

**LANGUAGE USE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE: AN  
INVESTIGATION INTO THE GENRE OF WORKPLACE  
EMAILS IN AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION**

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## Abstrak

Penyelidikan yang lepas menumpukan kepada penganalisan genre e-mel sebagai satu model yang berfokus kepada kandungan dan bentuk sahaja. Kajian ini pula menyelidiki genre e-mel sebagai sumber dengan menganalisis pengetahuan yang dijana dan pengetahuan yang disebarkan bagi membentuk genre e-mel dalam situasi sosio-retorik. Kajian ini menggunakan analisis genre kritikal dengan meneliti elemen dalaman dan luaran teks atau pengaruh amalan institusi dan aturan disiplin penggunaan bahasa dalam komunikasi e-mel di sebuah institusi pengajian tinggi swasta di Kuala Lumpur. Analisis menggunakan 378 e-mel dalam komunikasi, pemerhatian turut serta dan temu bual, kajian ini meneliti genre komunikasi e-mel dari sudut etnografi, teks, perspektif sosio-kognitif dan sosio-kritis. Satu kaedah integratif baharu, yang melibatkan pendekatan terhadap teks, konteks dan analisis genre telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Kajian ini mengenal pasti empat jenis e-mel. Penjenisan e-mel dibuat berdasarkan tujuan komunikasi, hasrat, matlamat komunikasi, laras dan struktur generik. Hasil kajian menunjukkan e-mel perbincangan digunakan untuk membincangkan sesuatu isu. E-mel bentuk ini lazimnya melibatkan penghasilan dan ujaran ketara dalam penghujahan secara terang-terangan. E-mel pertanyaan pula digunakan sebagai strategi permintaan dan respons melibatkan wacana naratif dan bukan naratif. E-mel penyampaian digunakan untuk menyediakan fail yang melibatkan penghasilan maklumat secara wacana naratif. Manakala, e-mel pemberitahuan pula untuk memaklumkan isu-isu umum kepada penerima khususnya gaya abstrak dan penghasilan maklumat. Kajian ini juga memaparkan bahawa amalan institusi dan kelaziman disiplin dalam komuniti wacana mempengaruhi penggunaan bahasa dalam e-mel. Hal ini tergambar dalam penggunaan strategi, mekanisma dan pilihan linguistik dalam keempat-empat jenis e-mel. Kajian ini memberikan sumbangan dari segi sosio-retorik dan analisis genre kritikal berdasarkan amalan, tatacara dan kelaziman dalam komuniti pengurusan akademik. Pendekatan integratif turut ditonjolkan sebagai satu kaedah penelitian penggunaan bahasa dalam komunikasi e-mel.

**Kata kunci:** Komunikasi e-mel, Sosio-retorik, Analisis genre kritis, Komuniti wacana, Pendekatan integratif

## Abstract

Past studies that examined the genre of email regarded genre as a model by focusing on the content and form alone. However, this study examined the genre as a resource by analyzing the knowledge producing and knowledge disseminating that makes the genre possible in its socio-rhetorical context. The study, in line with critical genre analysis, examined the text-internal and the influences of the text-external elements on language use in email communication at a private higher educational institution in Kuala Lumpur. Using 378 emails, participant observation and interviews, this study analyzed the genre from the ethnographic, textual, socio-cognitive and socio-critical perspectives. To conduct the analysis, a novel integrative methodology that included approaches to text, context and genre analysis was applied. The study revealed that the emails could be categorized into four types of genres that varied in their communicative purposes, intentions, goals of communication, register and generic structures. The discussion email genre, which was used to negotiate issues, mainly included involved production and overt expression of argumentation. Enquiry email genre, which was used as a request-respond strategy, included narrative and non-narrative discourse while the delivery email genre, which was used to provide files, mainly included informational production and non-narrative discourse. Informing email genre, which was used to notify the recipients about general interest issues, mainly included abstract style and informational production. This study also revealed that the institutional practices and disciplinary conventions of the discourse community influenced language use in the emails. This was reflected in the strategies, mechanisms and linguistic choices made in the four types of genres. The study contributed to the socio-rhetoric perspective and critical genre analysis based on conventionalized practices and procedures in the community of practice in academic management. The integrative approach is also highlighted as an analytical method to examine language use in email communication.

**Keywords:** Email communication, Socio-rhetoric, Critical genre analysis, Discourse community, Integrative approach

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>ABE</b>	: Association of Business Executives
<b>BABA</b>	: Bachelor of Arts: Business Administration
<b>BCC</b>	: Blind carbon copy
<b>BCU</b>	: Biber Conner Upton discourse organization approach
<b>CC</b>	: Carbon copy
<b>CDA</b>	: Critical discourse analysis
<b>CEO</b>	: Chief Executive officer
<b>CGA</b>	: Critical genre analysis
<b>CL</b>	: Critical linguistics
<b>CMC</b>	: Computer mediated communication
<b>ESP</b>	: English for specific purposes approach to genre
<b>FGM</b>	: Focus group member
<b>FTA</b>	: Face threatening act
<b>ICCS</b>	: International certificate in computer science
<b>IDCS</b>	: International diploma in computer science
<b>KL</b>	: Kuala Lumpur
<b>MAPCU</b>	: Malaysian Association of Private Colleges and Universities
<b>MBA</b>	: Master in business administration
<b>MOE</b>	: Ministry of Education, Malaysia
<b>MOHE</b>	: Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia
<b>MQA</b>	: Malaysian Qualifications Agency
<b>NCC</b>	: National Computing Centre
<b>NED</b>	: Pseudonym (the educational institute subject of the study)
<b>SFG</b>	: Systemic functional grammar
<b>SFL</b>	: Systemic functional linguistic approach to genre

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The development of computers during the last decade of the twentieth century has changed the industrial landscape of the world, and the “e” factor has become a distinguishing mark of this era, the information era. Initially, computers were used as typewriters and calculators. After the introduction of the Internet and email, however, they have become influential and widespread communicational methods, especially in business communication (Crystal, 2003a). Email today has become the preferred channel of communication in the workplace (Ean, 2010; Hadina Habil, 2010). To a certain extent, email has replaced traditional written (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002) and oral (Flynn, 2010) communicational methods. Business people these days spend more time preparing documents that are communicated through electronic forms (Nikali, 1998). This present study is concerned with the use of email communication in the workplace, particularly examining the genre of email communication as an institutional practice.

Previous research on the genre of email has been scant, and loosely using the term genre to refer to the texts produced in emails (Don, 2007). This research mainly focused on the textual features of emails to describe how the emails were written (Baron, 1998; Davis and Brewer, 1997; Grzega, 1999). Genre analysis, however, should not only investigate how the emails are written, but also examine why the emails are written the way they are. This argument presents the case for a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) and a “comprehensive and insightful understanding” of

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