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INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS EMAIL COMMUNICATION IN ELF (ENGLISH AS LINGUA FRANCA)

Autor

Mª Ángeles Velilla Sánchez

Director

Ignacio Vázquez Orta

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana

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Introduction

In recent years globalization phenomena have undergone a significant development and, as a consequence, many international business transactions are carried out by agents from different languages and countries. They have to use an international language to communicate, and in most cases, English is chosen as lingua franca. As the business community needs a way to communicate and close the distance gap, email has become the most important computer-based media for business communities to work together in virtual locations. Many studies have been done on the topic of English as lingua franca (henceforth ELF). As Jenkins (2007:27) explains, "it is often observed that English has become a global language and that the majority of its non-native speakers (NNSs) use it as a lingua franca among themselves rather than a 'foreign language' to communicate with its NSs". Throughout her explanation in her book *English as a lingua Franca: attitude and Identity* (2007), she defines ELF as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers who have different first languages and she argues that ELF interaction can include native English speakers but, in most cases, it is a contact language between people who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is an additional language. ELF is understood as a communication tool used routinely and successfully by millions of speakers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in their professional, academic and personal lives. As Facchinetti et al (2010: 149) see it, the circumstances that have activated this adaptive process of an emergent ELF are often referred collectively as *globalization.* As a consequence, the "the organization of social relations and transactions" and "networks of activity, interaction and power", needs for a common language or a lingua franca, which in most cases is English and which naturally gets transformed accordingly, transforming the very concept of community in the process. Focusing this issue on the

business realm, along with advancing globalization, business structures started to change rapidly in the 1990s. Cross-border merges and acquisitions took place and the increasing significance of the internet in all social and societal activities meant that the partners of communication also changed (see for instance Crystal, 2003; Dor, 2004). According to Kankaaranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013: 19), "no longer did only specific units of organizations deal with partners across borders (as, for example, in imports or exports of goods and services) but entire organizations had to be prepared to engage in international interactions, for a variety of purposes. Operations were international, and for these, specific professional qualifications were needed, including proficiency in the languages in question, which in most cases meant English". Such relevance has English in the business sphere that in recent years the concept of BELF has been developed. This is an abbreviation to refer to "English as Business Lingua Franca". According to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen "the concept of BELF originates from two large research projects conducted at the Aalto University School of Business from 2000 to 2009 and they set on exploring the language and communication practices of internationally operating business professionals". This concept is developed by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's *The Knowhow Project* (2006-2009), consisting of several subprojects in which they analyse the professionals' need to know what, why, how and when to communicate when they are building business networks. Finally, this idea is related to Fishman's (1971: 232) view of "Speech community" that he defines as "one , all of whose members share at least one single speech variety and the norms for its appropriate use" and Wenger's (1998: 76) concept of "Community of practice". According to Wenger, "there are three dimensions characterising community of practise: mutual engagement, a joint negotiable enterprise and a share repertoire of negotiable resources". Among others ways of international communication such as

business letters (see Suau, 2010: 82-118) or business faxes (see Zhu, 2013:35-54), today the most useful written mode of communication to engage within the international business world is electronic or email correspondence. According to Louhiala-Salminen (2002: 224) "the box' with the email technology was the initiator of most activities in a business professional's working day. Email messages are delivered to the computer, to the recipient personally. Still, the email technology does not invade the recipient's personal space. In addition, since the technology is independent of time constraints, business matters can be dealt with at any time of the day without imposing on the recipients" (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002:124) However, also other features, such as social definitions of media appropriateness, email's compatibility to job tasks, functionality, and ease of use have been found to be influential in media choice. (Kankaanranta, 2005:41). Diverse analyses of emails written in English by cross-borders senders and recipients have been carried out. For instance, Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska (2013:77-98) have done a contrastive analysis of British, Spanish and Polish email writing; Carrió-Pastor and Muñiz-Calderón (2013:55-76) have analysed the variation of English business e-mails in Asian countries; and Kankaanranta (2005) has based her PhD dissertation on international email communication in Lingua Franca by multinational companies.

The present study aims to analyze the variation patterns of international business emails in terms of register, linguistic component, communicative competence and generic organizational pattern. The main research question is whether business emails are changing towards a more informal, co-operative and goal-oriented nature and in which aspects is this variation more noticeable. Referring to the methodology of the study, with the aim of observing the fluctuation of business emails written and sent around the world, 90 emails written in English by business managers, including both native

speakers and no-native speakers of English, from multinational chemical companies set up in 14 different countries from the five continents have been analyzed. In this case, it is the Spanish company which is establishing commercial relations with the other 13 multinational companies all around the world. (See table 1). It has to be considered that it is an up-to-date textual analysis provided that all the emails have been sent from November of 2013 to January of 2014.

Country	N. of emails
Canada	2
Spain	43
China	4
Germany	5
England	1
Malaysia	1
Australia	2
Rumania	3
Israel	4
Russia	3
South Africa	5
Switzerland	5
Vietnam	5
Thailand	7
N=90	

Table 1: Correlation of number of emails and countries

This textual analysis is not going to consider commercial and cultural differences. The main analysis targets are to observe:

1. Linguistic and register variation: Hybrid nature of spoken and written English language in international email communication.

2. Communicative competence in business emails and structural moves variation analysis: salutation, providing information, requesting, pre-closing, closing and signature moves.

Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that the reason for choosing this topic as subject for my final dissertation is mainly my interest in the sociolinguistic side of the English

language, developed throughout these four years studying a degree in English Studies at the University of Zaragoza. However, I have to thank my interest in ELF studies to the University of Southampton (the university where I studied during the Erasmus year) where I got immersed in the subject by means of a module called English Language in its Global Context. In this module we studied not only the history of the English language, but also the current situation and the future prospects of the language. Finally, I am interested in the business sphere, as it is one of the most important realms where English as lingua franca is used internationally.

Emails analysis

1. - Linguistic and register variation: Hybrid nature of spoken and written English language in international email communication.

There seems to be unanimous agreement today that email correspondence combines features that have traditionally been associated with either written or spoken language. However, according to Kankaanranta (2005: 102), one of the fundamental differences between speaking and writing is that "speakers interact with their audiences, writers do not". Chafe (1982: 55) uses the notion of *involvement* to describe the relationship that the speaker typically has with his/her audience in contrast to *detachment,* which characterizes a writer's relationship to the reader. Interestingly, modern communication media seems to encourage involvement to the transfer of oral language features into the written mode. As previous studies on email writing have already indicated, electronic correspondence has its own discourse peculiarities which affect the text's purpose, structure and writing process. "Emails operate on multimodal medium: written, oral and also "pictorial, using emoticons and other visual techniques" (Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska, 2013: 83). Crystal (2001: 48, 238) regards the language of email as something genuinely different in kind consisting of 'speech + writing + electronically

mediated properties'. Thus, he suggests that a fourth medium, i.e. computer-mediated language called *Netspeak*, has to be added to the three mediums of spoken language, written language, and sign language.

The purpose of this section in the study is to analyze the linguistic and register nature of the email correspondence with regards to the coexisting features of spoken and written English found among the present emails corpus, in order to study how this international way of communication has developed an increased involvement among natives and non-native speakers of English from different countries who in most cases have never coincided physically but maintain a close business relation by email communication in English language as lingua franca (ELF). A miscellaneous correlation of informal features has been carried out in the light of Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska's (2013:88) and Kankaanranta's (2005:191) lists of informal features in email messages. The correlation in the table below (Table 2) summarizes the most important informal features found among the emails in the corpus. It reveals a rather more relaxed, flexible or informal language detached from the neutral, conventional or standard language in this type of correspondence as, for instance, business letters. As Suau puts it, business letters are supposed to be more distant, rigid or formal, therefore a tendency to substitute business letters by emails exists when the letter is not necessary as a signed official document which may commit to payments, orders, etc (Suau, 2012:82-118). However, emails may also incorporate attached documents, which for international transactions is a faster way to deal with business operations.

Informal Features	Examples from the corpus
Idiosyncratic and colloquial word selection	"No need to show customer name if you do not want".
State verbs such as think, know, wish	"I think this is a good new" "I wish you are back in office safety" "we know Brentag distributes SilverIon"
Non-count nouns mistakes	"I think this is a good new"
Colloquial expressions	"by the way" "my college Ms. Eva Wu will follow up" "respond back to you" "sounds good" "we get a big gold of bar out of your raw material" " I gave it one last go at getting a good brew and I think I have it" "Let's have a chat tomorrow" "nice to meet you"
Unconventional use of punctuation	"I am now in a business trip…"
Lack of question marks	"Do you have a technical article" "What is the smallest silver & gold order"
Use of exclamations (even double marks)	"The article would be really great! "Hurry up!" "It seems OK!!" "I appreciate it very much!!"
Metacomunicative pictorial representation of facial expression	";)"
Use of ampersand	&
NS idioms	"I am keen to do a trial run! "awaiting for news ASAP"
Contracted verb forms	"Please don't hesitate to contact me"
Use of the addressee's mother tongue or the sender's native language	From Israel: "Hasta pronto, Feliz anio Nuevo" Spanish email sent to Russia: "Spasiba" Russian signature: "Любовь Фиалкина / Lubov Fialkina" From Germany:"Mit freundlichen Grüßen"
Misspellings	"Dead See" (instead of Sea); now (instead of know); "warehous" (instead of warehouse)
Short or fragmented utterances/sentences	"Good news:" "One question:"
False cognates	"Pretend" (instead of expect)

Table 2: Spoken English. Informal style

It can be observed that the participants of 14 different nationalities use English language as a lingua franca for establishing business communication in which the spoken language is privileged. Among other conversational features, we can find colloquial words and expressions, unconventional use of punctuation or idioms. This practice suggests that the users have a very pragmatic view of the language choice. However, "It has been suggested that in lingua franca communication misunderstandings are more probable than in communication between native and non-native speakers" (Lesznyák 2002: 163). The higher probability has been ascribed to the increase of potential interference sources and the difficulty of determining which norms of language and language use to apply in a given situation. This view has been questioned by Knapp (2002: 219), who argues that investigations into spoken lingua franca interactions are characterized by a high degree of cooperativeness and consensual style. The former theory is not pertinent to the emails studied in the present corpus, since any instance of misunderstanding has been found and few misspellings or cognates errors have been committed by the writers. Furthermore, according to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen "it can be argued that for BELF speakers, grammatical correctness is not nearly as important as the genre knowledge of their own specific field of expertise involving a shared understanding of what, why and when to communicate. Professional competence in today's global business environment involves communication knowhow as an integral element of business knowhow" (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2013: 17)

Additionally, the emergence of the email medium seemed to have influenced the written business communication language. In the business environment surveyed, the technological advances represent changes in the social context, which have changed discursive practices from 'formal' business correspondence to 'informal' message

exchange. Computer-mediated communications serve as an illuminating example. They lead to the emergence of new genres, which combine features of speech and writing, conversational discourse and public discourse (Kankaanranta 2005: 97). Among the most informal features ascribable to this computer-mediated email communication can be named the use of metacomunicative pictorial representation of facial expression such as ":)", the use of "&" (a logogram representing the conjunction 'and') to produce shorter messages or the use of exclamations to avoid the distance gap among the participants, emulating the participant's voices, therefore establishing a more personal and colloquial message (see Table 2).

Finally, some instances of expressions written in other languages different form English have been found. For example, an Israeli sender's closing move was written in the language of the recipient who happened to be Spanish ("*Hasta pronto, Feliz anio nuevo*"). On the contrary, a Spanish email's closing move which was sent to a Russian colleague was written in Russian ("*Spasiba").* Furthermore, some instances have been found among German emails in which the closing moves were written both in German and English "*Mit freundlichen Grüßen / Kind regards*" and the same happens with Russian signatures "*Любовь Фиалкина / Lubov Fialkina*" (see Table 2). The use of different languages in the emails, despite the fact that all the participants use English as lingua franca for multinational business purposes, shows the awareness of the diversity of communities, cultures and the individual cultural backgrounds. In other words, some participants make clear their awareness of the addressee's mother tongue which is different from English as well as other participants want to stress in some way their own mother tongue as a way of specifying their own linguistic and cultural background.

However, it is obvious that there is a pragmatic choice in the use of English language, in the sense that it is perceived as a neutral and equal alternative.

Nevertheless, the ample use of colloquial or informal language has been found in combination with several conventional or standard language features. Among these professional formal register features can be named the use of non-contracted forms of verbs, more elaborate connectors and reporting verbs, the use of incoterms and Latin terms, the abundant use of passive expressions and the conventional use of punctuation and capitalization (see Table 3).

Formal Features	Examples from the corpus
Non-contracted forms of verbs	"if you do not want" "I will give you a summary report" "I am going to search"
Specific reporting verbs	"I would like to <u>inform</u> you"
Use of Incoterms	"TDS", "MIC results", "MSDS", "VAT", "CIF", "DDP"
Latin terms	"assistance, resume"
More elaborate connectors	"Nevertheless", "Besides"
Conventional use of punctuation and capitalization	---
Passive verbs/expressions	"The payment under your PI dated Nov.5th has been arranged last Friday"

Table 3: Written English. Formal style

As it has been observed, the register or level of formality has been downgraded if compared to the professional formal register previously used in business letters. It could be described as a semi-formal tone of "co-operative business colleagues" allied to what may be called standard written English but with a clear variation tendency. However, according to Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska (2013: 86) "as a guiding principle, the type of register will not be ultimately determined by the type of linguistic features but by their proportion and combination. In this way, we find in current business email

features which correspond to the professional formal register together with features which are typical of the professional casual register". This variation towards a more professional casual register has been noticed in the following email strategies: (the following correlation of features has been adapted from the list established by Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska (2013: 87).

1) Use of personal opinions, personal comments and subjective or emotive language:

Emotive/subjective/attitudinal terms:
- Guess
- Wish
- Would like
- Imagine
- Hope
- Feel
- Appreciate

Personal or subjective expressions/opinions:

- "I imagine there is no problem from your side"
- "Maybe I can also help you having a look giving my recommendations"
- "I would like to inform you that budget for 2014 included Canada as country to visit. I think this is a good new"
- "The article would be really great! Hurry up!"
- "I am keen to do a trial run"
- "Excellent news!!!"

2) Provide compromising information showing spontaneous emotions, complicity and confidentiality.

- "I wish you are back in office safety. How is everything in Thailand?
- "I am now in the business trip…"
- "We are back and recovered from long trip."
- "I was going to send you an email yesterday and got a big surprise to see your email instead."
- "I am not at expert at all on this. Which one do you think is better?"
- "Please do not call me Mr. Cabria (Just Alfonso)"

3) References to social issues related to holydays and leisure activity.

- "Have you decided when would you visit North America? Would it be along the same time as the NYSCC?"
- "Hopefully waiting for some Christmas holidays"

- "I have three days at home next week so plan to update all these loads and try and arrange some visits"

The conclusions that can be drawn from the study are, first, that the degree of formality or informality used in an email message depends on the relationship between the sender and the recipient. It has been noticed a higher level of formality among the participants whose emails represent their first business contact and a lower level of formality in those emails which reflect a longer business relationship between sender and recipient. In this case, we can find in general terms a more co-operative and relaxed style. Secondly, the nature of the information conveyed affects the language used; confidential, serious information is conveyed in a more formal, cohesively written way, mostly by means of conventional lexical formula, passive verbs, formal expressions and terminology or more elaborate connectors. On the other hand, personal or social information is written in a more informal register by means of using colloquial strategies, relaxed syntax and punctuation, unconventional shortenings, complicity strategies, casual terminology and idioms. According to Giménez-Moreno and Skorczynska (2013: 83), "since the main purpose of this medium is to save time and reduce work pressure, the more it fluctuates towards its spontaneous, unplanned and conversational side, the more "informal" features it incorporates.

2. - Communicative competence in business emails and Structural moves variation analysis: salutation, providing information, requesting, pre-closing, closing and signature moves.

According to Bhatia (1993:30), a genre is organized in a series of discriminative structural elements or moves, which distinguish one genre from another and which are necessary for genre recognition. In the same way as each genre has a communicative purpose that it tends to serve, each move also serves a typical communicative intention

or function which contributes in some way to the fulfillment of the overall communicative purpose of the genre.

Kankaanranta distinguishes nine main categories of moves according to the classification established in her PhD dissertation (Kankaanranta 2005: 273) and for the purpose of the present study this classification is going to be used as reference for the types of moves identified in the corpus, which generally coincide. The distinction of moves established by Kankaaranta in her study is the following:

Move I: Identifying subject
Move II: Salutation
Move III: Referring to previous contact
Move IV: Indicating enclosure
Move V: Providing information
Move VI : Requesting
Move VII: Pre-closing
Move VIII: Closing
Move IX: Signature

The present study is going to focus on the moves which have been identified to have greater relevance or level of detail and which have been found to be present on the great majority of the emails in the corpus. These five moves are: Move II: salutation; Move V: providing information; Move VI: requesting; Move VII: pre-closing; Move VIII: closing; Move IX: Signature. The analysis of these moves is going to be done in the light of Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory given that, according to Kankaanranta "politeness can be regarded as a social value in human interaction, including business, and its universal principles are reflected in language use. Although all societies show these principles at work, what counts as polite may differ from group to group" (Kankaaranta, 2005:110).

The Politeness theory is based on the notion of face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61–62). Face is the public self-image, which is mutually granted in a communicative event. The components of face are defined as negative face, the want of every member of society to be unimpeded by others, and as positive face, the want of every member to be accepted and to 'belong'. Brown & Levinson (1987: 74) argue that three factors affect the degree to which an act can threaten one's positive or negative face: (1) social distance, familiarity between the speaker and the addressee; (2) relative power of the speaker and the addressee; and (3) ranking of the imposition in a particular culture. The greater the seriousness of the face-threatening act (FTA), the more likely an individual will be to use politeness strategies to minimize the threat to the addressee, in particular if the individual has less power than the addressee, or if their social distance is great. According to Brown & Levinson (1987: 101–128), positive politeness is directed toward the positive face of the addressee, in other words his want to have a good image and to be liked. Positive-politeness utterances are used to imply, for example, common ground, familiarity, cooperation, or sharing of wants. Claiming common ground with the addressee, for example, entails that the speaker indicates that he belongs to the same group of people who share specific goals and values. One of the strategies to achieve this is to use in-group identity markers, such as specific address forms or names. To show that the speaker and the addressee are cooperators, on the other hand, can be accomplished by including both participants in the activity, for example by using an inclusive *we*, as in *Let's do this*. Negative politeness, in contrast, is oriented toward the negative face of the addressee, that is, his want to have his freedom of action unhindered. It is specific and focused on the particular imposition that an FTA, such as a request, effects. The strategies used to give the addressee a face-saving line of escape

include, for example, hedging, apologizing, and impersonalization. (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 129-210.)

MOVE II: SALUTATION

The second move, salutation was found in the 93% of the messages. As it could be observed in the table below several forms of salutation has been found, including forms of salutation of conventional business correspondence such as *Dear Marketing Manager of Laboratorios A., Dear Mr./Ms. (surname)* or similarly, *Dear (first name+ surname)*. However, the use of first names versus surnames in this move is the dominant pattern and is more sensible to the context of the messages. In this sense, 49% of the messages include *Dear + (first name).* The level of formality declines by the use of less conventional forms of correspondence salutation such as *Hi + (first name)* which is the case of 32% of the e-mails. Other instances of salutation found in the corpus can be seen in the table below (See table 4).

Salutation	%
Dear (first name)	49
Hi (first name)	32
Dear (first name + surname)	8
Dear Mr./Ms. + (surname)	3
No salutation	3
Dear Marketing Manager of Laboratorios A.	1
Hi (name), hi friend	1
Happy new year (first name)	1
Hello + (first name)	1
Good day	1

Table 4: Move II: Salutation

Naming practices in organizations are closely related to both positive and negative politeness. For example, Morand (1996: 426) investigates naming in American companies in the light of Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory since it is considered a salient interpersonal event. The selection of an address form with title

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(Mr., Mrs., Ms) and surname shows negative politeness, a ritual of avoidance or deference, whereas an address with the first name comprises a positive ritual which signals a bond and interpersonal closeness. Reciprocal first-naming is thus seen to foster more egalitarian and collegial interpersonal relations (Kankaanranta, 2005: 114).

This change from traditional formal business correspondence to more informal message exchange has increased the use of first names in the salutations of email messages, replacing titles and surnames which were traditionally employed in those of business letter discourse. Therefore, what can be perceived in the corpus samples is a new tendency towards the use of positive politeness in business correspondence naming practices accused by the main use of reciprocal first-naming, which implies an interpersonal closeness among the writers of the present emails.

MOVES V AND VI: PROVIDING INFORMATION AND REQUESTING

Move V (Providing information) and move VI (requesting) are central in the furtherance of the company's activities. These two moves contain the most relevant information about the international business communication established among the writers of the emails in the corpus. In this sense among the 90 emails studied, 39% of the emails only include the providing information move, 8% of the emails just contain the requesting move and 49% of the emails contain both moves in combination as the central part of the email. The remaining 4% corresponds to emails in which neither move V, nor VI appear (they are for instance thanking emails).

The main aspect to be studied in these two central moves of the business emails is the use of BELF as a necessary tool for international business communication. The business-specific knowledge is said to be combined with some communicative

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strategies of international business shared by the business community. This "domain of use" is referred by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen as "The knowhow" (see The Knowhow Project 2006-2009) based on the notion of "global communicative competence" of international operating business professionals (GCC).
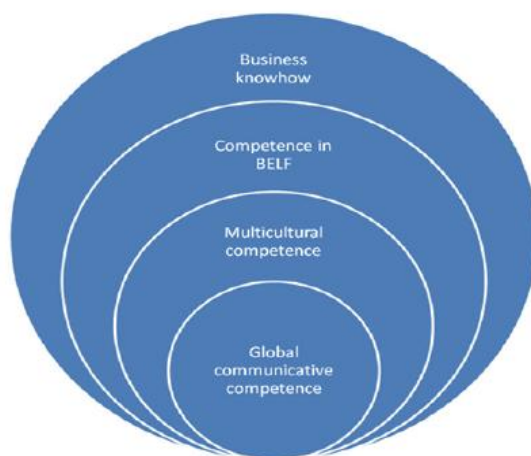
Model of Global Communicative Competence (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011:258)

According to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, "competence in BELF is driven by the idea of managing the task at hand, while simultaneously creating rapport and maintaining the relationship (for maintaining trust). It requires competence in the English "core", business-specific genres and communication strategies focusing on clarity, brevity, directness and politeness (Kankaaranta and Louhiala-Salminen 2013: 27). In this case this study is going to be focused on the second surrounding layer, "Competence in BELF". Communication strategies such as clarity, brevity, directness and politeness are going to be analyzed and exemplified and also a list of English "core" vocabulary will be included.

First of all, this section is going to focus on a core vocabulary and phrases which appear in the central and most informative moves of the emails and which are frequently used when writing business letters or e-mails in English (see Emerson, 2004). These are

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some of the most repeated business phrases or expressions in English among the emails in the present corpus:

- Summary report
- To have activity report
- To Receive your order
- Pro-forma invoice
- To place an order
- Potential business
- Manufacturing process
- To increase our cooperation
- Customer
- To update
- Business Manager
- To be high experienced
- To quot
- Quotation
- Product brochure
- To request information
- Catalogue
- Capital
- Long term business
- Project
- To start sales
- Requirements
- To have peak of production
- Stock
- Employee
- Client
- To purchase
- To increase cooperation
- Expenses
- Warehouse

- Delivery address/date
- Arrange meetings
- Competitive price
- Freight cost/conditions
- Packing time
- Led time
- Payment conditions
- Product list
- Feedback
- Delivery time
- Market
- Postal code
- Market research
- To support/support
- Benefits
- Technical information/ data
- Supplier
- Business strategy
- Company
- Sample
- Demand
- Comment on
- Assistance
- To distribute/ distribution
- To promote
- To have feedback

This core vocabulary and phrases shared among the email writers shows the need for a BELF vocabulary which enables the writers to be successful in these international encounters. According to Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013: 27) "BELF as a shared resource was now taken for granted by internationally operating business professionals; it was perceived as any other necessary tool to do the work". Given that the email writers work for multinational companies where international transactions are

ordinary dealings some "core" or pre-established shared vocabulary and structures are needed. Among this vocabulary some generic collocations such as "*proforma invoice*" or *"freight cost"* and some verb collocations such as "*to place an order"* are common in the Business English Lingua Franca domain.

Secondly, among the **providing information moves (move V)** in the emails of the corpus several repeated structures have been observed. If we talk about clarity and brevity, short and simple structures both in active and passive voice have been found, for instance:

- "I will give you a summary report in next week about silver products"
- "Your order is planned to be sent this week via FedEx"

Referring to directness, some sentences using imperative have been found, although the directness is reduced by the use of hedging (i.e.: "please"). For instance:

- "Please, start your production"
- "Please quot me the minimum quantity of silver and gold colloidal powder"

Finally, talking about politeness it is common the use negative politeness strategies such as the use of modal verbs which minimize the threat to the addressee, or impersonalization talking about the whole company rather that the writer in particular. For instance:

- "We would like to place a new order of 1L silver citrate solution."
- "We would like to inform you that budget for 2014 has included Canada as country to visit."

However some instances of positive politeness strategies were used by the writers of the emails:

- Offer and promise: "I haven't heard of this company but rest assured I will find out what's happening."
- Exaggerate: "Perfect. I wish all customers were so organized as you are giving us time to prepare the orders."
- Be optimistic: "I imagine there is no problem from your side".

Finally, among the **Requesting moves (move VI**) of the emails in the corpus several examples of these business communication strategies have been found.

Clarity, brevity and directness have been found to be quaintly important in the messages. This sense of directness is due to the use of positive politeness among the writers of the emails. Some examples of these features are the following:

- Do you also deal with vet & medical device? If not, do you have any contact with these fields?
- "Do you have any new?"
- "Any idea about price"

Nevertheless, the writers of the present emails also use basic strategies of negative politeness, as they are:

- Be conventionally indirect: "I would like to ask you about feedback from your customers"; "It would be great to have your comments on this order to supply right on time".
- Hedging: "It is possible to have <u>kind</u> of activity report to see potential and projects"; "<u>please</u> give us update quotation with delivery time"
- Apologize: "I am not an expert on this. It is possible that you give me your opinion?"; "Sorry if I am not quick minded today".

To conclude, it could be said that BELF is very different from the language written or spoken with native speakers because it is highly situation-specific, dynamic, idiosyncratic and consequently, inherently tolerant of different varieties. The dynamism entails that strategic skills, such as ability to ask for clarifications, make questions or clarify information gain in importance for successful communication. These strategies are always done in the light of some politeness principles to apply in everyday individual's professional communication. Positive politeness is used to imply, cooperation and sharing wants among the multinational business companies. However, this genre needs for some negative politeness strategies in order to minimize the imposition upon the business colleagues and assured common ground. According to Brown & Levinson (1987), "requests, for example, represent FTAs as they run contrary

to the negative face wants of the addressee. Any rational individual will seek to avoid these FTAs, or will employ certain strategies to minimize the threat." Finally, English is important as a tool to get the work done while simultaneously maintaining a good relationship with business partners. As such, qualities such us directness, clarity and politeness could be characterize as "success factors" both in business communication and in BELF communication.

MOVES VII AND VIII: CLOSING AND PRE-CLOSING

What is noticeable of this part of the analysis is the great variety of closing forms found in the corpus of emails which can be observed in the table below (see table 5). As it can be seen in the table, 90% of the emails include move VIII, closing, as a relevant part of the message. However, the most striking aspect to highlight is the inclination to unconventional phrases which are far away from the conventional and rather formal phrases usually found in business letters or faxes such as *Yours sincerely* or *Yours faithfully*. By contrast, the closing phrases *Regards* (30%) and *Kind regards* (23%) are the most common forms of closing found in the corpus. Moreover, instead of *Yours sincerely* and *looking forward to hearing from you soon,* which would be the pre-established phrases, the variations *Sincerely yours* and *looking forward to hear from you soon* has been observed. These variable or unconventional phrases in the closing moves are a clear evidence of the linguistic variation of the moves towards more relaxed or less conventional English in business emails (See table 5).

Closing	%
Regards	30
Best regards	23
Thanks and regards	10
No closing	9
Thanks & Best regards	7
Sincerely yours	3
Kind regards	2
Have a nice evening	2
Thank you. Best regards	2
Thanks in advance and best regards	1
Looking forward to hear from you soon	1
Thanks for your reply. Regards	1
Thanks for your comments	1
Thanks for your helpful attitude	1
Thank you in advance for your prompt reaction	1
Thank you very much for your kind attention and support, Mr. (first name). Hope to have good news from you ASAP	1
Once again thank you very much	1
Hasta pronto. Feliz *anio* nuevo	1
Spasiba	1
Thanks again	1
I hope to have been of help. Regards	1

Table 5: Moves VII and VIII: Closing and pre-closing moves

Among other instances of variation can be named the fact that according to the distribution of moves established by Kankaanranta (2005:273) there is a previous move before the closing move: **move VII: pre-closing.** Nevertheless, the examples below show that some pre-closings and closings phrases have merged to become just one, the closing of the message, fading in this way move VII in the 22% of the emails in the corpus. This variation may happen because it is the pre-closing phrase which is missing (e.g.: *looking forward to hearing from you soon*) or because it just merges with the closing part as for instance: *thanks & best regards* (7%). Nickerson (2000: 157) suggests that the inclusion of the Pre-closing move is related to corporate politeness determined by the corporate distance between the participants and by the measure of compliance required from the receiver. In other words, the bigger the distance the more likely the writer is to use a pre-close; similarly, the more cooperation from the recipient

is needed, the more likely it is that a pre-close is used. This explanation seems to hold, at least to the extent the corporate distance could be established between the participants. Therefore, the conclusion we can obtain from this pre-closing move elicitation in many of the emails in the corpus is that the corporate distance among the participants in this email communication is short, or in other words, there is a much more confident and close business relation among them.

Furthermore, this move is related to Kankaanranta's move III, Referring to previous contact (reference to an event in which the participants of the message had been involved) since one of the most common realizations of Move III were expressions of thanks for the preceding message or the information provided. The 31% of the closing phrases in the email corpus include an expression of thanks such *as thanks and regards* or *thanks for your helpful attitude.* According to Fairclough (1992:295), this type of manifest intertextuality which makes explicit references to previous (or future) communication, was most frequently used in Move III, although it also appeared in other moves. The move and the intertextuality it realized offered evidence of the ongoing connections between events and texts in the company. Nevertheless, since there is a repetition in the content of moves III (referring to previous contact) and VIII (closing), the participants in the email correspondence seem to prescind from this repetition of the expression of thanks, probably considering it redundant and unnecessary and leaving it to the closing move in the 77% of the instances of the corpus. Among the remaining 23% of the emails we can find this repetition of the expression of thanks in both moves (moves III and VIII) in some emails and some other examples of emails whose unique function is to thank the recipient for his/her previous action or collaboration.

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MOVE IX: SIGNATURE

In reference to move IX, it can be said that it is still an important and fixed move in this kind of business correspondence, since this move has been found present in 81% of the messages in the corpus. This move makes also clear the previously mentioned dynamic of first name versus full name usage, as it has been illustrated in the salutation move. As it can be observed in the table below, in this case, 65% of the email messages were signed with the full name (name + surname) of the participants, with the curiosity in two messages written by Russian participants that are signed both in English and in Russian (see table 6). 10% of the signature moves in the email corpus include the first name and the surname's initial (i.e.: Milly N.) or the two surname's initials and the first name following a colon (i.e.: K,R, Radi). What it is noticeable from the analysis results is that the 13% percent of the messages were signed just with the first name (i.e.: Roni). According to Kankaaranta (2005: 295) "the reason for the frequent use of salutations and closings, with first names in particular, might be the writers' desire to contribute to cordial relations between the employees". Finally, in some messages the signature is present by means of the use of a preprogrammed signature.

Signature	%
Name + surname: "Alfonso Cabria"	63
First name: "Roni"	13
Name + surname initial: "Milly N."	10
No signature	9
Surname initial, first name: "KR, Radi"	3
Name + surname in English and in his/her mother tongue: "Любовь Фиалкина / Lubov Fialkina"	2

Table 6: Move VI: Signature

As Kankaanranta explains, "the frequent application of the Salutation and Signature moves was somewhat peculiar since the information they provided was repetitious; it was always found in the email template specifying the sender and the recipient of the

message. In the hectic business world, it seems unlikely that business practitioners would waste time in repetition, which seems to suggest that these moves had a specific function" (Kankaanranta 2005: 293). As was pointed before, these moves, with the use of first names in particular, contribute to the relational orientation in the messages. In this sense, the email examples in the corpus show that the introductory and the last moves in the emails depend of the relationship of sender and recipient. If the participants involved have a longer co-operative relationship in the business their salutation and closing moves are going to be less conventional and informal, thus becoming more cordial with the other person. By contrast, if the participants in the email communication have an incipient business relationship or this is the first contact between them their introductory and ending moves are going to be more formal and conventional, therefore keeping a more distant relationship.

Conclusion

Providing that the purpose of this analysis is to bring to the forth the latest variation patters in the business email communication some conclusions have been reached. Referring to the register and linguistic nature of the email correspondence, it incorporates miscellaneous features of spoken and written English. The most informal features observed in the corpus show a rather more relaxed and flexible language detached from the neutral or conventional language specific of this type of communication (i.e. business letters), which tend to be rather more distant, rigid and formal. It can be noticed a pragmatic view of the language choice characterized by a high degree of cooperativeness and a consensual style in the interactions since what BELF users really take into consideration is the professional communicative competence rather than the grammatical correctness in English. Spontaneity, unplanned

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messages, conversational and unconventional style are some of the most visible features to describe the emails in the corpus. In this sense, personalization and good rapport among the email writers can be noticed. Furthermore, the email technological advances have also contributed to modify the discursive practices from a "formal" register to an "informal" message exchange, thanks to this fast computer-based communicative medium. For the same reason, in terms of structure, even in most cases the emails are framed around 5 essential moves, the email writers seem to prescind from reiterations or repetitive moves such the pre-closing move proposed by Kankaanranta (2005). Therefore, the emails lean to be shorter in extension since the information is more direct, brief and condensed. Brevity and directness are communicative strategies that can be observed in the central core of the emails, the requesting and providing information moves, among two other communicative strategies proposed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) in their study about "Competence in BELF": an English core vocabulary frequently used by BELF users and diverse politeness principles (as proposed by Brown and Levinson, 1987). What can be highlighted from the politeness strategy used in business communication is a direct-issue oriented discourse based on a rather cordial relationship among sender and recipient to abridge the physical distance, while never discarding negative politeness strategies to lessen the imposition upon the business colleague. This need for communicative competence in BELF is essential to be successful in international business encounters among Multinational companies providing that it is the English language the main instrument to get the work done while simultaneously maintaining a good relationship with international business partners. To conclude, English as lingua franca used in business emails is highly situation-specific, dynamic, idiosyncratic and tolerant of different variations and it has been proved to be a neutral and pragmatic language among both

native English speakers and non-native speakers, while never neglect the diversity of communities, cultures and different backgrounds among International business workers.

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