic means in CMC. It is mostly based on consonants that are known for semantic value as compared to vowels, this case is repeated in 130 words (55,31%). Regarding letter and number homophones are mainly shortenings through a single letter whose phonological content equals a whole word.

For example: /U/ stands for YOU

/C/ stands **for** SEE

/R/ stands for ARE

/Y/ refers to the question “WHY”

Letter homophones can stand on their own as they can be associated with another letter homophone and can refer to two words

RU ————— ARE YOU

It also can be combined with number homophones:

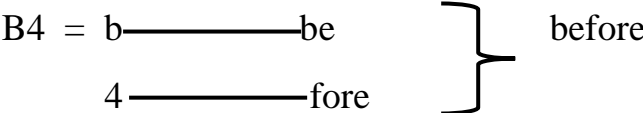


Table 3. Different kinds of abbreviations

Acronyms	Consonant spelling	Letter&number homophones	Total Results
36,95%	36,95%	36,95%	36,95%
56,52%	56,52%	56,52%	56,52%
6,53%	6,53%	6,53%	6,53%

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Indeed, from this analysis we grasp that relying on CMC imposes a specific style of writing that shapes the characteristics of such a medium. The analysis based on the corpus that consists of 150 e-mails revealed features that make up the pattern of business e-mail, it also displayed that electronic channel has an impact on the choice of language exponents. A wide range of abbreviations are exhibited through acronyms, consonant spelling and letter and number homophones. Indeed, the function which the language serves is considered as a factor of variation in language use.

Actually, the analysis of the corpus disclosed that e-mail discourse is developing its own language, a special language that is suitable for the immediacy of real time written communication.

5. CONCLUSION

The world of business does not exclude the use of English because it is conducted on a global scale. The use of English by the employees of the companies is embodied in the business communication performed through e-mails, this electronic medium imposes the use of specific discourse in which writing and speech are involved. In fact, e-mail is one of the technologies which have been increasingly accepted and used by many organizations and individuals for conducting day-to-day business.

The analysis based on the corpus has revealed features that make up the pattern of business e-mail; it has also shown that the electronic channel has an influence on the choice of the language exponents. The e-mail as a new emerging medium is a new type of discourse; it is a discourse that is developing its own language, a language that is suitable for the immediacy of real time communication. Actually, it is more than a channel; it is a communication culture of its own. Therefore, e-mail is still developing its own systematic rules, principals and standards. Some conventions are settled and agreed on among the discourse community.

The language works for us in new ways, it copes with new functions. E-mail has extended the language's stylistic range in an interesting and y. it is a fact of life and cannot be considered ephemeral. It bears gifts for linguistic investigations; it serves a new opportunity for academic investigation.

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