

The Discourse Analysis of the English for Business in the context of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): The Case of E-mail in Oran Shipping company

le discours de l'anglais des affaires dans le contexte de la communication par ordinateur : Cas des emails de la compagnie maritime à Oran

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ABSTRACT:

Computer mediated communication is becoming the dominant medium of communication all over the world. E-mail has assumed functions which are in some cases associated with spoken language and in other cases with formal writing. Analyzing the emails discourse enables to investigate how the business English communication is shaped in the immediacy of real time written communication. The main steps to be considered in the present paper are first, to define the main concepts cited above starting with business English, the current study focuses on the use of English by non-native speakers in their written communication in a multinational context then to explore and identify the most relevant features of the discourse involved.

keywords; Business communication, CMC, e-mail, ESP , Business English

RÉSUMÉ

La communication par ordinateur devient le moyen de communication dominant dans le monde entier. Le courrier électronique a assumé des fonctions qui sont dans certains cas associées à la langue parlée et dans d'autres cas à l'écriture formelle. L'analyse du discours des e-mails permet d'étudier comment la communication en anglais des affaires est façonnée dans l'immédiateté de la communication écrite en temps réel. Les principales étapes à considérer dans le présent article sont d'abord de définir les principaux concepts cités ci-dessus à partir de l'anglais des affaires, la présente étude se concentre sur l'utilisation de l'anglais par des locuteurs non natifs dans leur communication écrite dans un contexte multinational puis d'explorer et identifier les caractéristiques les plus pertinentes du discours impliqué.
Mots clés : Communication d'entreprise, CMC, e-mail, ESP, anglais des affaires

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1. Introduction

As a lingua franca, English is widely used in communication around the world, According to Crystal (1997) “English is now the dominant or official language in over 60 countries and is represented in every continent.”(Crystal 1997: 106). In the 21st century it has been holding the status of a tool to acquire knowledge and have access to diverse information , thus it has become a necessity to skilfully manipulate it as a means. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that the mastery of the English language increases the chances for employability in the multinational companies, both locally based as well as overseas.

The widespread use of English entails diverse contexts of use and usage, as a consequence the language developed in terms of register, jargon and purpose, has led to the emergence of the discipline of English for Specific Purposes and more specifically to English for Business Purposes.

The rising importance of English in the 21st century as well as its expanding use is, in fact, attributed to many reasons.

The most prominent one is globalization. According to some experts; faster economic globalization is going hand with hand with the growing use of English. In the last decade of the 20th century, further technological advances, such as the electronic e-mail and internet have facilitated communication among people from all walks of life and the language that is used most is English as stressed by David Crystal: “*Most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all the information stored in electronic retrieval systems is in English*” (Crystal 1997: 106) .

2. Literature Review

In today’s global world, the importance of English cannot be denied or ignored, as English is the most widely spoken language in the world. Thanks to new technologies, English has played a major role in many sectors, including medical, engineering and education, to be considered among the most important areas where English is needed. In particular, as a developing country, Algeria must effectively use this world spoken language to maintain its international image. It may simply be based on the effectiveness of post-secondary education. The purpose of this research is to talk about teaching and learning English for Specific purposes (ESP). Therefore, English should be the language of instruction in Algerian universities for the following three reasons : to find a high-quality job, to communicate with the international world and to have access to scientific and academic sources in the main fields of student studies.

Email is a powerful marketing tool and it is necessary to understand why email still plays such an important role in business and commerce in general. Professional email is a fast and an efficient way to communicate with customers, potential customers, suppliers, staff, bank manager and industries around the world. Sometimes, because of language barriers, time zones, inconveniences and for recording, the phone is simply not a viable form of communication. As a type of computer –mediated communication (CMC) email has gradually replaced the traditional spoken and written modes (telephone, fax and letters) and has become the dominant medium of communication all over the world.

Gains (1999), studied the text features for internal communication in business emails. Gimenez (2000) focused on the features of the text in business emails through a study of external business email communication. Hadina (2003) investigated the patterns of email discourse in workplace communication. Research has shown that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is creating a language variety which may be characterized in terms of its similarities and differences with written or spoken language.

3. Method

The analysis of the English used in the computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been conducted on the correspondence via emails of Mearsk Line Company Oran which is one of the leading liner shipping companies in the world. It has offices in more than 130 countries worldwide except in North Korea and Cuba. The corpus examined deals with 50 business emails collected. The analysis involves a scrutiny of the discourse used in emails, The 50 emails studied have been lasting over a period of 03 Months involving various topics. Emails have been exchanged between different departments levels of hierarchy within the targeted enterprise.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis is based on 50 business emails. The data analysis is conducted through various angles, such as organization plans, which depend on how the writers expect their readers to react to their messages, there are two basic organizational plans: direct and indirect plans (Murphy & Hilderbrandt 1991). Among the aim settled, is to move up straight forward delineating the direct plan for most business correspondences. Positive and neutral news can be best presented by the direct plan. On the other hand, the message is considered unfavourable to receive, the sender has to prepare the receiver to receive the message by using an indirect plan. In addition to the degree of formality and familiarity in the emails' both openings and closings, syntactic features in the messages such as abbreviation, acronyms, emoticones are favoured too.

4.1. Organization plan of the e-mails

The collected data has demonstrated that the organization plan set up in the emails exchanged highly promotes the direct plan instead of the indirect one.

Table 1 percentages of organization plan

Organization plan	Percentage
Direct plan	90%
Indirect plan	10%

The findings indicate that 90% of the workers tend to use direct plan when composing their business emails and the rest 10% used the indirect plan. It is not surprising that most of the e-mail messages were written in the direct plan, it may be because e-mail messages are business related, and business people normally have limited time to write and read them. As a result they tend to be short and direct. The findings support Philips (1989) who stated that e-mail is used for simple purposes

4.2. Openings and Greetings

Hatch (1992:13) claims that a writer "may or may not provide an additional opening." The present study examined whether additional openings, i.e. salutations, were used and what they were like. Such salutations as "Dear Mary" and "Hi" were expected to appear in the data as well as messages containing no opening greetings at all.

In addition, the names used in the opening lines were examined with the expectation that at least the following kinds of names would exist in the salutations if they were used at all:

- First name
- First name +last name
- Ms/Mrs/Mr +last name

Table 2 Salutations in the E-mail messages

Greeting type	Number of emails	Percentage
Dear	17	34%
Hi	15	30%
Hello	02	04%
Others	04	08%
No salutation	12	24%

It is showed that there are different salutations in the business e-mails used in the company. Almost all the messages in the data (76%) started with a salutation, the most frequent salutation is “ Dear” (34%) , another salutation that occupied the second position in the frequency of use “Hi” (30%) it showed that the informal style of the email . Other kinds of openings were less frequent (08%) such as “good morning” and 24% of the messages salutations were omitted and they went straight to the topic .

4.3 The Use of Names in the Salutations

The table below displays some components frequent occurrences in emails.

Table3 The use of Names in Salutations

	Number of emails	Percentage
First name	12	24%
Title	02	04%
Colleague	05	10%
Others	05	10%
No name	26	52%
Total	50	100%

There was a variation in the use of names in the opening greetings, it is shown that only 24% of the e-mail messages contain the the recipient’s first name. When names were used, they were combined with “ Hi” (12%of the messages) and “Dear” (12% of the messages also) and 52%of the written messages contained no name in the salutation followed by “Hi” and “Dear” .

4.4 Closings

The e-mail messages were further analysed in terms of the methods of closing . Three aspect of the closing were examined:

- Complimentary closing
- Name

- Automatic signature

The complimentary closing refers to such phrases as “Kind regards” , “Best regards” before the name of the writer .Automatic signatures often found at the end of the message usually including the name of the sender , title , organization , address, telephone number , fax , and e-mail address .

Table4 Complimentary closing in the e-mail messages

Types of closings	Number of emails	Percentage
No closings	06	12%
Brgds	27	54%
Regards	16	32%
Other like thanks	01	02%
Total	50	100%

Regarding farewells, they were omitted in 12% of the emails unlike salutations in 12 e-mails (24%) . As “ E-mail senders tend to use more words for the closing than for salutations.” (Horowitz and Barchillon 1994: 34) .

The most frequent closing is “Brgds” which the abbreviated form that stands for “Best Regards”. On the other hand, the formula “Regards” was used in 32% of the emails.

4.5 Syntactic features in the messages

Six CMC features of syntactic nature were included in the analysis : omission of a subject or a verb in the sentence , special spelling , abbreviations and acronyms , contracted forms , emoticons and typing errors .

Table 5 syntactic CMC features in the messages

Syntactic features	Number	Percentage	Total of the rest of messages
Subject or verb omission	07	14%	43
Abbreviations and special acronyms	29	58%	21
Emoticons	05	10%	45
Special spelling	12	24%	48
Typing errors	07	14%	43

In table 5 abbreviation and special acronyms were the most common type of syntactic CMC features and occurred 29 times in the messages (58% of the emails) using a special jargon which workers could understand without any problem as follow:

1) For abbreviation :

Tks (thanks)

Pls (please)

Bst.regds (best regards)

2) For special acronyms:

LOE (Letter of Engagement)

ASAP (as soon as possible)

A/M (Above mentioned)

B/L (Bill of landing)

TEM (Travel and expense management)

The acronyms used in the emails stand for specific terms relevant to the shipping company .

There were also several typing errors (14%) of the e-mail messages which can be regarded as typing errors (those have been made accidentally as in the following examples:

3) For typing errors:

Agai (again)

Pospone (postpone)

Await (wait)

Fro (for)

The typing errors detected in the data can be taken at least partly to support Lewin and Donner's (2002:29) remark on the importance of speed and efficiency in CMC : "*the purpose of CMC is to rely a message quickly; accuracy is secondary .*"

In addition , 24% of e-mail messages contained special spelling as seen in the examples taken from the collected data :

4) Special spelling :

4 (for)

U (you)

BTW (By the way)

Out of the ordinary spelling is often associated with CMC (Lewin and Donner 2002). This special spelling was used in 14 % of the emails .

5) Emoticons:

The use of smileys was found in 10% of the written correspondence used between the workers of the company.

4.6 Punctuation

In CMC, it is more important to write the message quickly than to write it accurately

Table 5 the number of messages including punctuation

Punctuation	Number of emails	Percentage
Capitalization or decapitalization	12	24%
Carefree use of punctuation marks	06	12%

The written e-mails can be partly achieved by writing a message entirely in lower or upper case letters . Usually, decapitalization, ie using the lower case letters , is used to save time, whereas capitalization is often taken as a sign of emphasis as in the following examples show :

URGENT

THANKS

hi

carefree marks was detected in 12% of the emails Lan (2000) points out that punctuation marks as well as emoticons can be used to express irony or intimacy as in the following examples :

///URGENT/// 2ND REMINDER ///

Can't be discharged !!!!!

If LOE is OK???

5 Conclusion

The e-mails at the Shipping Company based in Oran constitute an everyday part of the staff working lives when communicating with each other. The analysis based on the corpus of 50 business e-mails revealed features that make up the pattern of business e-mail , it also showed a wide range of abbreviations. The continued use of e-mails as a prominent means of communication was considered as a new type of discourse , this discourse has been developing its own language, a language that is suitable for the immediacy of real time written communication

Everyday email can be the most powerful, successful and effective cost, when running a business in a highly competitive world it is more important than ever to make hundred counts. Henceforth, this study reveals that a new discourse of business communication is developing. Nowadays the majority are using the internet as a tool for communication without having an idea about the traditional forms of communication such as letters or telephone, so it is important to know, not only, how to communicate effectively but also the norms that give such communication the characteristics that allow it to be correctly interpreted by its different users. Moreover, non-native speakers of English find themselves using English without having an idea about not only the norms for a form of communication, but also how to do it in a foreign language. Due to the globalization of business, the e-mails have started to have a huge impact on our professional life. The analysis of e-mail discourse is a contribution to solve linguistic and pedagogical problems in

English teaching and to enable teachers of English for specific purposes (ESP) designing language syllabus for business English students .

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