

An Investigation into the Generic Features of English Requestive E-mail Messages

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1. Introduction

1.1. Email as a mode of Communication

In recent years, technological changes have influenced everyday interaction and have brought new electrically mediated modes of communication. One of these organized forms of communication is electronic mail which is heavily employed at many work-sites and within large institutions (Gains 1999) to the extent that it has become part of the daily routine (Hawisher and Moran 1993). Baron (2000) points out that email has emerged as a system of language conveyance in situations where neither speech nor writing can easily substitute. What has led to its success is its convenience, marginal cost, speed of transmission and flexibility (Baron 1998). Furthermore, as communication in general is increasingly characterized by 'a preference for directness over indirectness' (Cameron, 2003: 29), email has become one of the most acceptable means of communication to meet this purpose.

Email has pragmatic and social functions. The pragmatic function is evident in its use in the academic and business environments, where its practices include thanking people for job interviews, soliciting advice and requesting, among other functions. Its social dynamics includes privacy in that it enables participants to interact in a less constrained way than when face-to-face (Baron 2000). Expansion of email functions (e.g. using email in academic and business environments) made editing more important. This in turn led to

the emergence of formal (edited) emails and informal (unedited) ones comparable to writing and speech.

Although it has a schizophrenic character (part-speech, part-writing), email can be considered, according to Baron (1998 and 2000), a type of (bilingual) mixed contact system, reflecting the linguistic profile of four dimensions: social dynamics (the relationship between participants), format (the physical parameters resulting from the technology), grammar (the lexical and syntactic aspects of the message) and style (the choices made to convey semantic intent expressed through selection of lexical, grammatical and discourse options).

1. 2. Literature Review

Developments in telecommunications over the last century have made possible new communicative modalities that blend the presuppositions of spoken and written language (Baron, 1998). One of these communication modalities is e-mail that displays hybrid characteristics of both spoken and written language. Shapiro and Anderson (1985: 10) argue that e-mail is ‘a fundamentally new medium with significantly new characteristics that cannot be treated with the old rules alone’. Therefore, studies on e-mail have considered the rhetoric of this new medium in terms of its linguistic features, genres, style, and form, as well as pragmatic functions. In particular, a number of researchers have found themselves confronting ultimate questions such as the extent to which these rhetorical and linguistic features are influenced by the properties of e-mail, the differences between the writer’s relation to a screen and his/her relation to a written letter or memorandum, the distinctions between email and traditional media, and the communicative purposes for which interactants use e-mail.

Regarding the differences between e-mail and paper-mail, Selfe (1989) sheds light on the ‘grammar’ of the screen and the grammar of the page. The differences between the screen text and the paper text include size, and the way in which text is read and structured. For example, screen readers move through the text scrolling whereas paper text readers move through it page turning. Other researchers paid attention to such matters as how one can structure the message to direct the reader’s attention to the appropriate parts of the text to elicit the reader’s response. While Halpern (1985) calls for placing the most important part of the e-mail message (i.e. a request) at the head of the message, Hawisher and Moran (1993) recommend placing it at the end. However, Lea (1991) notes that e-mail users often write fast and spontaneously without paying attention to where to place the most important points in a single e-mail message.

Concerning the stylistic features of email correspondence, many studies have come across a range of e-mail stylistic features. Collot and Belmore (1996) and Yates (1996) state that electronic messages seem to resemble writing when focusing on particular linguistic variables (e.g. type/token ratio or frequency of adverbial subordinate clauses) and speech when focusing on contexts where senders appear involved (e.g. first- and second-person pronouns, contractions and modal auxiliary traditional letter writing conventions; this is supported by the occurrence of opening and closing formulas. As for the stylistic devices of electronic messages, he points out that the frequency of informal honorifics increases at the same rate as the level of informality. In addition, the expression of emotion through punctuation and the use of abbreviations increase in less formal messages. According to Slembrouck (1998), email is a transformation of an already existing discourse type called the 'memorandum'. At the purely formal level, electronic mail messages make use of a rather fixed template borrowed from memorandum and the behavioral routines into which the texts are inserted.

Gimenez (2000) observes that the spoken nature of electronically mediated communication has started to affect business written communication, making it more informal and personalized, and showing a tendency of a more flexible register. Likewise, Hard af Segerstad (2000) finds that email messages, in comparison to formal business templates, tend to be more 'speech-like' in terms of the ease and rapidity of production and transmission and more 'written-like' since they are written and need to rely more on the typed word. However, in an investigation of real email examples drawn from commercial and academic environments, Gains (1999) reports that commercial emails in his data followed the linguistic conventions adopted in standard written business English, whereas academic emails showed a pseudo-conversational form of communication though conducted in extended time and with an absent interlocutor.

Other studies in a variety of sender-recipient correspondence among university students have yielded more findings on e-mail messages. At the university setting, these e-mails were found to be characterized by 'more casual language, truncated syntax, abbreviations, and symbols' (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). However, students in general write more formal e-mails to their professors (Chen, 2006) as e-mail messages can be edited like hard copy although they are most often composed on-line rapidly (Hawisher and Moran 1993).

Researchers have also investigated the communicative functions of e-mail messages. They have found that e-mails are used to make requests, respond to information, maintain contact, chat, promote, enquire, direct, and to have

fun. For example, mail messages, as found by Gains (1999), are heavily employed in business to disseminate information (45%), to make requests (32%), and to issue directives (11%), whereas they are used in academic affairs mainly for transmitting information (41%) and responding to prior requests (31%). Other studies have reported that students use e-mails with their professors to get information/advice about course materials, quizzes, and showing interest in course material (Martin et. al, 1999; Marbach-Ad & Sokolove, 2001).

Few studies have applied the well-known Cross-Cultural Speech Act realization Project (CCSARP) coding framework developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) to examine the differences in request strategies for request realization in a cross-cultural communication perspective. Using this coding framework, Chang and Hsu (1998) examine the request structure in English email messages written by Chinese learners of English and native American English speakers. Due to cultural differences, the requestive act structures of Chinese are found to have an indirect sequence but their linguistic realizations are more direct. However, the request structures of the native speakers are in direct sequence whereas their linguistic realizations are indirect. Likewise, results from the investigation of request speech act in emails written by Australian and Thai students in English show that Thai students' messages in making requests are less direct and more polite than those of Australian students (Swangboonsatic, 2006). The researcher points out that these differences in requesting style are attributed to the difference between the Thai and Australian cultural values. In an analysis restricted to the head requestive acts of email messages, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examines how native and nonnative English speaking graduate students formulate low- and high-imposition requests sent for faculty. Her results show that most requests are realized through direct request strategies; however, native speakers demonstrate greater resources in creating e-polite messages to their professors than nonnative speakers.

While e-mail messages have been the focus of a number of studies, no work of which we are aware has been carried out on analyzing the generic structure of the standard elements of requestive e-mail messages or has looked for evidence of socio-pragmatic norms that govern email as generic norm of communication in different linguistic communities, drawing on a corpus data indicative of generic complexity and staging. To the best of our knowledge, mere attention has been paid to studying the generic structure of email messages written by native and non-native speakers to find out culturally preferred discourse generic options. Therefore this study is an attempt to analyze the generic structure and registerial features of email messages written by American native speakers and Jordanian non-native speakers of

English and to shed light on the nature of the discourse strategies used by the two groups of writers to organize this type of genre. In particular, the research questions are:

1. What are the generic options that govern the rhetorical construction of email messages available to the American native and Arabic nonnative speakers of English?
2. What are some rhetorical moves of Americans and Jordanians that are similar or different?
3. What are the socio-cultural resources that have given rise to these similarities and differences?

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

A corpus of eighty e-mail messages was written by two groups of subjects participated in this study: forty English speaking Americans in the United States and forty non-native speakers of English from Jordan. The American and Jordanian students were undergraduate students; they were between 19 and 25 years of age. The Jordanian subjects were native speakers of Arabic. They were third and fourth year students studying towards a BA degree in English language at Jordan University of Science and Technology, and Yarmouk University; both are public universities in Irbid City. Sixty eight percent of the subjects were female students, and 32% were male. They studied English as a school subject in their home country, Jordan, for eight years prior to university admission, as English is taught as a foreign language in Jordan. The students have the level of proficiency that qualifies them for participating in this study as they have been pursuing undergraduate English courses and majoring in English language for three years. In addition, all students are required to take an English language proficiency test before entering the Department of English. The second group constituted forty American university students (23 were female students and 17 were male). They were undergraduate students in different majors (Political Science, Biomedical Sciences, Software Engineering, General Engineering, Biology, Communication Studies, Marketing, Journalism, Business, History and Law) at three American Universities: University of Texas, University of South Alabama and University of Massachusetts Amherst. Only native speakers of English were selected.

2.2. Method of Data Collection

The sample consists of eighty e-mail messages written by eighty undergraduate students. They were all requestive written for the purpose of eliciting a positive response from the readers of these messages in order to

create a possibility of accepting their requests. To ensure qualitative comparability and reliability of sampling, the data for this study were collected through distributing a simulated written paragraph to the participants via email. All the emails collected were written in response to a written paragraph describing a fictional situation in which the subjects had unavoidably exceeded the deadline to participate in a competition for selecting the best essay. Each subject's task was to send an email message to the committee to give him/her another chance to submit his/her essay. Two equal sets of data of 40 messages each were collected from the participants. The first set was collected by the researchers themselves who made contacts with the Jordanian students. Only students who showed willingness to participate in the study were asked to electronically respond to the email sent to them. In addition to the written task description, the situation was explained orally in person to them. By using the same situation for both groups of respondents, the researcher could directly compare the genre component preferences and the language used by both groups to address the same prospective reader. The second set was obtained from a corpus written by English native speakers in the United States. It was collected by three Jordanian MA students in Applied Linguistics and teaching Arabic courses to American students at the American universities previously mentioned. The researchers sent them the email containing the situation, and explained this situation orally to their students. The American students sent their responses either to their teachers who in turn forwarded the emails to the researchers or to the researchers directly. In addition, some further ancillary personal information was to be provided by the subjects. They were asked to provide information about their age, gender and education. All names and any other information likely to identify the participants were removed.

Admittedly, the data collection instrument used in this study is not without its own drawbacks because the data elicited was not natural. However, it was decided to adopt this instrument for the mere reason that this instrument allows the researchers to control the same situation for both groups of participants (Maier, 1992; Al-Ali, 2006a) so that we could compare the e-mail feature preferences used by both groups to the same situation.

3. Theoretical Framework

Each subject in this study is not a speaker, but a writer writing an e-mail message to an addressee (the selection committee); therefore, no actual interaction takes place since the situation is hypothetical and the reader is not able to respond directly. We drew on the framework of genre analysis to examine both sets of e-mail messages for specific generic features and their linguistic realizations. A request in the form of e-mail message may be sent to seek information on a detail, or to pursue good will and sympathy (e.g., 'in

situations where the writer's party perhaps needs to report that they will be unable to meet their commitments' (Yli-Jokipii, 1996: 306).

The e-mail messages collected share a main communicative function of requesting some kind of response such as some appropriate action for the benefit of the requester. The users of genre share some set of communicative purpose realized by a schematic structural component moves in a particular context (Swales 1990; Bhatia, 1993). I utilized Al-Ali's (2004) coding scheme on a corpus of English and Arabic job applicant letters written by English native speakers and Arabic native speakers, with modifications and additions of certain moves. The researchers found it necessary to add other communicative moves in order to articulate new rhetorical functions specific to the communicative needs of the English email messages. Al-Ali's analysis is based on Swales' (1990) and Bhatia's (1993; 2004) notion of genre analysis. These genre analysts put forward the move structure analysis framework which focuses on identifying the strategic functional options utilized by the writers to articulate the communicative purpose of a particular genre, the allowable order of these moves, and the linguistic features used to realize them. The next step is to provide contextual explanations why these rhetorical options were utilized by the users of the genre to achieve their communicative purpose. That is because, according to Bhatia (2004), the schematic generic patterns of a particular genre are the result of the conventions of the socio-cultural contexts in which genres are written.

Despite the shared communicative purpose of the routinized requestive e-mail messages, Kachru (1988: 207) maintains that 'there is to be a fair amount of variation in the use of non fictional genres in a number of nativized contexts particularly where dominant regional socio-cultural factors operate differently.' To find out variations between the two sets, we then compared the native speakers' data with that of the non-native speakers.

Because the writers of these messages are in low position with respect to the addressee, it is assumed that they should employ requestive mitigation strategies to minimize the amount of imposition exerted on the prospective reader. Based on request strategy types in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation framework developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989), we identified each request head act together with its mitigation strategies. We analyzed the request act structure in terms of the syntactic and lexical/phrasal mitigating devices used to mitigate the request act proper and the level of directness of the request linguistic forms. Some examples of the mitigating strategies and illustration of how these contribute to the politeness of the request are presented in the Data Analysis Section.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the American native speakers' and Jordanian non-native speakers' emails revealed that there are ten component moves by means of which requestive email messages are structured. Some moves have sub-steps such as the Apologizing move. Apart of salutation that indicates the Opening, and the signing phrases that indicate the Closing, the criteria for move analysis are solely semantic because the same semantic move can be realized by different formal linguistic features. As found in the analysis, the request messages written by the English native speakers and the nonnative speakers of English demonstrated differences in the number and frequency of moves employed. The nonnative speakers tended to use eight-move messages, while the American native speakers used nine-move ones. This does not mean that every email corresponded rigidly to the organizational model presented in this Table. Following are the individual component moves; each will be described and exemplified by instances from the corpus.

Table 1: Component moves of American and Jordanian emails

Component moves of American emails	Frequency of moves (%)	Component moves of Jordanian emails	Frequency of moves (%)
1.Opening	100	1.Opening	88
2.Identifying self	33	2.Identifying self	10
3.Apologizing		3.Apologizing	
• Announcing apology	43	• Announcing apology	64
• Giving reasons	98	• Giving reasons	93
4.Requesting	100	4.Requesting	100
5.Referring to documents	30	5.Invoking compassion	25
6.Promoting contribution	5	6.Promoting contribution	25
7.Specifying means of further communication	23		
8.Ending politely	58	8.Ending politely	33
9.Closing	75	9.Closing	63

OPENING

It is the first move in the e-mail messages examined. I found 100% incidence of this move in the native speakers' messages whereas it occurs in 88% of the Jordanian learners' data. The major function of this move is to identify and/or politely salute the target addressee. Most of the e-mails examined are commonly opened with one of the options listed in Table 2. Most all of the messages use the epistolary convention for opening starting with an address term. This indicates that 'the students still followed epistolary conventions in writing e-mail to their professors, which suggests that they viewed e-mail as more similar to print convention correspondence' (Zhang, 200: 14).

Table 2: ‘Opening’ options in the American native speakers’ (NS) and Jordanian nonnative speakers’ data

Openings (ANSs)	No. of instances (%)	Openings (J NNSs)	No. of instances (%)
1. Dear (Selection) Committee (Members)	58	1. Dear (selection) committee (members)	16
2. To whom it/this may concern	25	2. To whom it may concern	4
3. Dear Sir/Madam	12	3. Dear Sir(s)	43
4. Dear Drs	0	4. Dear Drs	6
5. Dear Mr.	0	5. Dear Mr.	11
6. Hi	5	6. Hello/Hi	20

Table 2 above shows the frequency of occurrence of each option used by the two groups of respondents. As is shown, 80% of the Jordanian messages and 72% of those of Americans were opened with the conventional greeting ‘Dear’. It was noticed that, a higher use of ‘Dear Sir(s)/Mr. /Dr.’ was recorded by the Jordanians (60%) in comparison to ‘Dear Sir/Madam’ (12%) employed by their counterparts. Also, while the Jordanian learners employed the informal linguistic opening ‘Hello’/‘Hi’ (14%), their counterparts used ‘Hi’ only with a percentage of 5%.

IDENTIFYING SELF

In this move the respondent introduces himself/herself to the target addressee by including his/her name and/or affiliations. This component occurred in 33% of the native speakers’ data, whereas it is employed only in 10% of the Jordanian messages. This component is usually realized by the following portions extracted from both types of data:

- (1) ‘I am (x) from (z) University and I have signed up to participate in the competition for writing an.’ (NNS Email 39)

APOLOGIZING

By apologizing, the addresser ‘recognizes the fact that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits to the fact that s/he is at least partially involved in its cause’ (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984: 206). In the decision to carry out an apology, the speaker is willing to humiliate himself/herself to some extent and to admit to fault and responsibility for a certain type of event that has already taken place (Olshtain, 1989: 156). In a closer look at the information sequencing of the e-mal data, this move occurs either before or

after the 'Requesting' move. Very interestingly, 92% percent of the Jordanian e-mails revealed a discourse organization pattern of an apologizing move followed by 'Requesting' whereas their American counterparts manifested a tendency (73%) to present the requestive move before the apology.

The data analysis revealed that the act of apologizing was realized explicitly by a routinized performative act of apology, and/or implicitly by giving the reasons related to the event that has taken place. Therefore this move can be divided into the following two subcomponents or steps: 'Announcing the apology', and/or 'Giving reasons'.

Announcing the Apology

This step involves an explicit announcement of the speech act of apologizing. The data revealed that this component step has a higher frequency of occurrence in the Jordanian learners' data (64%) than in the native speakers' (43%). It is realized by using one or a combination of more than one form of the following linguistic options:

- a. An explicit illocutionary routinized performative verb realized by the formulaic expression of regret 'apologize, or its nominalized form (i.e. apology).

The native speakers remarkably employed this option more often (76%) than the Jordanian learners (52%). In addition most of the native speakers' apologies were more direct and formal, and were further intensified by adding one of the following devices:

- an intensifying expression prior to the performative verb 'apologize' such as an intensifying adverb or the auxiliary verb 'do'
 - (2) 'I *strongly* apologize for not being better prepared and sending in my essay at an earlier time and hope I do not inconvenience you. (NS Email 30)
 - (3) 'I *do* apologize for not handing in the contest essay on time.' (NNS Email 20)
- a premodifying adjective before the nominalized form 'apology'
 - (4) 'Please accept my *sincere* apologies.' (NS Email 38)

- b. Apologetic 'sorry': This option was mainly used by the nonnative speakers and usually realized by using the lexical item 'sorry', or adding an intensifying adverb, or double intensifier as illustrated by the following examples:

(5) I'm *very* sorry for the delay.' (Intensifying adverbial)
(NNS Email 7)

(6) I'm *terribly, terribly* sorry.' (Double intensifier) (NNS Email 18)

The nonnative speakers were likely to express direct apology by using *sorry* and/or its intensified forms more frequently than the American native speakers with a percentage of 48% versus 12%.

Giving Reasons

The act of apologizing was also realized implicitly by giving the reasons and specifying the obstacles that make it difficult to achieve the desired objectives. Almost all the informants provided the addressee with reasons and explanations for having missed the scheduled submission. The reasons cited included an account of the cause which brought about the problem. This strategy occurred in both sub-corpora as suggested by its presence in 98% of the native speakers' and 93% of the Jordanian learners' data.

To realize this strategy, the native speakers employed subordinators such as 'Because (of) /Due to, or instances of adversative conjunctives (e.g. 'therefore'), or negative expressions indicating a problem such as 'Unfortunately', 'unable to', or 'malfunction', and 'corrupted'. The nonnative speakers mainly used adverb clauses introduced by 'because' and the adversative conjunction 'but' much more frequently. The major difference between the native speakers' and Jordanian learners' emails is the relative lack of variety of expressions in the Jordanian learners' sub-corpora.

The reasons were sometimes presented in detail or in the form of a story as shown in the following example:

(7) My delay was due to computer malfunction. There was a severe damage When I attempted to retrieve and send the essay initially, I discovered that my hard drive was corrupted, by the time the tech crew was able to fix the problem the deadline was already past.' (NNS Email 15)

As is shown in example 7, the problem is presented in detail taking the form of a story where the writer gives a ground (reasons, explanations or justifications) for his/her 'Requesting' (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: 287).

REQUESTING

This move is considered the backbone of the messages as suggested by its occurrence in every email message. It is central to the main communicative purpose of this genre, commonly known as the ‘head act’. Requesting, along with apologizing, comprise the main propositional content of the message. Requests in general ask that an action be taken to redress the problem described. They are pre-event acts: they express the speaker’s expectation of the hearer with regards to prospective action, verbal or nonverbal (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: 11). In the data analyzed, the writer expresses his/her desire that the reader performs an action – to give him/her another chance to submit the essay.

As shown in Table 3, the corpus displayed one or more of the following request strategies, the classification of which is founded on the empirical investigations carried out in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

Table 3: Subjects’ use of request strategies in E-mail messages

Request Strategies	Mood Derivable	Explicit Performative		Hedged Performative	Want Statement	
		Ask	Request		Hope	Wish
No. of instances (ANSs)	6	4	9	3	15	–
No. of instances (JNNSs)	10	9	–	–	17	7

1. Mood Derivable: Instances where the grammatical mood (the imperative form) determines the illocutionary force a request, e.g.,

(8) ‘Please *give* me another chance to rewrite a new essay and send it to you.’ (NNS Email 33)

2. Explicit Performative: The illocutionary intent is explicitly named by using a relevant illocutionary verb. The native speakers tended to use the verbs ‘request’ and ‘ask’, whereas the Jordanian learners used ‘ask’, e.g.,

(9) ‘I am writing to request a time extension for my essay.’ (NS Email 4)

3. Want Statement: The utterance expresses the speaker’s desire that the event denoted in the proposition comes about. In addition to using ‘hope’ by

both groups of participants, the nonnative speakers also used ‘wish’. The following examples illustrate this:

(10) ‘I hope you will be able to consider my entry.’ (NS Email 28)

(11) ‘I wish you would be kind enough to consider accepting my essay even though I exceeded the deadline.’ (NNS Email 7)

4. Hedged Performative: The illocutionary verb denoting the request is modified by modal verbs or verbs expressing intention, e.g.,

(12) ‘I would like to ask for an extension of the application deadline for submitting my essay, please.’ (Email 22)

In addition to these strategies, the respondents usually used syntactic mitigators including ‘Interrogative’, ‘Past tense’, and ‘If Clause’ to mitigate this move internally, and lexical phrasal devices such as ‘Politeness markers’ and ‘Downtoners’ to soften the amount of imposition on the hearer (see Farch and Kasper, 1989: 222). Table 4 presents the subjects’ use of the various subcategories of syntactic and Lexical/phrasal mitigating devices.

Table 4: Subjects’ use of the various subcategories of mitigating devices

Mitigating Devices	Internal Mitigating Devices					External Mitigating Devices
	Syntactic Devices			Lexical/Phrasal Devices		Disarmers
	Interrogative	Past Tense	If Clause	Politeness Markers	Downtoners	
No. of instances (ANS)	2	20	14	4	4	8
No. of instances (JNNSs)	–	7	12	13	–	12

As Table 4 shows, a higher use of syntactic mitigating subcategories was recorded by the native speakers (36 instances) in comparison to 19 instances employed by the Jordanian participants. However, we found that the percentages of lexical/phrasal devices were higher in the nonnative speakers’ data (13 instances) than those in the native speakers’ (8 instances). The following examples illustrate these mitigating devices:

(13) ‘Would it be possible to submit my essay at this late time?’
(Interrogative) (NS E-mail 18)

(14) ‘... and was wondering if it was in any way possible for me to still be able to submit the essay.’ (Past tense) (NS Email 1)

Concerning the lexical/phrasal devices, the Jordanian students used the ‘Politeness Marker’ ‘please’ more frequently.

External mitigation, on the other hand, operates beyond the request by means of various optional supportive devices. The participants tended to use disarmers. The writer attempts to remove any possible refusals the reader might raise upon being confronted with the request (e.g. ‘I understand ..., but ...’) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989: 287). The Jordanian learners used disarmers more than the native speakers (twelve instances versus eight). The following are examples from both types of data:

(15) ‘I understand the deadline has passed, but I would appreciate your consideration of accepting my submission at this time.’
(NS Email 6)

(16) ‘Although I know I exceeded the deadline, but I ask if you can give me another chance.’ (NNS Email 5)

The ‘Requesting’ as a directive speech act move is an integral part of the communicative purpose of this genre as it is a request for a positive action (i.e. invites action from the reader to give the reader a chance to resubmit his/her essay). This move tends to reoccur as the e-mail messages typically include giving apologies indicating why the writer missed the deadline, and in many cases each of these apologies is followed by a requestive move. Thus, a significant issue related to this move is its cyclicity in the sense that it does not necessarily occur once. One or more other moves can occur in between. It is likely that the length of the email message plays a role in the number of moves employed in this cycling configuration, so that the longer the email message, the greater the number of moves employed in between.

REFERRING TO DOCUMENTS

Thirty percent of the E-mail messages written by the American native speakers refer the prospective reader to the attached document(s) which provide additional evidence to justify why the request they have made. However, the Jordanian messages do not contain reference for documents. This move is often indicated by lexical items such as ‘attached’ or ‘enclosed’.

The following extract from the native speakers' emails seem to indicate this function:

- (17) 'Besides a computer description of the error, I also have attached with my essay scans of the receipt of work done to repair the machine, time and date noted' (Email 34).

PROMOTING CONTRIBUTION

In this move, the writer tends to encourage the reader to consider his/her request favorably by offering appraisal of their contribution and assertion of their ability to make a sound contribution in order to persuade the reader to be given another chance. This move occurred in 25% of the Jordanian learners' data, compared to 13% of the native speakers' sub-corpora. The following examples indicate this function:

- (18) '... because I know my essay has the potential of being competitive and winning the competition' (NS Email 23).
- (19) '... For I wouldn't work hard to hand it in if I wasn't sure that it would receive your impression' (NNS Email 28).

INVOKING COMPASSION

In this move, the writer appeals or asks the potential reader earnestly for help (Al-Ali, 2004) by referring to the importance of the competition to the writer. None of the American native speakers employed this strategy. This component was found in 25% of the emails written by Jordanian texts. They used expressions such as 'sympathize' and adjectives premodified by intensifiers such as *very*, *so* and *really*. The following examples illustrate this function:

- (20) 'I would like you to sympathize with me due to this exceptional circumstance.' (Email 2)
- (21) '... because I worked hard on it and also the subject means a lot to me.' (Email 4)

SPECIFYING MEANS OF FURTHER COMMUNICATION

In this move the writer expresses his willingness to provide any further information needed and indicates how he can be contacted (Connor et al. 1995). This move was realized by a statement or question inviting the reader for further correspondence to provide any further information, or to answer the reader's inquiries (Lesikar, 1984: 283). As is shown in Table 1,

'Specifying means of further communication' is given in 23% of the native speakers' data while it does not surface in the nonnative speakers' corpus. The following extracts indicate this aspect:

- (22) 'If you have any questions regarding the circumstances under which I was unable to submit the essay or any other aspect of my request, please let me know.' (NS Email 35)

ENDING POLITELY

The respondents usually end the body of the e-mail message with a conventional polite ending borrowed from print epistolary correspondence conventions. This component occurred in 58% of the native speakers' messages and 33% of the Jordanian learners' data. Subjects from both groups tended to use the following formulaic ending: '*I look forward to hearing from you (soon)*'. The major difference between the two types of sub-corpora is that the native speakers tend to vary their expressions using common endings such as 'Thank you ((so/very) much in advance) for your time/consideration', or 'I look forward to your reply', or 'I appreciate your time/consideration'. The Jordanian participants, on the other hand, used a limited set of expressions such as 'Thank you (very much)' and 'I will be (so) thankful'.

CLOSING

Seventy five percent of the native speakers' emails and 63% of the Jordanian learners' involved the use of at least one closing device at the end. The writers employed formulaic complimentary expressions such as 'Respectfully', 'With all my respect', 'Yours sincerely', 'Yours faithfully', to show their loyalty and respect to the reader, or used the casual way of sending good wishes such as 'Best regards' and 'Best wishes' to the recipient followed by the writer's name (first and last name). The native speakers used formal conventional closings more frequently than their counterparts with a percentage of 93% versus 75%.

5. Discussion

Comparing the American students' corpus to that of the nonnative speakers, I found some variations in the generic structure in terms of the sequential order, type, and frequency of moves, and the lexico-grammatical features realizing these moves.

Regarding the order of presentation of moves, the only significant difference between the two sets of e-mail messages is the preferred sequence of 'Apologizing + Requesting' or 'Requesting + Apologizing'. It can be seen that the requestive move in the nonnative speakers' data is usually made after

it has been justified, whereas the native speakers tend to issue their request intentions directly before they are justified. Therefore, nonnative speakers avoid immediate requesting (i.e. defer their request) and lead their readers into their request intention after other linguistic acts (Kasper, 1992). In contrast, English native speakers tend to start with the main subject or the main point that will be negotiated first in the discourse (Sifianou, 1992; Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1991; Green, 1996). These results are consistent with previous findings that Jordanians prefer the pattern of justification followed by request (Al-Ali and Al-Alawneh, forthcoming), while English writers prefer the pattern of request followed by justification (Schriffin, 1987; Kong, 1998; Zhang, 2000).

With regard to the rhetorical moves that are only found in the American data and those that are only available in the Jordanian nonnative speakers' data, it was observed that the native speakers tend to use optional moves such as 'Referring to documents' and 'Specifying means of further communication', whereas the Jordanians are likely to employ a different optional move (i.e. Invoking Compassion) that is not utilized by the Americans. The occurrence of the latter move in the nonnative speakers' data might be thought of as an elicitation strategy manifested by lowering the self-esteem of the requester. In other words, they tend to utilize a self-submission strategy embodying a sense of humility to exert a kind of pressure on the reader, following the strategy 'the more persistent the requester is, the more consideration his request will be given' (Al-Ali, 2004: 16). American native speakers, on the other hand, tend to utilize a different optional strategic component called 'Referring to Documents'. Although this move does not have a high frequency of occurrence (30%), it indicates that the native speakers prefer to include factual documents to prove that they had fully intended to submit their work on time; thus, the imposition on the prospective reader was unintentional and unavoidable. It seems that they prefer this convincing strategy because they think that the one who asks for a matter to be looked into by lowering the self-esteem and desperately needs the compassion, forfeit his position as equal partner in the social communicative event.

In addition, the American native speakers tend to leave the door open for further contact (i.e. Specifying means of further communication), whereas the Jordanian learners did not do so. In soliciting a response, 'the writer cleverly keeps initiative for further contact in his hands' (Bhatia, 1993: 67). It seems that such a strategy is part of the American native speakers' communication skills. Twenty-three percent of the American writers insist on pursuing their topics (i.e. request), which in turn puts a kind of pressure on the intended reader to make a response relevant to the previous initiating turn and a positive contribution to the forward moving of the discourse (see Vuchinich,

1977). Thus American native speakers try to push for further communication by telling the reader about how they can be contacted in contrast to their counterparts who do not seek to prompt a response.

As regards the frequency of moves, the two text groups of writers showed considerable variation regarding the frequency of each move. For example, it was observed that 'Promoting contribution' was evident in 25% in the nonnative speakers' data as compared to 5% in the native speakers' texts. A possible explanation for this difference in frequency might be the reason that self-appraisal for native speakers may be thought of an unsupported claim based simply on feelings or desires rather than on rational judgment; thus, 'it lacks credibility and is likely to be viewed by the reader as subjective' (Bhatia, 1993: 70). Thus the American native speakers appear to be more objective and rational than the Jordanian students. This explains why the American group content themselves with 'Referring to documents/evidence'.

The 'Requesting' move was included in every e-mail message. The obligatory occurrence of this move in the two sets of texts corresponds to the communicative function of the requestive email genre. Since its main function is requestive, it stands to reason that this move is obligatory and has a higher frequency of occurrence than other components. However, the linguistic forms used to realize this move used by each group of writers are not the same. As is shown in Table 4, while the American native speakers tended to use more syntactic linguistic devices (36 instances) than the nonnative speakers who employed 19 instances, the nonnative speakers used more lexical/phrasal devices than the native speakers (thirteen instances versus eight). According to Faerch and Kasper (1989: 237), the nonnative speakers reliance on the lexical/phrasal devices more than the syntactic means could be attributed to the reason that the former are easier to process than the syntactic structures whose mitigating function is not inherent in their grammatical meaning, rather it is a pragmatic, 'acquired' meaning that derives from the structure's interaction with its context and requires extra inferencing capacity on the part of the addressee. The syntactic means were opted for by the native speakers because these devices have been acquired naturally and become part of their grammatical competence. Therefore it stands to reason that this difference in use of syntactic devices in making requests could come from the lack of English mastery of nonnative speakers. These findings correspond to previous findings by Al-Ali and Alawneh (forthcoming) that native speakers prefer using syntactic devices that require a native language proficiency that the nonnative users lack.

An examination of particular lexical choices used to realize the moves reveals that nonnative speakers' are sometimes unaware of the proper

pragmalinguistic devices in the appropriate context. A comparison of the sentences of apology used by both groups indicated that the Americans explicitly announce their apologies by using the verb ‘apologize’ or its nominal form ‘apology. By contrast, the Jordanian nonnative speakers were more likely to express their apology by using the word *sorry* despite the fact that this word is the most frequent expression of apology in spoken English, while in formal situations and in writing, forms of *apologize* are more common (Owen, 1984). According to Maier (1992), the nonnative speakers’ frequent use of ‘sorry’ in written texts is due to their assumption that its use is appropriate when apologizing to a person in a position of power. The casual use of this expression could have given the impression that the users did not recognize the appropriate use of these expressions. Additionally, most of the nonnative speakers’ apologies were intensified by intensifiers such as *very*, *so*. Intensification, according to (Olshtain, 1989: 163), rises with lower status (i.e. the lower the status of the apologizer in comparison to the apologizee, the more intensification s/he will use to make the apology stronger creating even more support for hearer (H) and more humiliation for speaker (S). It seems that apologizing to someone in authority (the committee) may impose a heavier psychological burden than apologizing to someone of a lower status. Thus, by strengthening the apology with intensifying adverbs such as ‘really’, ‘very’, ‘deeply’ and ‘so’, the Jordanian learners show their awareness of the status of the apologizees and establish the ground for later requesting. In contrast, the American native speakers seem to be less psychologically inclined to apologize. Another relevant instance is the nonnative speakers’ use of *please*. It was the preferred politeness marker in making requests as it occurred with imperative structure in all requestive acts of Mood Derivable. Faerch and Kasper (1989) claimed that language learners’ preference for the politeness marker *please* is due to ‘its double function as illocutionary force indicator and transparent mitigator’ (p. 232). It appears that nonnative speakers might use *please* indiscriminately as a device to mark the utterance or sentence as a request rather than a mitigating device (see Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Blum-Kulka and Levinson, 1987, for similar conclusions).

Other instances illustrating the nonnative speakers’ unawareness of the sociolinguistic rules linking the linguistic forms with contextual variables were evinced in the ‘Opening’ and the ‘Closing’ moves. To open their email messages, the native speakers used more formal conventional lexical options (95%) than their counterparts (80%). At the first glance, the frequent use of such formal openings by the two groups of writers is likely to be a natural consequence of the tenor variable indicating the formality of the situation at hand where the interactants are of unequal power, the contact is infrequent and the affective involvement is low (Eggins, 1994: 65). Apparently, the

nonnative speakers' messages addressed upward seem to be formal and conforming to the conventional norms required in communication with authority figures. However, a closer look at the lexical choice practices used to realize the 'Opening' move displays that they do not have enough control over the address term system in English in that they do not marshal appropriate linguistic forms with their contextual cues in language use. This is confirmed by the overwhelming of the instances of lexical choices (60%) addressing masculine figures distributed as follows: in 43% it is 'Dear Sir(s)', in 11% 'Dear Mr.', and in 6% it is 'Dear Drs', which foreground masculine power and disguise feminism. That is because the students in the Jordanian university domain think that the committee responsible for selecting the best essay would be a group of male members. Therefore, it seems that the writers rely on rhetorical masculine coloring borrowed from their socio-cultural norms in their first language and applied into English. In other words these choices reflect features of the influence exercised by the Jordanian society in which masculine authority is evident (Al-Ali 2006b).

Another finding illustrating that the linguistic forms are poorly utilized by the nonnative speakers is the high frequencies of informal linguistic options (Hello/Hi) for openings (20%) and (25%) for closings in comparison to (5%) and (7%), respectively, used by native speakers. A possible explanation for this inappropriate use of these informal options is the perception among some of the nonnative speakers that the mode of communication determines the language used. Those users think that email as a medium of communication, in general, is characterized by informal and casual language, ignoring the fact that politeness conventions are expected to be maintained irrespective of medium. Thus, it seems that some nonnative speakers are unaware of which stylistic options required for different purposes in different contexts. What might give explanation to these inappropriate linguistic choices is that email use is still a language-using situation with less clearly defined constraints (Malley, 2006). Additionally, socialization into acceptable email interaction is still without much guidance as books on writing email messages provide little help to email users (Flynn and Flynn, 1998; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have looked at requestive email messages written by native and nonnative speakers of English addressed to the same reader, the selection committee. The choice of the same addressee is instrumental to avoid differences that result of the influence of status and power variables on the formulation of email messages. That is to say all the email messages were collected under the same social situation to insure a reliable qualitative comparability between the two categories of texts in order to determine similarities and differences.

The genre analysis of email component moves reflects the generic options that govern the rhetorical construction available to e-mail message writers in the native and nonnative settings. These staged options reflect the overall communicative purpose of this genre which conceals the socio-cultural constraints and pragmalinguistic behavior that have given rise to these generic options. As it is shown in this study, although the groups of students from different cultural backgrounds, one from American and the other from Arab, utilize some similar generic components such as 'Opening', identifying self', 'Apologizing', 'Requesting', Ending politely', and 'Closing', each group uses certain moves that are very rare or do not even exist in the other group's texts. For example, the American native speakers tend to use other moves such as 'Referring to documents', and 'Specifying means of further communication' that do not even exist in the Jordanian corpus to formulate their email messages. The Jordanian nonnative speakers, in contrast, utilize certain moves like 'Invoking compassion' that does not surface in the native speakers' texts. Therefore the nonnative speakers' generic choices do not always conform to those of the American conventions, but sometimes utilize their culture-specific choices to carry out requestive genre to appeal to the prospective reader.

The differences found in the generic options reflect different pressure tactics utilized by each group aiming at exerting a kind of pressure on the same prospective reader. While the Jordanian writers tend to use the self-submission strategy 'Invoking compassion', and the unsupported claim 'Promoting contribution' that are based simply on feelings, the Americans, instead, use objective supported strategic claims based on providing factual documents to prove that their imposition is unintentional. The Americans tend to support this optional strategic option by 'Specifying means of further communication' as an additional optional convincing strategic component. Unlike the Jordanian students, the Americans tend to employ a different strategy in order to achieve a positive response; that is 'the more objective and convincing the requester is, the more consideration one's request will be given'.

Another significant finding is the presentation of moves. Jordanian nonnative speakers of English show an obvious preference for the 'Apologizing' or 'Giving reasons' followed by 'Requesting' pattern whereas the American students display the opposite (i.e. 'Requesting' followed by Apologizing' or 'Giving reasons'). That is to say the American messages are more direct, as addressers give priority to the propositional content of the request proper whereas the Jordanian participants put greater emphasis on the interpersonal elements by apologizing and justifying their delayed request.

With regard to the nonnative speakers' use of the linguistic choices to realize the component moves of the email messages, their choices seem to suffer of insufficient pragmatic knowledge. This is evident in the high frequency of the masculine address forms borrowed from their L1 pragmatic and socio-cultural. The casual use of expressions such as *sorry* for apologizing, *Hi/Hello* as openers, and the informal endings in this social situation could have given the impression that the users either had difficulty in finding the appropriate linguistic expressions or did not recognize the appropriate use and the contextualization conventions of these expressions in this context since the weight of face threatening act is great due to the unequal social status between the students and the selection committee. Another potential reason for the more speech-like features of some linguistic options is the medium of communication (i.e. email). It is possible that some of the nonnative speakers view email as an informal medium of communication; therefore, the language used in email tended to be informal.

To conclude, the present study has provided insights into generic and pragmatic flaws of Jordanian students in their use of English in email message writing. The study attempts to provide some potential explanations for these infelicities related to the subliminal influence of native cultural norms and the insufficient exposure to the pragmalinguistic contextualization conventions which are usually acquired through primary socialization in family or friendship circles or intensive co-operation in a finite range of institutionalized environments' (Gumperz, 1996: 383). Although explicit teaching of the contextualization linguistic options are difficult in a foreign language classroom (Niezgoda and Rover, 2001), it is important to raise nonnative students' awareness to email message conventions in terms of their standard generic components, and their pragmatic functions, as well as the linguistic expressions used to realize them, and how these organization options and linguistic realizations vary according to the social context.

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