A CORPUS STUDY OF EMAIL WRITING IN A BUISNESS SETTING AND ITS PRACTICAL

APPLICATION IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While email writing is a part of everyday life for most people in the US, it is a topic which sometimes does not receive much attention in the classroom. Literature specifically targeted at teaching non-native speakers of English about email writing is scarce, while sources aimed towards the general population, written from the perspective of etiquette guides, are quite common. However, it is not known whether this information is true to the ways that people actually write emails in the US, or whether it is merely prescriptive information which might or might not be followed by most native speakers.

This study's goal is to examine authentic emails of native speakers of English to see how emails are actually written. A corpus of emails written by employees of the

Enron Corporation was examined to determine common patterns of openings, body, and closings in relation to gender and authority as variables.

In addition a small survey of eleven English as a Second Language teachers in an Intensive English Institute was carried out to learn how other ESL teachers might approach the topic of email writing, if in fact they do. This information was used to create lesson plans for teaching non-native speakers of English how to write emails in a way that is reflective of how emails are actually written. The information goes beyond an etiquette book because it is drawn from actual email writing practices.

Finally, a sample set of four hours of lessons are offered to teach students about email openings, closings, email bodies, and subjects. Such lessons are not present in most ESL textbooks, especially those used for general English courses such as writing. These lessons are based on the corpus study and teacher survey and can be done in almost any classroom. All they require is the ability to create handouts and a chalkboard. Email access at home for the teachers and students is required for the homework, but a computer lab during the lesson is not.

Hopefully these lessons and the research and survey they are based on will be helpful to teachers and students of English as a second language as they teach and learn about email writing.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Very little literature on the topic of email writing exists in the fields of TESOL or linguistics. As a result, this literature review is divided into two sections. In the first section, pertinent linguistic information to this study is discussed, specifically that related to email writing. Also examined is the sociolinguistic factor of gender which might influence email writing, as it influences other aspects of communication. In the second section, sources which specifically are designed to teach email writing, but not from a linguistic perspective, are examined.

Linguistic Information

Baron's (2008) discussion of email lends some insights into the types of emails which exist and the different "rules" that each type seems to have. Baron points out that grammar issues abound even for native speakers of English, perhaps from a lack of

proofreading, or even ignorance of the rules of written English. The medium has

become so common that many forms of writing are no longer formal or special. Despite

the greater permissibility of errors in email because of its increased use, there are still

types of email which require careful editing. A quick message to a friend asking about

lunch might contain nonstandard grammar without the reader noticing or caring, but an

important message to a supervisor about the budget requires more care. Different types

of email require different levels of formality and different vocabularies, as well as

different attention to their grammar. The number of types of email is tremendous, and

each has its own set of unwritten rules.

On a note related to the formality of emails, Stephen, Howser and Cowen's

(2009) study on email demonstrated that students who compose emails which their

professors see as overly causal, using the techniques previously described, are more

likely to receive a negative response from their professors in regard to the specific

request of their email, as well as negatively damaging their long-term relationship,

which could have led to mentoring and recommendation letters.

Part of the reason that non-standard grammar is permissible in some types of

email writing is the speech/writing line. Knowing where speech and writing are

separated and where they intertwine is a key point of Baron's (2000) research. Baron

has made an excellent case for the idea that email is a creole language. It shares many

of the features of creole languages, including quick development and its first-generation

status, and is a mix of spoken and written English. This evolution has been quite rapid. In

Baron's own research as little as 10 years ago email greatly resembled formal written English, but when she published her ideas about email being a creole two years later she had already decided that email did not as closely resemble formal written English (Baron N. S., 2000, pp. 250-259) – ten years later it has doubtless evolved even more.

Gender is a topic which has been widely discussed in linguistics, though rarely in relation to email writing. Gender is an important factor influencing how people speak, and often this carries over into the way that they write. Many perceived gender differences about speech are stereotypes: women speak more politely, women are less assertive, men are more dominant in their conversation and less likely to discuss their feelings. While these are stereotypes, and most certainly not always true, their presence or lack thereof is often noticed by listeners (Bucholtz, 2004), and there are some gender differences which occur (Speer, 2005, p. 32). This can be approached from a number of angles, including the idea that there are simply differences, one type of speech is not better or more dominant than the other. Many languages, such as Japanese, actually have some different forms for male and female speech. While English does not have such specific forms which non-native speakers can learn, there are differences in the ways that men and women speak, and these differences can translate to the ways that they write.

The internet might seem to be a genderless area – after all, one could pretend to be anything – but the differences of gender still exist. A medium which could equalize gender has not done so (Herring, 2003).

Etiquette Sources

The challenges of deciding what is appropriate for a particular type of email are even greater because little research has been done on the subject. "Researchers are often hesitant to ask colleagues - or strangers - for logs of their email correspondence, perhaps for fear people will say no" (Baron N. , 2008, p. 16). This adds to the difficulty of the non-native speaker in learning how to write emails, as the only resource available to them is etiquette and business books and websites, which are written more from the theory of email writing than the actuality of it, based on evidence.

Non-native speakers of English have a number of options available to them in researching email etiquette. They could turn to the plethora of etiquette books on the market, or, more likely, they could conduct a search of the internet to see what is appropriate for email. Following is a survey of the top three most popular email etiquette sites, according to a Google search.

The most popular site for email etiquette (http://www.emailreplies.com) contains a list of tips for email writing. The tips do not really tell a writer how to properly open and close an email, beyond telling them that the "e-mail (should) be personally addressed" (Why do you need email etiquette?, 2008). Beyond this, the site offers a number of tips for the content of messages, such their number one tip "be concise," and advice to answer all questions and keep paragraphs short, perhaps even using numbers for each item. Other advice is more general, such as not forwarding chain

letters, and deals more with email in general than the composition of a solid email that will be well received in a workplace or higher education setting.

The second most popular email etiquette website (http://careerplanning.about.com/od/communication/a/email_etiquette.htm) comes from the well-known about.com. This website forgoes the list format to offer some basic email tips in paragraph form. Again, it advises writers to be concise, then goes on to lambast poor spelling and grammar. "Please" and "thank-you" are strongly encouraged. Beyond this, the only specific advice for the content of email messages themselves is "When in doubt, use Mr., Mrs., or Dr. (if appropriate). When you are replying to an email and the sender of the original message has used his or her first name only, then you could safely assume it's okay to use that person's first name as well" (McKay) – so use titles until the other person doesn't. Only titles are discussed, and not what comes before them. Closings are not discussed at all.

The Purdue OWL site (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/636/1/) is the third offering of email etiquette tips. It follows a different format from the first two, preferring several subject headings with tips underneath each one. The first subject heading is the most applicable to the content of emails, and offers 5 tips. In summary: 1. Apply an appropriate subject 2. Great Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. 3. Do not use all caps 4. Use short paragraphs and be concise 5. Do not try to make jokes (Stolley & Brizee, 2010). This site by far had some of the most concrete tips at the top of its page, including a

specific way to open emails. Again, no suggestions are offered on closing, but some similar suggestions are offered for the body of the message.

After these three sites the information presented on subsequent sites becomes redundant. The majority of the information on other sites which appear in a Google search of "email etiquette" is the same as the information when appears in the first three hits. Even the information on these first three hits overlaps greatly. It seems that email etiquette is fairly universally acknowledged – no site has many new insights for readers wishing to write better email.

In summary, email etiquette websites say that: email greetings should at least contain Mr./Ms./Dr. and perhaps "dear," unless a relationship was established with the recipient. They would not know how to close an email. The content of the message would be as short as possible with as few mistakes as possible, and the subject line as specific as possible[1].

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[1]   A note: The sites listed above all had comments about CCing, spam, attachments and other topics related to email. These topics were not discussed as they will not be analyzed in the body of this paper. The purpose of the paper is solely to discover how to compose appropriate emails – not email etiquette in general.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As previously mentioned, acquiring data sets of email to analyze is a difficult

task, as many people are unwilling to have the contents of their email boxes analyzed,

especially people in a business setting. Nevertheless, it was decided that analyzing

business setting emails would be more beneficial to non-native speakers wishing to

learn about actual email patterns of native speakers than emails from, for example, a

university setting, as most non-native speakers will be using their email skills in the

professional world.

Corpus

The corpus of emails used comes from the Enron Corporation. These emails were

released to the public in the court cases regarding this company. Several corpus studies

have been done on this dataset, but none on this particular topic. The dataset (Cohen,

2009) contains emails from 140 senders, divided into folders based on each person's

email account. In each person's folder is the contents of their email account, divided as

they had their account set up – so each account contains different folders. However,

each account's "sent" folder contains the emails sent by that particular person, and

these are the emails which will be examined in this study.

Selecting the Dataset

In order to select these emails, the folders containing each sender's email

account were divided into two folders - one folder for males, one for females. The data

was left in the alphabetical order in which it originally appeared. A random numbers

table was used to select 20 males and 20 females from each folder. The sent items

folder was checked for each person, and as long as it contained at least 10 items, that

person's folder was included in the study. If fewer than 10 items were present, the table

was used to select another person. The first 10 emails in the 20 randomly selected

individual's folders were then used for this study, for a total of 400 emails.

The process of selecting the individuals was random except for gender, as gender

is a factor examined in this study, and to do this an equal sampling of each gender was

necessary for analysis. Otherwise the data could have come from all males or all

females, which would have resulted in skewed analysis. To determine gender received

emails were examined as to pronoun usage if the names were non-conclusive.

The "sent" items folder of each person was used as it contained emails from a known individual. These people's salary and position are public knowledge, and there is no question of their identity as they are the owners of the email accounts from which they are sending emails.

Breaking Down the Dataset

After the male and female individuals were randomly selected through a random numbers table, with those whose sent items folders which did not contain enough emails being excluded, they were further classified by position. In a few cases, for some reason position could not be determined, and these individuals were replaced by others with the help of the random numbers table. The males and females were each placed into groups according to their positions. In the males folder the breakdown occurred as follows:

Table 1: Positions Held in the Data: Male

Position	Number of persons in the study who held the position
CEO	2
Director	4
General Employee	6
Manager	3
President	1

Trader	3
Vice-President	1
Total	20

In the females folder the breakdown occurred as follows:

Table 2: Positions Held in the Data: Female

Position	Number of persons in the study who held the position
Director	1
General Employee	13
President	1
Trader	2
Vice-President	3
Total	20

For the purposes of the study, these positions can be classified as those in a position of authority, versus those not in a position of authority. They were classified thusly because an aim of the study was to determine not only if gender has an effect on email style, but also if power does. While these positions could be determined based on their rankings in the Enron management structure, they were simply divided into those

persons generally having authority, and those not. Employees and traders do not typically supervise large numbers of other people (though they might supervise some other people) and CEO's, presidents, vice-presidents, directors and managers typically do supervise many other people, either directly or indirectly. The study aims to determine if this supervision, or authority, has a bearing on email style in general, as looking at the relationship of the persons in each individual email to one another would be impossible without knowing the identities of all participants. The data ultimately was broken down as follows:

Table 3: Positions of Authority: Men

Position of Authority?	Number of persons in the study who held the position
Authoritative Position	11
Non-Authoritative Position	9
Total	20

Table 4: Positions of Authority: Women

Position of Authority?	Number of persons in the study who held the position
Authoritative Position	5

Non-Authoritative Position	15
Total	20

Throughout the study it is important to remember that while the male data is close to equally broken down into those with and without authority, the same is not true of the female data. Selecting the data so that an equal number of men with and without authority and women with and without authority was considered (as the male/ female data was selected) but this was not done as it was actually not possible with the dataset. There were not enough women in positions of authority to equally break the female data down – in fact, the majority of the females with known position information are already present in the selected dataset, while there are many males not present in the selected dataset whose emails were available for analysis.

Examining the Data

After the participants for the study were selected, their emails were examined. Each of the first ten emails in the participant's sent items folder was opened. If one of these emails contained no text by the author, only a forwarded message with no sort of note attached, it was replaced by the next set in the data. So in some cases 15-20 emails had to be opened to obtain 10 emails which contained text by the email's author.

In evaluating the data, emails which did not contain text from the sender but were simply forwards were omitted in favor of the next email in the sent items folder.

Also, some emails in a person's sent items folder might have been written by an assistant or secretary. In this case, it was apparent from the sender who wrote the emails and the next email from the folder was selected.

If an email did contain text, a number of factors were examined. The first factor was the presence of some sort of greeting, or opening, such as "hello" or "dear." These items were considered a greeting if they came at the beginning of the email. The second factor was the presence of a title of address towards the person receiving the email, such as "Mrs." or "Dr." or even "Sir." The third factor was the name of the addressee in some form, be it their full name, first or last only, initials, or something else recognizable as a name. There were some emails where the addressee's name was not at the beginning of the email, but did appear later on. This was not considered part of the email opening. Occasionally an email with a questionable name (as to whether it was first or last) appeared, but this dilemma could usually be resolved with the help of the recipient's email address. It is acknowledged that in a few cases a judgment on the part of the researcher had to be made in regard to first/last names in question.

The body was the second part of the email examined. All of the etiquette sources placed great emphasis on writing concise emails, so the number of sentences in each email was examined. The sentences of the email writer, based on traditional grammatical markers, were used, even if these sentences were very long or very short. Another tip of the etiquette sources was writing emails free from mistakes, or what is considered in the works to be non-standard grammar, spelling and capitalization errors.

It was quickly seen that non-standard issues in email tend to fall into two categories: 1) minor technical issues, usually a lack of appropriate capitalization or spacing mistakes – less significant non-standard items and 2) substantial spelling and grammar mistakes – significant non-standard items.

The final items of each email to be considered were its closing and signature. The closing was any words which occurred at the very end of the email, as a short, standard phrase, such as "thanks" or "talk to you soon." To be considered a closing, the phrase/ word needed to occur at the very end of the email, or immediately before the sender's name. After looking at the closing, the sender's name was examined. If present, it was classified as either first, last, initials, or full. There was no chance of error in labeling the sender's name as first/last because it was the title of the folder.

After the data was collected and classified, it was examined as to percentage of occurrence of each part of the data in relation to the whole of its group, and then overall.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The following is the data collected. The data is further broken down as it is discussed. For details on the classification of the data see the "Methodology" section.

Table 5: Distribution of openings across gender and position

	Had Greeting	Used a Title	Had an Addressee Name
Men – In positions of authority	2%	0%	20%
Men – Not in positions of authority	7%	1%	21%

Women – In positions of authority	4%	0%	12%
Women – Not in positions of authority	9%	3%	31%
Overall	6%	1%	23%

Table 6: Distribution of body across gender and position

	Was Concise (under 3 sentences)	Used Letters or Numbers for Organization	Had Minor Technical Issues	Had Serious Grammatical Errors	Used Profanity
Men – In positions of authority	81%	1%	8%	4%	4%
Men – Not in positions of authority	83%	2%	22%	10%	3%
Women – In positions of	90%	0%	20%	8%	2%

authority					
Women – Not in positions of authority	77%	0%	9%	1%	0%
Overall	80%	1%	13%	5%	2%

Table 7: Distribution of closings across gender and position

	Had Closing	Had a Signature
Men – In positions of authority	16%	40%
Men – Not in positions of authority	32%	44%
Women – In positions of authority	20%	8%
Women – Not in positions of authority	32%	41%

Overall	26%	37%

Greeting

According to Clyne (2009) oral introductions follow certain rules which are based on a number of factors, and someone who is not familiar with a culture may not know which factors are the most important when addressing a particular person. Some of the factors include: How familiar the people are with one another, if the other person is perceived as an adult, the relative ages of the two participants, if the participants belong to the same group, if the participants are the same socially, and how the first person addresses will affect the address of the second person (Clyne, 2009). I have found that the same factors are present in email address.

The first conclusion which can be drawn from the data is that persons in a business setting tend to prefer not to open their emails with the traditional "dear" and rarely even use the more informal "Hey," "Hi" or "Hello." In fact, the traditional "dear" did not show up a single time in this dataset of 400 emails. This conclusion is supported by the etiquette websites which tended not to encourage the use of such greetings. A non-native speaker wishing to sound natural in a business setting could probably safely leave off any sort of greeting in correspondence.

Greetings are a good example of the way that Baron's research on the speech/writing distinction is proved true - whereas email once resembled traditional

letter writing (Baron, 2000), it has morphed into a form which finds those modes of address typically associated with speech more appealing with its use of "hey" and "hi."

Overall, 6% of emails had a greeting. This means that 94% of emails did not have any sort of greeting.

Table 8: Greeting, Overall totals

Greeting	Number of Occurrences (out of 400, 40 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 400)
Hello	5	1%
Hi	7	2%
Hey there	1	0.25%
Hey	12	3%
None	375	94%

Of the different groups of people examined in the study, women not in positions of authority were the most likely to use some sort of greeting with their emails, at 9% of emails containing them. However, these greetings were informal ones, such as "hey" and "hi."

Table 9: Greeting, Women not in positions of authority

Greeting	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Occurrences

	(out of 150, 15 subjects)	(out of 150)
Hello	4	3%
Hi	5	3%
Hey	5	3%
None	136	91%

Men without authority closely followed women without authority in their use of greetings, at 7% of emails containing them.

Table 10: Greetings, Men not in positions of authority

Greeting	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 90)
Hello	1	1%
Hi	1	1%
Hey there	1	1%
Hey	4	4%
None	84	93%

This could lead to the conclusion that those not in authority, versus those in authority, have more solidarity, or wish to establish more solidarity, with the people they write to, as building solidarity is one of the functions of particular types of

greetings (Clyne, 2009). Those who have authority might wish to not establish solidarity through a greeting, as the people they write to are quite possibly under their authority.

In general women tended to use a greeting more often than men. This holds true even for women with authority. Both groups of women greeted 2% more than their male counterparts. This could be attributed to women being socialized to attend to social relationships more explicitly than men (Bucholtz, 2004).

Table 11: Greeting, Women in positions of authority

Greeting	Number of Occurrences (out of 50, 5 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)
Hi	1	2%
Hey	1	2%
None	48	96%

Table 12: Greetings, Men in positions of authority

Greeting	Number of Occurrences (out of 110, 11 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 110)
Hey	2	2%
None	108	98%

Overall, greetings were not commonly used. Those without authority greeted more than those with authority, perhaps because of solidarity, and women greeted more than men, perhaps because of the above mention of socialization. According to this data, non-native speakers wishing to sound natural should overall avoid greetings, especially the traditional "Dear." If they do still choose to greet, they are best off choosing more speech-like greetings such as "hi," "hey," and "hello."

Titles

Titles were very rarely used in this study, i.e., in only 1% of emails overall.

Table 13: Title, Overall totals

Title	Number of Occurrences (out of 400, 40 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 400)
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr	5	1%
None	395	99%

This was surprising because etiquette sources tend to agree on recommending title use. However, they also agree that once a relationship is established titles can be dropped. This is also the conclusion of Clyne (2009). It is not known if the emails in this study were all sent to people whom the senders had relationships with, but they could very well have been sent to fellow employees of Enron Corporation or to people the sender had a personal relationship with outside of work. It is safe to say that in order to

follow native speaker conventions, emails sent to people the sender has a relationship with do not need to contain a title, and perhaps there are situations where a title is not necessary even without a relationship.

It was seen in the data that the few emails which did contain title use were sent by those without authority.

Table 14: Titles, Men not in positions of authority

Title	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 90)
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr	1	1%
None	89	99%

Table 15: Titles, Women not in positions of authority

Title	Number of Occurrences (out of 150, 15 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 150)
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr	4	3%
None	146	97%

Neither men nor women in positions of authority used titles at all.

Table 16: Titles, Men in positions of authority

Title	Number of Occurrences (out of 110, 11 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 110)
None	110	100%

Table 17: Titles, Women in Positions of Authority

Title	Number of Occurrences (out of 50, 5 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)
None	50	100%

Both people in positions of authority and those not in positions of authority would have equal opportunities to send emails to people they did not know well, so this implies that recognition of authority is a stronger factor than familiarity by itself in determining the use of titles.

As with greetings, women were slightly more likely to use titles than men. Again, this could have been due to politeness, or perhaps the women happened to be emailing more people they were unfamiliar with.

A non-native speaker would be well-advised to avoid title use with people he/she has established a relationship with in a business context. Perhaps even someone

a relationship has not been established with would not require a title. Concluding this from the data was impossible as the relationship between each sender and recipient could not be determined.

Addressee Name

Addressee names were the third feature of the opening/greeting process examined in this study. Use of addressee names to open/ help open an email was much more common than the use of a greeting or a title, at 23% overall, but still occurred in less than ¼ of the emails examined.

Table 18: Addressee name, Overall totals

Addressee Name	Number of Occurrences (out of 400, 40 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 400)
First only	81	20%
Initials only	2	0.5%
Guys	3	0.75%
Last only	4	1%
Greet with sender's name	1	0.25%
None	309	77%

Again, a non-native speaker of English wishing to sound natural in a business setting would probably be safe in leaving out this aspect of email writing, despite the advice of email etiquette books.

If an addressee is named, overall, a first name tends to be chosen as the appropriate form of address. Perhaps again this is out of a desire for solidarity. A first name is typically considered more informal than a last name. The next most common way to address someone was with their last name (usually accompanied by a title) only. However, the first name use occurred 20% of the time. Last name use only occurred 1% of the time – this typically corresponded to the use of a title. It is traditional to use titles with last names, so this was not surprising (Lindsell-Roberts, USA). Overall a first name is a wise choice if using an addressee name is the decided on course of action, though using an addressee name is by no means necessary in the average business email.

Men tend to name the addressee about 20% of the time, regardless of their authority level.

Table 19: Addressee name, Men in positions of authority

Addressee Name	Number of Occurrences (out of 110, 11 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 110)
First only	18	16%
Initials only	1	1%
Guys	3	3%

None	88	80%

Table 20: Addressee name, Men not in positions of authority

Addressee Name	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 90)
First only	18	20%
Last only	1	1%
None	71	79%

Typically men choose to use the first name of their addressee. Occasionally men used "guys" when referring to several men to whom the email was addressed. This is an informal choice, and one which etiquette sources did not suggest. However, even men in positions of authority used this choice, indicating that it must in some situations be appropriate for business use.

Women were more varied in their use of an addressee name. Women in positions of authority used one only 12% of the time, and women not in positions of authority used one 31% of the time.

Table 21: Addressee Names, Women in Positions of Authority

Addressee Name	Number of Occurrences (out of 50, 5 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)

First only	6	12%
None	44	88%

Table 22: Addressee Name, Women not in positions of authority

Addressee Name	Number of Occurrences (out of 150, 15 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 150)
First only	39	26%
Last only	3	2%
Initials only	1	1%
Greet with own name	1	1%
None	106	71%

These numbers are well below and above the average, respectively. A speculation could be that women prefer to use an address out of politeness, as women are often more polite than men (Speer, 2005), but women in authority positions are trying to avoid this stereotype of women more than women not in positions of authority. This, however, is merely a speculation. Regardless, the average woman, regardless of authority level, in a business setting addresses her subject by their first name, as do men, but less than ¼ of the time. This is the information that non-native speakers need to take away from this section of the study.

Email Length

The length of emails was extremely important in all of the etiquette sources. The first source which comes up on google, emailrepiles.com's number one tip is: "Be concise and to the point: Do not make an e-mail longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an e-mail is harder than reading printed communications and a long e-mail can be very discouraging to read" (Why do you need email etiquette?, 2008). The second most popular source in a google search has a page entitled: "Be Concise and Professional" (McKay)as if a lack of concise writing leads to a lack of professionalism. The article advises writing short emails, and if they must be long an apology is suggested: "You may even want to apologize for being so wordy at the beginning of the message" (McKay). One of the first five suggestions of the third most popular source according to a google search is that emails should be as short as possible: "Write clear, short paragraphs and be direct and to the point" (Stolley & Brizee, 2010). Thus each source seems to view concise writing as either the most important or a very important aspect of good professional email writing.

The emails in this study are consistent with the advice of the email etiquette sources. The bodies of the emails were examined as to sentence length. 48% has only one sentence. After observing that there seemed to be far fewer emails with more than three sentences than with three or fewer, I made a formal count, with the result that 80% of the emails in the study contained three or fewer sentences.

Table 23: Body, Overall totals

Sentences	Number of emails with this many sentences	Percentage of Total Emails (out of 400)	Use of letters/ numbers to organize	Minor mistakes only (capitalization, spacing, etc)	Some/ Many spelling grammar mistakes?	Profanity
1 sentence	193	48%		13	5	3
2 sentences	69	17%		9		1
3 sentences	60	15%		15	5	2
4 sentences	27	7%		4	3	1
5 sentences	19	5%		6	3	1
6 sentences	12	3%		4	2	
7 sentences	7	2%	1	1		

8 sentences	3	0.75%				
9 sentences	2	0.5%	1			
10+ sentences	8	2%	1		1	

Of the different demographics examined, everyone excluding women in positions of authority hovered around these percentages of concise emails – and women in authority wrote even more shorter emails, with 90% being under three sentences.

Table 24: Body, Women in Positions of Authority

Sentences	Number of emails with this many sentences	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)	Minor mistakes only (capitalization, spacing, etc)	Some/ Many spelling grammar mistakes?	Profanity
1 sentence	26	52%	2		
2 sentences	12	24%	1		
3 sentences	7	14%	3	1	
4 sentences	3	6%	2	2	1

5 sentences	1	2%	1		
6 sentences	1	2%	1	1	
7 sentences					
8 sentences					
9 sentences					
10+ sentences					

It is obvious from both the advice of etiquette books and the study conducted that shorter emails are appropriate in a business setting. Getting the message across is important – 1/5 of the messages were longer than three sentences, but getting it across more quickly than it would take to write/read several sentences is valuable, no matter what demographic is examined. Non-native speakers should be encouraged to write emails which are as short as possible when communicating in a business setting.

Letters/Numbers for Organization

The next factor examined was that of using letters or numbers for organization in email writing. Usually this consisted of numbering different points or questions the author had to make, like an outline. Bullet points would also fall into this category. Because so many of the etiquette sources suggested concise emails, many of them also suggested using a method of organization to help readers when a long email was absolutely necessary.

Emails with the use of letters or numbers for organization showed up remarkably few times – one in an email with seven sentences, one with nine, and one with ten. It would seem on the surface that this is not a common email writing technique in a business setting. However, there were only a total of 20 emails over seven sentences in length in the data – 5% of the overall total. It is possible that in longer emails this technique is sometimes used, but there is not enough data to come to a conclusion about this. It is apparent that if a non-native speaker wishes to use letters or numbers to organize an email it should probably be a longer email, as this is the only place in the data where this phenomenon occurred, and this matches the advice of etiquette sources.

Interestingly when organization strategies were used, all of them occurred in the emails of male subjects. With so few occurrences, however, it is difficult to make any substantial conclusion about what this means for gender and organization of emails in a business setting.

Table 25: Body, Men in positions of authority

Sentences	Number of emails with this many	Percentage of Total Emails (out of 110)	Use of letters/ numbers to	Minor mistakes only (capitalization, spacing, etc)	Some/ Many spelling grammar	Profanity

	sentences		organize		mistakes?	
1 sentence	54	49%		4	1	2
2 sentences	18	16%		1		1
3 sentences	17	15%		1		1
4 sentences	5	5%				
5 sentences	5	5%			1	
6 sentences	4	4%		2	1	
7 sentences	3	3%		1		
8 sentences	1	1%				
9 sentences	1	1%				
10+ sentences	2	2%	1		1	

Table 26: Body, Men not in positions of authority

Sentences	Number of emails with this many sentences	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Use of letters/ numbers to organize	Minor mistakes only (capitalization, spacing, etc)	Some/ Many spelling grammar mistakes?	Profanity
1 sentence	41	46%		2	4	1
2 sentences	17	19%		7		
3 sentences	16	18%		6	3	1
4 sentences	5	6%		1	1	
5 sentences	5	6%		3	1	1
6 sentences	2	2%		1		
7 sentences	1	1%	1			
8	1	1%				

sentences						
9 sentences	1	1%	1			
10+ sentences	1	1%				

Errors

One of the most surprising conclusions of the study was the appropriateness of what are commonly considered mistakes in emails. Both minor errors such as a lack of capitalization or spacing issues (words run together) and more serious issues, such as an non-standard spelling and grammar, were fairly common in the emails. A total of 18% of the emails had some sort of non-standard English which would be considered an error or mistake, by prescripitivists, either major or minor, with 5% being more serious and 13% being less serious. An example of a more serious error could be using the wrong tense in combination with capitalization errors in one email. A less serious error could be not capitalizing the first word of a sentence. This is almost 1/5 of the emails which had prescriptive mistakes of some sort. (see Table 23)

Two of the three etiquette sources were explicit about the importance of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Emailreplies.com's (2008) third tip is "Use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation." Careerplanner.com's third section (of three) is

devoted to the topic of spelling and grammar. Regardless of this advice, quite a high proportion of the emails contained spelling, grammar, punctuation and/or capitalization errors, statistics, as observed in Baron's (2008) research as well.

The mistakes were more prevalent in emails of 3-6 sentences, with 50% of six sentence emails containing errors. Only 9.3% of 1 sentence emails contained errors, and 13% of 2 sentence emails. This indicates that the more sentences are in an email the more likely it is that it will contain errors. This trend did not hold true for 7-10 sentence emails, but as only a few of these existed in the data no conclusions can be drawn from them.

Table 27: Body, Women not in positions of authority

Sentences	Number of emails with this many sentences	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 150)	Minor mistakes only (capitalization, spacing, etc)	Some/ Many spelling grammar mistakes?
1 sentence	72	48%	7	
2 sentences	22	15%		
3 sentences	20	13%	5	1
4 sentences	14	9%	1	
5 sentences	8	5%	2	1
6 sentences	5	3%		

7 sentences	3	2%		
8 sentences	1	1%		
9 sentences				
10+ sentences	5	3%		

Men in positions of authority made minor errors 8% of the time and major ones

4% of the time (see Table 25) – the former number being substantially lower than the

overall 13% average and the later being slightly lower than the overall 5% average (see

Table 23). The 5% average is affected by the women not in positions of authority, the

largest demographic group, who only had substantial errors 1% of the time and minor

errors 9% of the time. Both numbers are quite a bit lower than the overall averages.

In contrast, the men not in positions of authority and the women in positions of

authority had significantly more errors in their writing. The former group had minor

issues 22% of the time and the latter 20%. Major issues occurred 10% and 8% of the

time. This means that men in positions without authority made some sort of mistake in

their writing 33% of the time, and the women in positions of authority followed them at

28%. The gender nor authority position aligned in their quantity of mistakes.

Overall, less than 20% of the emails still had any sort of error, and the majority of

these were minor issues. A native speaker would still be well advised, as the etiquette

sources say, to try to keep emails error free, but not spend undue time on this pursuit,

as the subjects in this study apparently did not. A non-native speaker must consider the

social implications of their not being native speakers of English when making this judgment.

Profanity

Another unexpected phenomenon which occurred in the study was the presence of profanity in the emails. While this language occurred in only 2% of emails total, it was present. It is possible that the emails it occurred in were of a personal as opposed to professional nature, but they were regardless all from a cooperate email account, and it is impossible to know the extent to which each email was personal or professional, even on close examination. For example, an email about the company email is not professional, but relates to the company, so it would be difficult to classify. Etiquette sources did not even mention this topic.

Men used profanity more than women. Over 3% of the men's emails contained profanity, while less than 1% of the women's emails contained profanity (see Tables 24-27). This could perhaps be attributed toward the tendency for women in general to use profanity less than men (Bucholtz, 2004).

Also, those in positions of authority used profanity slightly more than those not in positions of authority. The men in authority used profanity 3.6% of the time while those without authority used it 3.3% of the time. The women in authority used profanity 2% of the time while those without authority used it 0% of the time. The reason for this

is difficult to say. Speculatively, those not in positions of authority might feel social

constraints because of their relative power.

Profanity was present in the data, but because there was so little of it sweeping

claims are difficult to make. Overall, it was present only 2% of the time, and as

mentioned before the line between personal and professional emails is often blurred, so

it is difficult to know if all of these occurrences were in personal emails. As a result, non-

native speakers of English should avoid profanity in their email correspondence,

especially with persons they do not know well, as it is typically considered impolite, and

thus inappropriate for business purposes. They could be advised that they will

occasionally see it in emails.

Closing

Closing emails was the only non-name item which occurred with any frequency

in the dataset, at 26% overall.

Table 28: Closing, Overall totals

Closing	Number of Occurrences (out of 400, 40 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 400)
Thanks	71	18%
Thank you	9	2%
Take care	4	1%

Keep in touch	2	0.5%
Talk to you soon	3	0.75%
See you then/tonight	3	0.75%
Regards	10	3%
God Bless	1	0.25%
Thx	1	0.25%
None	296	74%

Quite a wide variety of closings occurred, but the simple "thanks" was by far the most common at 18%. Including the more formal version of "thanks," "thank you," brings this total to 20%. Occasionally some other form of closing such as "keep in touch" or "regards" was used. None of the etiquette sources mention the topic of closings.

Using "thanks" in some form to close an email may function to soften a request being made in addition to expressing gratitude. The other types of closings usually express a sentiment of wanting to communicate with the other person again, such as "keep in touch" or "see you soon" or expressed appreciation for the other person, such as "regards." These types of closings are probably for solidarity (Barbieri, 2008).

There was little gender variation in the use of closing.

Table 29: Closing, Men in positions of authority

Closing	Number of Occurrences (out of 110, 11 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 110)
Thanks	5	5%
Regards	10	9%
God Bless	1	1%
Thx	1	1%
None	93	85%

Table 30: Closings, Men not in positions of authority

Closing	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 90)
Thanks	25	28%
Thank you	2	2%
Take care	2	2%
None	61	68%

Table 31: Closings, Women in Positions of Authority

Closing	Number of Occurrences (out of 50, 5 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)
Thanks	5	10%
Thank you	2	4%

Take Care	1	2%
Keep in touch	2	4%
None	40	80%

Table 32: Closing, Women not in positions of authority

Closing	Number of Occurrences (out of 150, 15 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 150)
Thanks	36	24%
Thank you	5	3%
Take care	1	1%
Talk to you soon	3	2%
See you then/ tonight	3	2%
None	102	68%

In every type of email, regardless of gender, "thanks" was the most common

closing. An apparent exception to this was in the men in positions of authority group,

which contained a high percentage, 9%, or "regards;" this is due to the emails of a single

person. Neither men nor women were likely to close in general or to close with one

specific closing more than another.

However, there was significant variation in likelihood of closing an email related

to position of authority. Men and women not in positions of authority closed their

emails almost 33% of the time, while women in positions of authority closed them 20%

of the time, and men in positions of authority less than this. This could be a result of

those not in positions of authority having to make requests more often than those in positions of authority, or at least having to apply a softener to their requests more often.

In general, a non-native speaker would probably be safe not closing an average business email in any way, but should probably consider the appropriateness of a form of "thanks" at the end of the email before making this decision, as it is the most common type of closing, and can be used as a softener.

Signatures

Signatures were the most commonly included aspect of email writing in this dataset, at 37% of the time overall.

Table 33: Signature, Overall totals

Signature	Number of Occurrences (out of 400, 40 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 400)
Full name	29	7%
First only	80	20%
Last only	9	2%
Initials only	30	8%
Nickname (obvious)	1	0.25%
None	251	63%

Everyone except for women in positions of authority included a signature of some sort

on their emails over 40% of the time. This was not a topic discussed by etiquette

sources.

Table 34: Signature, Men in positions of authority

Signature	Number of Occurrences (out of 110, 11 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 110)
Full name	1	1%
First only	19	17%
Last only	9	8%
Initials only	14	13%
Nickname (obvious)	1	1%
None	66	60%

Table 35: Signatures, Women in Positions of Authority

Signature	Number of Occurrences (out of 50, 5 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 50)
Full name	2	4%
First only	2	4%
None	46	92%

Table 36: Signatures, Men not in positions of authority

Signature	Number of Occurrences (out of 90, 9 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 90)
Full name	3	3%
First only	25	28%
Initials only	12	13%
None	50	56%

Table 37: Signatures, Women not in positions of authority

Signature	Number of Occurrences (out of 150, 15 subjects)	Percentage of Occurrences (out of 150)
Full name	23	15%
First only	34	23%
Initials only	4	3%
None	89	59%

Using a first name to sign emails was the most common method, at 20% of the time, as was the case with the addressee name, but a full name (7%) or initials (8%) only were also fairly common. Using a name to sign emails could serve a practical purpose of reminding the recipient who wrote the email, identify the sender if an original email was sent to a large number of people, or simply be another sign of solidarity.

Women in positions of authority signed their emails only 8% of the time. This was not the case with any other sub-group.

Non-native speakers have the choice of signing or not signing their emails, and have several options of how they do so. It is possible that signature use is somehow related to conversations (see next section), which could be an explanation for why it occurs frequently, but not as frequently as no signature. This would be good information that might help a non-native speaker of English decide if a signature was necessary or not on an email.

Conversations

Conversations were an important aspect of email which unfortunately could not be taken into account in this study. Conversations in email probably affect what aspects of email are included, just like they affect what aspects of speech are included in a verbal conversation (Richards, 1980). They possibly could result in any of the aspects examined here being left off in subsequent emails in a conversation but not in the first one. Knowing this for sure is not possible without further research. In this study, examining this aspect of email was considered, but unfortunately, in this dataset, as would be the case with any dataset that was not the researcher's own inbox (and even then sometimes) it is impossible to know if an email is indeed part of a conversation. Sometimes the previous email(s) can be seen along with the current one, but they could have been deleted by the sender as some of the etiquette sources suggest, and the

researcher would have no way of knowing this. So knowing for sure if an email is part of a conversation is impossible with this dataset, as it would be with most datasets.

Conclusion

1. Greetings are generally avoided. If they are used, "hey," "hi," and "hello" are typically selected. Those not in positions of authority tend to use them more often than those in positions of authority.

2. Titles are not generally used, especially if a relationship has been established. Women use them more than men, and those not in positions of authority more than those in positions of authority.

3. An addressee name is sometimes included in the body of the email, probably out of solidarity, but is not necessarily. If one is used, the first name of the recipient is what is typically selected.

4. Emails are generally as short as possible.

5. Using letters or numbers to organize an email is not common. (Though the data on this subject was inconclusive)

6. Mistakes (not in content) are generally acceptable in emails sometimes, especially minor errors but also major ones.

7. Profanity is generally avoided in emails, probably out of politeness, as it is not very common, but might sometimes be seen. Men use profanity more than women.

8. If "thanks" is appropriate as an email closing it tends to be used, especially by those not in positions of authority. However, not closing an email is also common.

9. Signatures of first name, full name, or initials are quite common in email writing, but not necessarily all of the time.

The above list contains 9 points which a non-native speaker of English could take away from this study as general guidelines to writing emails which are not necessarily better from the standpoint of etiquette, but are more natural sounding because they are based on actual data taken from native speakers of English in a business setting. The list will be used in one of the following sections to design a lesson plan for teaching non-native speakers of email how to write natural sounding emails.

Chapter 5: A Teacher Survey

Because the data taken from the Enron Cooperation data was in many cases not in line with etiquette sources, a survey was taken of teachers in an Intensive English Institute (IEI) at a mid-sized Midwestern University to see if they varied in their responses from the Enron data. Very few of the researched emails were probably written as first time emails to an unknown person, so while the data can tell non-native speakers how to write emails in general once they are established in a job, they still need to know how to write the occasional formal email. The results of the survey indicated that teachers feel that there is some variation between formal versus.

The eleven teachers received a survey via email containing ten questions. The teachers simply responded to the survey by replying to the email, usually with their

answers after each question. A method of response was not specified. For confidentiality purposes, teachers are not identified by name and the full responses are not included, but the answers to each question are summarized below. It is important to note that the IEI has both native and non-native speakers of English teaching English. If the response of a non-native speaker of English was an anomaly in the data this is mentioned; otherwise non-native speaker responses are part of the data.

Question 1

Do you teach students about email writing specifically, in lessons only on email, or in general, such as when questions arise, or both?

Six of the eleven teachers responded that they did teach specific lessons on email writing, but only when the content of the course was appropriate for such a lesson, for example in an upper-level writing course or a computer skills course. Otherwise they only taught email writing if students had questions about it. On the other hand, there were five of eleven teachers who had never specifically taught an email writing lesson at all.

This is an interesting response as it indicates that teachers do see a need for email writing lessons, and perhaps some of them would teach email writing more if they had materials on the topic. It is a subject that some teachers view as valuable for teaching to students.

Question 2

What kinds of settings do you consider in teaching email? Business settings? University settings? Casual settings?

Ten of eleven teachers responded that they teach email for university settings – only one teacher had considered business settings because of a special project her student did.

However, many students in a university IEI will probably need to send business related emails in the future. Perhaps these teachers do not feel knowledgable with teaching this type of email, or perhaps are not looking beyond the immediate needs of their students. While university emails are important, if teachers had more information about business emails, they might be more inclined to cover this email type in class.

Question 3

How do you teach students to open emails? There are many combinations to choose from, how do you help students to understand what to use in each situation? For example: "Dear Mr. John," "Professor Smith," "Jane," or "Hi Sara" might all be appropriate in certain situations – as would no salutation in some situations.

All of the teachers agreed that starting an email with "Dear Mr./Ms./Miss/Mrs./Professor Last Name" (though they did not all mention all of the options) was the way to teach openings to students. Some teachers said they would go

farther than this in their lessons, teaching students about when they could use other types of openings "I usually introduce the concepts of social distance and relative power…" or another response "(I)…try to help them acquire strategies/skills that allow them to find out what the appropriate opening in a specific situation is." These teachers are focusing on concepts that go beyond email writing in order to explain when a formal opening is not necessary. One teacher even used the opportunity to explain the interesting Ms./Miss/Mrs. distinction which occurs in English , while others emphasized that a mere "Teacher" or "Dear Teacher," while polite and acceptable in some cultures is not in the United States.

Overall the teachers did seem to agree with the etiquette sources in their assessment of emails openings, and when they addressed less formal/more familiar email openings agreed with the Enron data.

Question 4

How do you teach students to close emails? For example, "Sara," "Sincerely, John," and "Thanks, Jane" would all be appropriate in some situations – as would no closing in some situations. What do you teach students is appropriate in different situations?

All of the teachers seemed to agree that "Thanks" and "Sincerely" are the best ways to close emails. Only one of them addressed in class how much of the sender's own first name to sign, or if it was OK to sign only the sender's name. She said: "In the spirit of formality, I would also not tell them to simply write their name as a closing;"

Most teachers noted that their responses were based on the idea that these were

formal emails. A non-native speaker suggested "regards" or "best regards" which are

acceptable closings according to the Enron data, but not particularly common – the fact

that only one teacher suggested this reinforces that this is not a common way to close

emails.

This is good information as it indicates that, despite the Enron data, in formal

situations teachers still think that an email closing is necessary. As the etiquette sources

did not address this topic the information is particularly relevant.

Question 5

What do you teach students about the bodies of emails? Etiquette books address the

following topics: length, spelling and grammar, and organization strategies. Do you

address these topics? If so which and how? What do you say?

Eight of ten teachers (not all responded to this question) commented on how

they tell students to be concise with their emails, especially not including unnecessary

details such as symptoms when sick – apparently many of the teachers had received

student emails in the past with more details about illnesses than they desired. One

teacher commented that "They (emails) should be clear and concise." This sentiment

was echoed by many of the respondents. The teachers also said that as they are

teaching a foreign language they do emphasize proper spelling and grammar. One

teacher commented that "I do discuss with them the fact that spelling and grammar are

often "looser" in email" and went on to state that this varies by social distance, something he tries to explain to students. Seven of ten teachers seemed to focus more on standard spelling and grammar than explaining when spelling and grammar could perhaps be less standard. None of the teachers made any comments about organization strategies, beyond the already mentioned brevity.

This information is good for this study as it suggests that the reality of the business world, etiquette sources, and actual classroom practices all match in regard to email length. While the business world is perhaps not so focused on proper spelling and grammar as the classroom and etiquette sources, teachers do seem to be focusing on more formal emails, and perhaps would accept less standard grammar if an email were more informal. In fact, this was indicated by a few of the teachers.

Question 6

Do you teach students about subject lines? What do you teach them?

The responses to this particular question varied greatly. Four of ten teachers did not address this topic at all in their classrooms, but one commented that now that it had been suggested, she would do so as it would greatly improve her inbox. Other teachers said that they did address the topic, and specifically commented that "Subject lines should be what the email is about in as few words as possible; not your name!" – teachers seemed to find that students from other cultures thought a name was a good subject line, and tried to encourage them to use the topic of the email instead.

The response to this question was particularly valuable as it was not possible to study it with the Enron data.

Questions 7 and 8

Do you think that email conventions change with familiarity? For example, does email change when a family member, colleague, supervisor or unknown person is addressed?

Do you teach your students to change the above discussed topics due to familiarity with your recipient? For example, does email change when a family member, colleague, supervisor or unknown person is addressed?

Teachers unanimously agreed that email conventions do change with familiarity, but most did not address this topic with their students, preferring to focus on formal email writing. Several expressed distaste for being addressed by their first names and the general informal tone of student emails. They seemed to adopt an attitude that sending a professor an informal email has more negative repercussions than sending a peer a formal email, so they focused on the formal.

The teachers all agreed that familiarity does make email more informal, but apparently do not address this in their classes. Perhaps if they had guidelines for addressing informality in email writing they would do so. This is particularity important in light of the Enron data, which suggests that the dynamics of email writing are different, and to function well they will need both formal and informal email writing skills – as well as the ability to distinguish which skills are appropriate in which situations.

Questions 9 and 10

Do you think that exchanging multiple emails back and forth (in a conversation) results in any changes in email conventions?

Do you teach your students that conventions change in an email conversation?

Once again teachers unanimously agreed that conversations result in more informal emails, with openings and closings being dropped. However, as with familiarity, they did not necessarily convey this information to their students, though some said that they mentioned it. Perhaps again a lesson plan would help teachers share this information with their students, as they are already experiencing conversational email and will continue to do so in the business world.

Survey Conclusions

Some teachers do address email writing in their classrooms, but most seem to focus on formal writing, not mentioning informal email as much. Some information that they believe should be conveyed is:

1. When writing formal emails, start with "Dear Title Last Name."

2. When closing use "thanks" or "sincerely" with your (the sender's) name in some form.

3. Emails should be concise, with no unnecessary details.

4. Emails should have proper spelling and grammar, especially in formal situations.

5. Subject lines should briefly (1-2 words) summarize the email content.

6. Familiarity and conversation both change email writing, making it more informal.

Chapter 6: Lesson Plans

The lesson plans created as a result of the research and teacher survey are an important part of this project. These plans will hopefully be useful to teachers of ESL in teaching their students about email writing. They are based on the real life emails of business professionals, combined with the opinions of teachers, especially in regard to formal emails.

There are approximately 3-4 hours of lessons which have been developed. The amount of time which they take to teach varies by level. They have been designed for students who are upper intermediate, to be covered in approximately four hours of instruction, or low advanced students, to be covered in approximately three hours of instruction. This is the point at which students probably would be emailing persons not associated with their English learning. The lessons could also be suitable for advanced

students but would probably require less time. The lessons have not been tested on advanced students.

The amount of instruction was selected at 3-4 hours because 1) it seemed possible to convey the information necessary in this amount of time to this student level and 2) Most teachers do not have more time than this available to them to teach a lesson on email writing; they are usually teaching this topic along with many others. The lessons could be taught in any class a teacher thought email writing was related to – an integrated skills class, writing, reading, study skills, business English, or computer skills, to name a few.

The lessons as presented here are divided into two days of instruction, because this fit with the classes they were tested in. In hour long classes, the pair work portion of each lesson could simply be paused at the end of one class and resumed during the next class, meaning that the lessons could be broken up in any way desired. The only way that they would not work well would be to combine them into one day – this would leave no opportunity for students to do the homework exercise, which is essential for the second portion of the lesson.

The lessons are quite simple and were purposely designed so. They require only paper, pens, chalkboard and chalk. The homework does require student and teacher computer access, but if students need to learn about email writing they probably have these things available to them.

The lessons follow simple but proven techniques of teaching which make them useful to an experienced or novice teacher. A novice teacher will simply rely more on the notes as they lead the discussion of email writing, while a more experienced teacher will perhaps have additional information beyond the notes to convey to students, though the notes are designed to be all-encompassing.

The lessons have been tested, revised, and re-tested in a university setting, so that what is related below and reflected in the worksheets is a final product, with some questions and steps revised because of student issues or classroom practice. The times given reflect the time the lesson took in the different classes.

Communicative Classrooms

The email lessons were constructed to be as communicative as possible. A communicative method of language teaching is promoted in almost any TESOL textbook published in the last twenty years (Brown, 2007) (Carter & Nunnan, 2001) (Gebhard, 1996). This method of teaching involves the teacher stepping back and facilitating discussion as much as possible while letting students talk as much as possible. Activities to allow students to practice what they have learned are the heart of a communicative classroom.

Day 1

Goal: To help students understand and practice writing emails to persons they are not familiar with or in formal situations.

Objectives: Students need to understand that, in relation to email:

- This lesson relates to formal emails/ emails to unknown people.

- In a formal situation start with "Dear;" use judgment in other situations.

- A title is necessary for formal situations or to people in some way above you in status.

- Sometimes it is acceptable to leave off a greeting or use a first name only with people who you are not familiar with but who are not above you in status.

- Keep the body as short as possible. Only include necessary information.

- Keep spelling and grammar as correct as possible. Spend more time on this the more important the email is.

- Sign the email with at least your first name, and probably your full name if you have not met the person.

- Sign "Thanks" before your name if appropriate. "Sincerely" is also acceptable in a formal situation.

- Have the subject line explain the content briefly.

The objectives are taken directly from a combination of the conclusion sections of the research and teacher survey portions of the paper.

Step 1: Warm-up

The first step of the lesson is a simple warm up. The teacher writes on the board: "Freewrite about differences you have noticed between email writing in your country or in the United States. If you have not noticed any differences, freewrite about similarities." The teacher will probably need to explain the topic after writing it on the board, pointing out that students could focus on formality, length, the way emails are opened and closed, or anything else they have noticed.

Students are given 10-15 minutes to freewrite about this topic, basing the amount of time given on the level of the students and how long it will take them to write a couple of paragraphs or their equivalent (as freewriting does not require paragraph structure). Let them know how much time they have so that they can gauge it well. The teacher can answer questions which arise. Some students will write about how email is not as common in their country. This is fine for the discussion but should not be encouraged at the start of the exercise.

The purpose of this warm-up activity is to get students thinking along the right lines for the lesson. Some sort of "introduction to activities" (Brown, 2007, p. 168) is usual in ESL textbooks and lesson plans, and freewriting tends to be a common activity, especially in writing classes. The topic of the freewriting was chosen because the uniqueness of each student should be recognized in an ESL classroom (Gebhard, 1996, p. 53) and this particular topic allows students to express their own feelings in relation

to their own countries, their perceptions of the United States, and email. Being able to write about their own countries can also help students relate a known topic, email in their country, to an unknown topic, email in the United States.

Step 2: Teacher Led Class Discussion

After students have had a chance to warm up by thinking about the topic of email, the teacher can lead a discussion of the student's responses. It is important at this point that the teacher only facilitate this discussion and participate minimally, as a de-centralized teacher role is important in a communicative classroom (Gebhard, 1996, p. 53). This portion of the class will take 5-10 minutes, depending on the responses of the students.

Step 3: Introduction to the Topic

As students begin to respond less in step 2 (or time is running short) the teacher can facilitate a change in the direction of the topic by asking exactly what needs to go into an email to a person that one does not know well, or in a formal situation. The teacher can draw an email outline on the board and point to places, asking lots of questions: What should we put first in the email? What should go in the body? Is there anything we can do to organize this better? How should we close this?

Again the role of the teacher here is to facilitate the discussion. The teacher will talk more during step 3 than during step 2 as it is necessary for all of the objectives to make it onto the board at this point. However, the teacher can write them as students

suggest them, and instead of telling students: "Open the email with 'Dear'" can try

asking them "What should we put first in this email?" Or "How should we start this

email?" Or "How do you start a letter on paper?" Only as a last resort should students

be told the answer. Negotiating meaning with teacher aid is key to a communicative

classroom (Gebhard, 1996, p. 53). When the answer is voiced it can be added to the list

of email points on the board (the objectives). Writing on the board gives students visual

and auditory input, which is helpful for different learning styles (Claire & Haynes, 1994,

p. 19).

It is quite possible that the previous section will segue naturally into this one, as

students will begin to point out specific aspects of email that are common in their

countries or the United States. If any of them match with the objectives, they can start

the list on the board. This portion of the lesson will take 10-15 minutes.

Step 4: Practice

Practicing is at the heart of this lesson. It uses functional application of the

information given in step 3 in the most real-world context possible in the classroom.

This is in line with communicative language teaching which stresses "functional use" and

"focus on real-world concepts" (Brown, 2007, p. 46).

In this part of the lesson students are handed several copies of worksheet 1 (an

email template), and worksheet 2.

Worksheet 1

To
From
Subject

Worksheet 2

Write an email that is appropriate for each of the following situations. All of these situations are formal or involve people you do not know very well. Think about how you will open the email, what you will say in the body, and how you will close the email. Also remember the subject!

If you are stuck check the points on the board or ask the teacher.

If you feel like you need to include details that are not in the question, (like an appointment time) you may make them up.

1. Pretend that you are writing an email to a new professor to ask for an appointment. What would you say? The syllabus says the professor's name is Maria Howe, PhD. You know from class she is a woman[2].

2. Pretend that I asked you to email your classmate Sam and give her the homework assignment (its page 53 in the textbook). You have never talked to Sam before but you've seen her in class.

3. Pretend that your boss has asked you to email a client, Jonathan Smith, and let him know that his order from your company will be shipped right away, and you are sorry for the delay (it should have been shipped yesterday). The order is 500 boxes of socks. You work for Allied Sock Company. Your boss is Melinda Jones.

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[2] This is included because students often have trouble deciding on gender based on names alone. Because this is the first exercise the information is pointed out explicitly.

4. Pretend that you met someone nice at a party named Jess Wright and want to be friends. You are not interested in the person romantically. You exchanged email addresses but you are going to be brave and email Jess Wright first. You want to invite him/her to play Monopoly (a board game) with you and your friend Tim. Jess can be a guy or a girl – it's up to you.

5. Pretend that you need to email a client to check how many boxes of socks he ordered. The person who wrote the order down was unclear. The client is Mark Wong. Your boss is still Melinda Jones. You still work for Allied Sock Company.

Worksheets 1 and 2 contain five different scenarios in which students must email someone they do not know well or in a formal situation. They are placed in pairs so that the class is mixed up from their normal partners (simple numbering works well, with like numbers being partners). Writing together is very helpful to students: "co-operative and group work, (including collaborative writing) strengthen the community of the class and offer writers authentic audiences" (Carter & Nunnan, 2001, p. 32). Students can start writing their emails on the templates. They need to be reminded at this point that keeping emails concise is important.

When the majority of students are done with the first question, the teacher can facilitate a discussion of good answers. As the teacher facilitates, an example of a good answer to question number one should materialize on the board so that students are

both hearing and seeing a good response. This process will continue with the rest of the questions or until the end of the class. The purpose of this part of the lesson is so that "Opportunities for students to negotiate meaning with each other and the teacher" (Gebhard, 1996, p. 53) are offered. Students obviously first negotiate the answers together in pairs, but then have the opportunity to do so as a class with the aid of the teacher.

The back and forth nature of the step (instead of finishing the writing first and then doing all of the discussion is twofold. The first reason is to keep the lesson lively and fresh by not spending too long on one type of activity (Brown, 2007, p. 168). The second reason is to allow for different work speeds of students; the lesson can end at any point because the questions have been discussed along the way. The questions are designed so that as long as the first three are completed students should have a good grasp on this part of the lesson, so completing every question is not necessary if time runs out, and if discussion has been done along the way stopping at any point is possible. This part of the lesson will take 45-60 minutes.

Homework

For homework the students have the most authentic activity possible for this type of lesson – they must email the teacher based on two further scenarios. This allows students to practice the skills they learned in class on their own. The students can be handed the worksheet (worksheet 3) which explains the assignment to them visually,

and the worksheet can then be explained verbally to accommodate different learning styles.

Worksheet 3

Please complete the following worksheet for homework. You will email me, as your teacher, the answers. This means that I will receive two emails from each of you.

If you feel like you need to include details that are not in the question, (like an appointment time) you may make them up.

When you sign the email, use a made-up name. Don't sign your real name because I will make copies of your emails for the class to discuss.

This is due: _____

1. Pretend that you do not understand question #3 on page 53 of the homework. You are hoping that I, your professor, will explain it to you because it is due in class tomorrow. You asked your classmate but he/she also does not understand it. You are not familiar with me yet as it is the beginning of the semester.

2. Pretend that you need an appointment with your boss to discuss a client, Susan Kim. Her business is called "Super Sock Store." You would like to upgrade her to a premium client status because she has bought so many socks, but the procedure is that your boss needs to meet with you to review her file. You work

for Allied Sock Company. Your boss is Melinda Jones. You have only actually met your boss once.

Day 2

Goal: For students to understand the changes which occur in email writing due to familiarity.

Objectives: For students to understand that when writing emails, in a familiar style:

- The greeting might be left off.

- The body will become even shorter

- Spelling and grammar mistakes are more acceptable.

- The closing might be left off.

- A first name only signature, nickname, or no signature is common.

Step 1: Warm-up

In the second warm-up activity students will be handed packets containing the emails the other students wrote for homework. The instructions for the assignment told students not to sign their own names. If they did, these must be obscured before photocopying. The email address at the top of the page also needs to be obscured. On the board, the teacher will write, then verbally explain, that students need to look for ways to make these emails better, or decide if no improvements need to be made. The

focus needs to be on content, not grammar or spelling – students will try to focus on grammar even after this has been stated, and need to be steered away from it in the discussion unless it relates to the question of email formality.

Once again, the purpose of this warm up is to get students thinking about email writing and also to give them a chance to voice their own opinions. This part of the lesson will take 15-20 minutes.

Step 2: Discussion of Warm-up

Again students will participate in a teacher facilitated discussion. The teacher needs to start the discussion by telling students that they need to be gentle with their comments. Perhaps saying "in my opinion, the closing should be different" or "I like….. but I don't like…." Would be a good alternative to simply stating what is wrong with an email. The purpose of this is actually to make the discussion more smooth and require less teacher intervention, while helping students to avoid unintentionally insulting each other. This part of the lesson will take 5-10 minutes.

Step 3: Discussion of Familiarity

A discussion, just like than in step 3 of day 1, is led. This time the objectives from day 2 need to be put on the board. This part of the lesson will take 5-10 minutes.

Step 4: Practice

Again students have an activity to complete which is as real life as possible. This time they may be offered the choice of working in pairs or alone (different students might pick differently). This is to accommodate different learning styles (Brown, 2007). Unlike in day 1, the students will complete all of worksheet 4, which is shorter due to step 5, before the class discussion.

Worksheet 4

Write an email that is appropriate for each of the following situations. All of these situations involve people you are familiar with and are not formal. Think about how you will open the email, what you will say in the body, and how you will close the email. Also remember the subject!

If you are stuck check the points on the board or ask the teacher.

If you feel like you need to include details that are not in the question, (like an appointment time) you may make them up.

1. Pretend you have gotten to know your boss at Allied Sock Company quite well now, and need to meet with her about upgrading another client, Aaron Jones, to a premium client status because he has bought so many socks. His business is called "The Sock Company." You need to meet with Melinda Jones, your boss,

about reviewing his file because the procedure is that your boss needs to review the file.

2. Pretend that you are emailing your friend Terry White because you want to hang out and play Monopoly. Terry can be a guy or a girl. You know him/her quite well.

3. Pretend it is the end of the semester (so you know me well) and you do not understand question #3 on page 53 of the homework. You are hoping that I, your professor, will explain it to you because it is due in class tomorrow. You asked your classmate but he/she also does not understand it.

During this time the teacher will be facilitating, but also seeing which answer each pair/student has had the most success with. The teacher needs to make sure that he/she has selected the best answer from each pair/student, and at the end of the time assign each pair/student an answer to work with for step 5. There needs to be an even distribution of each question. This part of the lesson will take 30-45 minutes.

Step 5: Discussion of Practice

This step is the ultimate step of this communicative email lesson plan. In the previous day's lesson, students saw modeled by the teacher a facilitation of discussion of answers, with a sample written on the board. Here each student or pair of students will share one of their best answers –which was pre-selected by the teacher and

assigned to them at the end of the last step - with the class. They can write their

answers on the board and explain why they selected this answer. Other students can

comment or ask questions, as in the previous day's discussion. The teacher needs to

make it clear at the beginning of this step what will happen: "I have assigned each of

you an email example (from worksheet 4) to share with the class. Please put your

answer on the board and prepare to share your answer with the class. The class can ask

questions or make comments about your email example – they might even have

suggestions to improve it. Together you will work to provide a good answer to each

question." If there are more students than answers then multiple answers to each

question can be discussed at once.

This step is one of the most communicative because students are actually

leading the discussion of which answers are correct. The teacher has stepped as far back

as possible to let the students guide their own learning. This part of the lesson will take

25-45 minutes.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this paper the topic of email writing has been researched and discussed in both its formal and informal aspects. This has been done through a combination of research in general, research of etiquette sources, a study of corpus data, and a survey of actual teachers in an IEI. Further research could be an examination of a larger corpus of emails from a variety of business settings to see if type of business has an impact on email. The research in this study was limited because the corpus came from only one source. The survey was also limited as the teachers all taught at the same IEI, though they did have different backgrounds. All of this information was based on being presented to students in 3-4 hours of classroom tested lessons on formal and informal email which apply to the classroom, business, and social realms.

Teachers, according to the survey, often do not focus on this topic, and if they do, often do not move beyond a formal university setting in their explanations. However, non-native speakers of English will need to write emails in all aspects of their lives, and knowing what is most common in email writing will help them do this most successfully in an English speaking culture. Hopefully the research and subsequent lesson plans presented here will help teachers in convey information about email writing to their students which is both accurate and interesting.

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