Analyzing the Electronic Institutional Discourse: A Multidimensional Approach

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Abstract:
 This study evaluates the utilization of an integrated approach to analyze the electronic discourse used in an academic institution. Therefore, a study was conducted at the faculty of arts and languages in El-Oued university. A corpus of 100 e-mails from the routine work is compiled. Then a critical discourse analysis approach based on an analytic framework that advocates both Halliday's Systematic Functional Grammar and Herring's discourse analysis approach to Computer Mediated Communication were adopted. This integration of analysis approaches was applied to detect the extent of conformity of those e-mails to the genre conventions of the institutional academic discourse. Results revealed the existence of flaming, unconventional abbreviations and incomplete sentences, absence of some compulsory moves and mailing to non-intended readers.
Keywords: E-mailing; Electronic Discourse; Institutional Discourse; Discourse Analysis.
Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The internet revolutionized our world. It has fundamentally changed our lifestyles since technology has become an integral part of our life and its use in various fields becomes a necessity. The most important contribution of technology that facilitated our modern life is enjoining various methods of communication based on technology called internet-based communication. The technological revolution has brought about a communication revolution in which communicators use different electronic devices to ensure social communication via text messaging, e-mailing or chatting using different social media applications. E-mailing is not only utilized among individuals, but has become a form of communication between both individuals and institutions or between institutions and institutions for both internal communication among workers and for external communication as well. The reliance on e-mail for communication is not limited to business institutions only, academic and educational institutions also depend on e-mailing to communicate internally with the teaching staff and administrators, and it is also used for external communication with other institutions or individuals.

The importance of e-mailing in communication urged language researchers to investigate this type of electronic discourse to detect its characteristics so as to enhance its formulation within institutions. It had been noticed that despite its importance, communicators still write inappropriate e-mails that do not respect the official electronic writing standards. Although the emailing discourse was analyzed by different researchers, results were unable to ameliorate the e-mail language since most studies depended on a mere linguistic analysis presenting distinctive linguistic features only. Thomas Cho (2010) for example presented an extensive linguistic analysis of emails utilized in the workplace in a research entitled "Linguistic Features of Electronic Mail in the Workplace: A Comparison with Memoranda". Similarly, in a research entitled "Electronic Mail–A New Style of Communication or Just a New Medium?: An Investigation into the Text Features of E-mail" conducted by Jonathan Gains in 1999, the analysis of the key text features of two kinds of emails: commercial and academic was conducted.

The dependence on a mere linguistic approach to analyze e-mails within academic institutions is unsatisfactory; there should be a focus on other levels of analysis. The present study aims at evaluating the utilization of a multidimensional approach to analyze the electronic discourse used in an academic institution. Therefore, a study was conducted at the faculty of arts and languages in El-Oued university where e-mailing constitutes the only form of communication among high ups and teachers. The present researcher used a blended approach to discourse analysis that comprises three analysis approaches: critical discourse analysis, conversational analysis and genre analysis. This will provide a holistic and comprehensive analysis. This blended approach focused on organizational patterns, linguistic distinctiveness, communicative purposes as well as pragmatic, cultural and conversational features.

The significance of the study lies in its importance to detect the anomalies found in a discourse utilized to communicate within an institutional academic setting. The multidimensional approach to analyze such a discourse provides a comprehensive and attentive diagnosis that will pave the way to language researchers to search for ways to enhance the e-mailing discourse used in institutions. The current study also has the advantage to approach a discourse from a holistic perspective by using an integrated approach to discourse analysis rather than relying on a single approach that will be insufficient to provide accurate results.

The current study seeks to answer the following questions:
- What advantages can the utilization of a multidimensional approach to analyzing the e-mailing discourse provide to institutions?
- How can the multidimensional approach to e-mail discourse analysis be formulated and applied?
- What pedagogical implications can be resulted from the use of an integrated approach to discourse analysis of the institutional academic e-mailing discourse?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is devoted to present a theoretical background of the study by illustrating the key concepts related to the research topic which are the e-mailing, the electronic discourse, the institutional discourse as well as discourse analysis.

E-mail "electronic mail" is asynchronous form of computer-mediated communication (CMC). According to Herring (2008), CMC was still a novel topic of research in the early 1990s. The email enables the same information to be communicated speedily to numerous people, Waldvogel (2007). It is widely used as a form of communication by both individuals and institutions. This is why, it is considered as one of the most popular applications of online digital technologies.

Approaches to analyze e-mails are varied. Researchers' selection of analyzing approaches are closely related to their research purposes. The linguistic, pedagogical, psychological, communicative, social or organizational approaches are widely adopted. Investigating the language of the e-mail communication genre has been based on different approaches. Collot and Belmore (1996) stated that the e-mails' language is closer to the spontaneous genres such as speeches and interviews than it is to the informational genres such as official documents. Baron (2000, 2002) focused on stylistic features when analyzing the e-mails such as informality, abbreviated and elliptical forms and the messages' length. She signaled that these features made the e-mail style closer to telegraphic language. David Crystal was also interested in the study of internet language, he made great contributions to clarify the features of the electronic discourse. He stated that the electronic revolution has brought about a linguistic revolution, resulting in 'Netspeak', 'a genuine new media'. (Crystal, 2001, p. 238).

Discourse Analysis or 'discourse studies' utilizes a number of approaches to analyze written, vocal or sign language use or any significant semiotic event. The 'naturally occurring' language use is a preferable type to be subject to discourse analysis. Hence, e-mails can be a good example of such a discourse. Discourse analysis adopts different methodologies, assumptions and dimensions that fit the specificities of the field under study. Discourse analysis can be used in different fields such as education, linguistics, international relations, psychology, communication studies, translation studies…etc. For this reason, analyzing the e-mail discourse depends on special assumptions and methodologies that fit the electronic language analysis. Linguistic analysis alone will be then insufficient to study emails' language; there should be an integration of different approaches that will focus on other dimensions related to communicational studies.

The present researcher then opts for the 'corpus-based analysis' as an analytical approach in

investigating the features of the institutional academic e-mails. The corpus is "a collection of texts or parts of texts upon which some general linguistic analysis can be conducted" (Meyer, 2002, p. xi). Corpora are then real-world written or spoken samples of language. The Corpus-Based Analysis is useful for the study of register-variation. Herring's (2001, 2007) discourse analysis approach to CMC was adopted in this study because of the considerable contribution to linguistic research on email communication she made. According to Herring (2001), when analyzing CMC the   social practices, the communication purposes, and the situational and demographic factors have to be taken into consideration. In Herring (2007), a CMC classification scheme was provided. It brings both the relevant aspects of the technical and social context that influence discourse usages within CMC.

Identifying the language of email communication is difficult "simply because the vast diversity of settings and purposes of [its] use outweigh any common linguistic features" (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p. 420). Petrie (1999, p. 26) coined the term 'emailism' and identifies nine types of emailisms presenting mainly the distinctive linguistic features of emails. Similarly, Crystal (2001) coined the   term "Netspeak", referring to CMC in general including email. Netspeak features of emails also focus on providing linguistic features of email discourse. According to Frehner (2008), the shortenings can occur on both levels the lexical level and the syntactic level.

The institutional discourse is a discourse utilized among members of the same company or institution. In fact, those members form the same discourse community called also a community of practice and they share and have in common conventions of the language production. Traditional institutional discourse was basically in a written form. With the internet revolution, most institutions including academic ones rely on the electronic discourse mainly e-mails   for internal and external communication.

Different researchers investigated the electronic institutional discourse in different settings such as academic, commercial or political institutions. The purpose is to provide an attentive diagnosis of the electronic language so as to enhance its quality for a better communication. Internet linguistics also known as "netlinguistics", which is a branch of linguistics concerned with electronic discourse, takes four main perspectives: sociolinguistics, education stylistics and an applied perspective. Crystal (2005) defines it as: "the synchronic analysis of language in all areas of Internet activity, including email, the various kind s of chat room and games interaction, instant messaging, and Web pages, and including associated areas of computer-mediated communication (CMC)".

When analyzing the e-mail discourse within institutions, attention is given to the messages' purposes , the relationship between correspondents as well as the company's policy and culture. Gains (1999), for example, investigated the text features of business e-mails used for internal communication. Focus of his study was on generic features including subjects, closings and openings in addition to linguistic features including, abbreviations, omissions, compression and register. Gimenez (2000) analyzed textual features of external business e-mails. The e-mail language in his data "contains simple, straightforward syntactic structures, showing a preference for coordinated rather than subordinated ideas" (p. 241). He also found that informality of style is detected through standard and personalized uses of abbreviations, contracted forms, capitalization and spelling mistakes.

Mallon and Oppenheim (2002) provided a list of 'e-mailisms', textual features that are

exclusive to e-mail messages. According to them e-mailisms are those "features associated with e-mail" which may or may not appear in other forms of communication (2002, p. 9). The most common e-mailisms found in their data were contracted forms, spelling mistakes and quoted text.

Institutional e-mail discourse makes use of embedded e-mails. Gimenez (2005) argues that business e-mails have become a more complex genre, embedding a series of internal messages. According to him, embedded e-mails are: " Messages which are made up of an initial message which starts the communication event; a series of internal, subordinated messages which depend on the first message to make sense; and a final message which brings the communication event to an end." (Gimenez, 2005, pp. 235-36). Accordingly, researchers have to deal with e-mail messages as forming a unified chain of communication that cannot be treated and analyzed separately.

The pedagogical perspective can be also a motive of studying the institutional discourse. The theoretical research on the language of e-mails should be exploited in practice. The ESP teacher can be the best one who will be able to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Researchers should explore the pedagogical implications of their empirical research findings. Exploiting the research results for pedagogical implications is also signaled by Gimenez (2005). According to him, this will adjust the deficiencies detected in institutional discourse. The SAE (Selecting, Applying and Evaluating) model was proposed then by Gimenez (2005) to design and evaluate activities in the business classes. We should encourage e-mailer within institutions to respect the standardization of the linguistic forms because messages could become legal records. Conformity to the standard composition of the messages should be also respected. first subtitle opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. The first subtitle opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy. The first subtitle opens with an introduction that presents the specific problem under study and describes the research strategy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section provides the methodological framework of the study. It will provide information about the research approaches and methods, data collection procedure, data analysis procedures, interpretation and discussion of the results to finally formulate recommendations that are useful in shaping some pedagogical implications.

The researcher compiled a corpus consisting of 100 e-mails from the routine conversation of the work conducted in the faculty of arts and languages at El-Oued university during the academic year 2020/2021. E-mailing constitutes the only form of communication among high ups and teachers in the faculty. The corpus contains incoming and outgoing e-mails. The corpus consists of two types of e-mails: specific e-mail messages intended to special recipients only, volunteered by a number of six teachers, as well as e-mail messages sent collectively targeting the whole teaching staff. In both types, personal information of both senders and receivers were kept anonymous and confidential.

Then a critical discourse analysis approach based on an analytic framework that advocates both Halliday's Systematic Functional Grammar and Herring's discourse analysis approach to CMC were adopted. This integration of analysis approaches was applied to detect

the extent of conformity of those e-mails to the genre conventions of the institutional academic discourse. Hence, a critical discourse analysis that comprise a textual analysis, a conversational analysis and a genre analysis was adopted to have a holistic and comprehensive analysis. This blended approach focused on organizational patterns, linguistic distinctiveness, communicative purposes as well as pragmatic, cultural and conversational features.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the organizational and generic levels, results of the analysis revealed that most e-mailers missed some compulsory moves mainly the opening and closing sections, especially when the e-mail is a reply for an earlier conversation. Results also revealed that only 30% of e-mailers managed to include the subjects of their e-mails. The table1 illustrates how the constituent moves are utilized by e-mailers.

Table.1. Participants' Utilization of Compulsory Moves

Moves	Subject line	Opening salutation	Closing Salutation	Signature
N of participants using moves	30	60	70	70
Percentage of using moves	30%	60%	70%	70%

On the linguistic level, it was noticed that this institutional discourse is full of unconventional abbreviations, non- respect of capitalization and punctuation as well as the existence of incomplete sentences and spelling mistakes. E-mail messages were also full of omissions, contracted forms and compression. The Subjects' sections of e-mails were not linguistically constructed in an appropriate way. Most e-mailers fail to use noun compounds to nominalize the subject sections for the sake of conciseness and precision; they rather use long sentences that will be truncated and impossible to be seen at one glance; important information about the reason of sending the messages will be lost and ignored rather than being fronted in an initial position. Table 2 below provides examples of some linguistic breach of the norms of a linguistic nature.

Table.2. Participants' Linguistic Anomalies

The anomaly	Examples
unconventional abbreviations	-T&P (time and place)
non- respect of capitalization	-*el-oued university
non- respect of punctuation	-…therefore there should be…
Use of incomplete sentences	-As for the evaluation criteria.
spelling mistakes	-*meeeting, *saerch
Omissions	-info instead of (information)
contracted forms	-she's ,they're
Misuse of nominalization in the subject line	-I want to enquire about the schedule instead of (schedule enquiry)

As for the communicative purposes, it was noted that e-mails were composed to achieve different communicative purposes. They can be official invitations for meetings or e-mails informing about directives, administrative measures, time tables, training projects, test and exam marks' submission deadlines, assignment of specific tasks for teachers such as invigilation of official examinations, sending proposals on topics of interest for the general course of educational matters, inquiry about an absence or failure to perform a task and complete it within the deadlines, informing high ups about a future possible absence and responding to inquiries. Examples of the communicative purposes maintained through the e-mails are illustrated in table 3 below:

Table.3. E-mails' Communicative Purposes

Communicative purposes	Examples
Informing	Dear colleagues, You are hereby informed that the final deliberations will take place on Wednesday as follows
Reminding	Teachers who have not submitted their exam and resit answer sheets yet, are kindly requested to submit them as soon as possible. Regards
	Please don't forget your make up exam tomorrow.
Requesting	Dear colleagues. You are kindly requested to present the typical answer of the second exam to the secretary of the exam or send it via my email.
Postponing events	you are hereby informed that L2 and L3 resit+makeup exams scheduled next week, are postponed until further notice.
Assigning Tasks	Would you please find in the attached documents L2+L3 first semester resit+makeup examinations Invigilation_ sem1 resit+ makeup exam.2020_2021. Kindest regards
Inviting to attend meetings	Dear colleagues I hope this e-mail finds you well. You find attached to this email the schedule of the final deliberations committees.
Submitting marks' deadlines	Salam dear teachers, You are hereby informed that the final exam marks(cc+exam) should be submitted before 10/03/2021

Concerning the organizational features, results reveal that 90% of the e-mails are sent with no reference which can lead to its loss or difficulty to be retrieved especially when correspondents receive numerous e-mails a day. Some emails are sent to non- intended readers when e-mailers exchange specific messages such as reminder for incomplete tasks, providing excuses for absence or asking for clarification; this is due to the non- use of the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) option.

On the discourse level, it was noticed that e-mailers adopt a loose and informal style. This informality is shown through the use of informal salutations and closings. Overuse of spoken negatives and contracted forms are also signs of informal style. Correspondents were influenced by the chatting styles they used to adopt in social media communication. Table 4 below presents some examples of informality found in the corpus

Table.4. E-mails' Features of Informality

Features of Informality	Examples
Informal salutations & closings	Good morning/ bye
chatting styles	4 ur (meaning for your)
spoken negatives	didn't
contracted forms	You're

The findings also reveal the existence of flaming when correspondents show their anger or dissatisfaction about certain issues. Some messages are too long. They could be better written and reformulated in a shorter way. On the other hand, many messages are too short and constitute non satisfactory responses to inquiries.

On the pragmatic and cultural levels, the researcher noted the existence of delayed responses to urgent issues. For this reason, there should be a sense of responsibility and professional conscience among correspondents. Willingness to respond to e-mails in the required time limit is a desirable quality that must be found among the members of the academic community. Correspondents then should constantly check their e-mail inbox. The researcher also marked the existence of apology in many e-mails. The culture of apology for professional mistakes or lack of achievement related to work will deepen and strengthen relations among workers and illuminate all sorts of confusion and misunderstanding. The researcher also noticed that some e-mails sent to the totality of recipients as reminders of uncompleted tasks, this will annoy the ones who have done their job perfectly. Hence, it is recommended that these kinds of e-mails should be sent only for the intended recipients. On the other side, the researcher also noticed the absence of email messages of praise, congratulations and thanks and gratitude in cases of promotions or the completion of valuable work that benefits the workplace. These types of messages will enhance the individual's attachment to his/her organization and motivates him/her to make more efforts and thus increase his/her job performance.

On the methodological level, the researcher's   adoption of a multidimensional approach to analyze the e-mails was successful. The integration of multiple discourse analysis approaches: critical discourse analysis, conversational analysis and genre analysis were satisfactory to provide answers to the research questions. The utilization of a multidimensional approach to analyzing the e-mailing discourse provides institutions with many advantages. The

attentive diagnosis of emailing discourse approached from different perspectives will lead to exploit the results to adjust any sort of deficiency. This will lead to an increase in the conformity of those emails to the genre conventions of the institutional academic discourse.

Important pedagogical implications can be resulted from the use of an integrated approach to discourse analysis of the institutional academic e-mailing discourse. 'E-mail Communication in the workplace' should be clearly presented and taught to students at the university level, who will be future workers, so as to equip them with methods to compose better professional emails. In this way, they will not encounter difficulties to compose correct emails in future occasions. Similarly, workers within the university institutions can engage in an e-mail writing training in a form of workshops supervised by experts in the academic writing issues. Workers can also have the initiative to engage in self- professional development projects by relying on individual efforts to enhance their e-mail writing.

The present research has some limitations. The relative small corpus is insufficient to generalize results to other similar academic institutions. The scope of the study was restricted to internal communication only. Extending the scope of study to external communication would have provided better results. Recommendations to conduct further future research on e-mailing discourse within academic institutions that focus on both internal and external communication were suggested.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study aims at evaluating the utilization of a multidimensional approach to analyze the electronic discourse used in an academic institution because the dependence on a mere linguistic analysis of such a discourse is unable to ameliorate its quality. This blended approach focused on organizational patterns, linguistic distinctiveness, communicative purposes as well as pragmatic, cultural and conversational features.

Results of the analysis revealed that most e-mailers missed some compulsory moves mainly the opening and closing sections, especially when the e-mail is a reply for an earlier conversation. On the linguistic level, it was noticed that this institutional discourse is full of unconventional abbreviations, non- respect of capitalization and punctuation as well as the existence of incomplete sentences and spelling mistakes.

On the other levels, it was noted that e-mails of official invitations for meetings or for informing about directives and other topics are sent with no reference which can lead to its loss or difficulty to be retrieved especially when correspondents receive numerous e-mails a day. Some emails are sent to non- intended readers when e-mailers exchange specific messages such as reminder for incomplete tasks, providing excuses for absence or asking for clarification; this is due to the non- use of the BCC option. The findings also reveal the existence of flaming when correspondents show their anger or dissatisfaction about certain issues.

The study ends up with recommendations that encourage e-mailers to constitute a community of practice which respects the academic institutional setting. It was also recommended that an integrated approach to analyzing the institutional discourse should be adopted in further studies. Moreover, there was a suggestion to organize special training in a form of study days to train correspondents how to be successful e-mailers within the institutional settings.

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