

The Language of Email : A Hybrid Towards Standardization

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ABSTRACT

As computers have become an integral part in the life of the societies all over the world , people are increasingly using computer technologies including the internet, and particularly the e-mail , to communicate encouraged by the easy access to these technologies and their lower cost . This, in turn, has led to a growing field of study which is Computer – Mediated Communication (CMC) part of which e-mail is expected to be the most familiar and the widely-used mode of communication exchange. Within the course of its relatively short time of use, e-mail has shaped its (approximately) regular format so far, but its language (English only for the purpose of this paper) has shown irregular manifestations in the message texts .

This study tackles this issue of the characteristics of the language of e-mail including its format as compared to the conventional letter. It emphasizes the hybrid nature of the English texts of emails which is being under a process of linguistic systemization as an indication that it is on a way of standardization . Therefore , the scope of the study is limited only to email , and doesn't go beyond studying its language features .

The methodology followed starts with reviewing some topics about email format and language referring to the literature in the field in which the recent writings on the Net provide a major reliable reference to the study . Then the prevailing characteristics of the language of email are also shown illustrated with examples from random samples of email texts . Brief citation of the "Netiquette" is necessarily presented , and the appendices of emoticons , acronyms and abbreviations used in email are to support indicating the systemization being processed towards the standardization of the language of email .

The conclusion then confirms the fact of the hybrid nature of the email language as a composite of both spoken and written English in addition to other language characteristics unique to email , but this hybridization is now being systemized as all the linguistic manifestations (whether in format , words , phrases , structures or even emoticons and abbreviations ...etc) have come to be understandable and agreed-upon , and have already been grouped in alphabetical glossaries and dictionaries ; this , in itself , is a step on the way of standardization and a case that supports emailers to reinforce this specificity through their daily use and most probably "impose" more standards for the language of email with the course of time .

الخلاصة

بعد أن أصبح الحاسوب الالكتروني جزءاً مهماً ومكماً في حياة الشعوب ، يزداد يوماً بعد يوم مستخدمو الحاسوب بكافة تقنياته بضمنها الانترنت وخاصة البريد الالكتروني ليتواصلوا مع بعضهم البعض متشجعين بسهولة الحصول على هذه التقنيات وسعرها المناسب جداً . أدى هذا الأمر إلى نمو حقل جديد في الدراسة إلا وهو ((الاتصال عن طريق الانترنت)) والذي يكون فيه البريد الالكتروني الطور الأكثر شيوعاً واستعمالاً في العالم ، وقياساً إلى الفترة الزمنية القصيرة نسبياً في عمر البريد الالكتروني إلا انه أصبح ذا هيكلية ثابتة تقريباً على إن اللغة فيه اظهرت العديد من المظاهر غير المألوفة في اللغة (الانكليزية لأغراض هذا البحث) في نصوص الرسائل .

يختص البحث بهذه المسألة وهي خصائص لغة البريد الالكتروني وضمنها هيكلية مقارنة بالرسالة البريدية التقليدية . فيؤكد البحث على إن هذه اللغة هي خليط من خصائص اللغة الانكليزية المكتوبة والمحكية وأخرى جديدة خاصة بالبريد الالكتروني . إلا إن هذا الخليط يمر بعملية تنظيم لغوية مما يبين انه في طريق الثبات ولذلك فان حدود هذا البحث لا تقع خارج دراسة البريد الالكتروني وخصائص اللغة الانكليزية فيه ولا تتعدى ذلك .

أما طريقة البحث المتبعة فتبدأ بعرض بعض الموضوعات الخاصة بهيكل الرسالة الالكترونية واللغة فيها عن طريق الإشارة إلى ما متوفر من مصادر في هذا المجال، وتشكل الكتابات الحديثة على الانترنت مصدراً مهماً في هذا البحث . ثم يتم استعراض الخصائص الشائعة للغة الرسالة الالكترونية معززة بأمثلة من نماذج عشوائية لنصوص رسائل الكترونية ، ومن الضروري أيضاً التطرق إلى أمرين أولهما آداب الشبكة (Netiquette) وثانيهما الملاحق الخاصة بالمختصرات والإشارات في لغة البريد الالكتروني تعزيزاً لما يقدمه البحث من عملية التنظيم اللغوي باتجاه الثبات للغة خاصة بالبريد الالكتروني.

وتؤكد الخاتمة على حقيقة طبيعة الخليط اللغوي للغة البريد الالكتروني كتركيب من الانكليزية المكتوبة والمحكية إضافة إلى ما يخص البريد الالكتروني فقط من خصائص لغوية ، إلا أن هذا الخليط يمر الآن بمرحلة تنظيم بكافة أوجه اللغة (بما فيها الهيكلية والمفردات والعبارات والمختصرات والتراكيب وحتى الإشارات) حيث أصبحت هذه مفهومة ومتفق عليها وتم تجميعها وتصنيفها في قواميس ومجاميع مؤبجدة ، هذا بحد ذاته خطوة نحو ثبات هذه اللغة وأما يشجع مستخدمي البريد الالكتروني لتعزيز مثل هذه الخصوصية في استخدامهم اليومي وربما (يفرضون) قياسات أخرى لهذه اللغة مع مرور الوقت .

Introduction :

With the arrival of the network in early 1990s , English began to get its global prominence through the internet .But by the course of its relatively short time of use on the net , it has undergone a lot of change on all its aspects as a language used online . Many of the language manifestations have been set aside or replaced with new ones ; therefore , a flow of new words , expressions , abbreviations , forms , and phrases emerged . Some are driven from the old conventions of the language but others are absolutely new .

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has come to existence as the field covering all means of communication through the World Wide Web. It is generally understood as having three essential parts: "asynchronous communication via email or...synchronous communication such as "chatting" or through the use of group software " (Ferris , 1997 : 1).

Email is used in all sorts of personal , social , business and organizational communication , that's why , it is called the "mother of all internet applications"(Gonglewski , Meloni & Brant , 2001:1), and can simply be understood as message texts that are sent through an electronic (computer) to specific individual or groups , which can be attached with files including sound , videos and graphics ¹ .

Aims:

The principal aim of this paper is to present an argument for the linguistic characteristics of the language used in e-mail which is always featured as speech-like written language . Deviation from the conventional written rules of the language can easily be distinguished .Other characteristics are none-like and unique to email . Therefore , it is basically a hybrid of all these characteristics ,which is now being categorized and , to a certain extent , systemized. Such an argument can help indicating whether emailers can shortly fix up email language standards .

Methodology :

The procedure followed to promote such an argument starts with tackling some topics about email format and language referring to the literature in the field in which the recent writings on the Net are reviewed to provide a major reliable reference to the study . Then the prevailing characteristics of the language of email are also shown illustrated with examples from random samples of email texts . Brief citation of the "Netiquette" is necessarily required and appendices of emoticons , acronyms and abbreviations used in email are to support indicating the systemization being followed towards the standardization of the language of the email .

Limitation:

The scope of the paper is only the study of the e-mail language and format i.e. the characteristics and the rules recommended . E-mail is conceived of here as a medium of communication through which messages are sent electronically from one computer to another via a network ; therefore no categorization of e-mail messages is adopted on any basis like purpose , subject , length ...etc.

¹ -cf : Guide to Internet Terms : A Glossary . Available <http://www.Getnetwise.com>

Email Language:

Email is generally known to present both written and spoken language though it also keeps its own features unique to this rather new means of interactive exchange .

What makes the email text spoken-like , according to Gonzalez-Bueno , is the lack of capitalization , the use of icons (simleys,winks...etc) , the use of simplified or phonetic spelling and punctuation (like exclamations) ,and the immediacy of the exchange for the interlocutors ; participants also use the same situation strategies in the face-to-face interaction when formulating their emails which share clear tendency towards informality with the opportunity to restore the previous messages (1998 : 60-4) . Referring to the much recent literature that describes email language as hybrid of both oral and written language² , Halliday sees that all these markers of the email language are a result of the new demands on the language which have made it "work for us in ways it never had to do before ; it will have to become a different language [variation] in order to cope" (1990:32) . The idea of hybridization of this new medium of communication is also expressed by Foertsch when understanding its language as "neither pure writing nor pure speech but somewhat in between"(1995:304).

Similarly , Bliss and Macaraeg explained that speech is a dialogue that involves two participants in concurrent time while writing is a monologue involving one participant in a displaced time , but email language is an interactive structure which is neither monologue nor dialogue involving two participants in a displaced time with no concurrent participation (2004) .

Obviously there are new language conventions now evolving when using the Net to write emails , which are described by Tornow as "blurring the past distinctions between writing and talking" (1997:1) ; for him an email is a written talk that Davis and Brewer defined as "writing that stands in place of voices"(1997:2).Even facial gestures included in this "talk" can be represented with simleys and emoticons although it remains difficult in email to convey emotions and to type exactly what you would say* . in other words , the English email message is a block of abbreviated language that is seen as a written accent to clearly refer to the conversational aspects of language that might be involved in email texts , or even in other online communication media .

Email format :

As compared to the conventional letter email is certainly a cheaper and faster medium which has other features that significantly surpass the old media . Emails are instantaneous in their production and probably in their reception , easily copied and can rapidly reach many IDs (Jonsson , 1998 :1) . Reply to sender and forward options as well as attachments and speed are of course unique to email .Letters usually open with "Dear" and close with "sincerely" but the email hasn't developed its own format for greetings and signature yet ; it sometimes doesn't need salutation at all³ . Muniandy summarises that the email saves money and time , gains more acceptance , is easy to use , transcends geographical boundaries , and is of a better business

² cf : Lucas,S.B.& Weasenforth,D.(2001)E-mail and Word Processing in the ESL Classroom:How the Medium Affects the Message.Language . Learning&technology.Jan.V.5.No.1

³ cf Sherwood , K.D. A Beginner's Guide to Effective Email .(Intonation) Available at <http://www.webfoot.com>

strategy.(2002:50).Nevertheless , email is conceived of as only a mere extension of the traditional letter but much more powerful , richer and pleasurable to read since ideas are clear and concise . In his review to the well-known Crystal's 2001 volume "Language and the internet" Steven L. Throne clearly described Crystal's treatment of email arguing that in spite of its memo-like format but it is a new tool for dialogue which can contain a series of anterior messages .it is a new domain which is internet mediated . (2002 :24-7) .

Characteristics :

Genrally , the email is characterized with the relative informality that dominates its style and that can sometimes be expressed through symbols which

show either physical actions or emotions . The following are only the principal features that govern the email language . They are reinforced with examples taken from random samples of email messages :

1. The lack of capitalisation especially in the beginning of sentences

i am leaving next week

- 2.the use of the short forms and abbreviations (see appendix 2)

u for "you"
 abt for "about"
 kay for "okay"
 4 for "for"

- 3.use of acronyms (see Appendix 2)

ASAP for "as soon as possible"
 Imo for "in my opinion"

4. use of asterisks and brackets to isolate and highlight the word for a certain probable response it may encapsulate

thanks for *ali* did the job
 you want things to (fall apart)

- 5.use of emoticons as a technique employed to convey feelings and emotions (see Appendix 1)

hell be there :)

6. less pronouns , auxiliaries or modals

grateful your reply soon (without "I would be")

7. use of capitals randomly

work starts Next monday

8.use of capitals for emphasis

thank YOU for all that

9.punctuation , contraction is inaccurate

they dont agree will leave too

**10. exaggeration of emotion or personal expression
through excessive repetition of a particular mark**

is that enough!!!!!!!!!!

Netiquette :

Parallel to this concurrent displaced-time hybrid of language use in email as a world-spread , net-mediated medium of human communication, a real need to govern it with "etiquette" or "terms of conduct" is certainly an urgent requirement . These rules of conduct for email (and other CMC) is referred to as "netiquette" . In Wikipedia free encyclopedia⁴ , this term is seen to be a contraction of "network etiquette" and is " a catch-all term for the conventions of politeness recognised on Usenet , in mailing lists , and other electronic forums such as internet message " .The encyclopedia also recommends RFC185 5⁵ as the most comprehensive set of such conventions.

Though it is difficult for a particular authority to claim managing this free human interaction effected , logically , by individual and sociolinguistic factors , there are also other attempts to present these rules of conduct to the internet users, like the Oxford University netiquette , and Microsoft netiquette for new "netizens" which is intended to show the best behavior when going online⁶.

The core of these rules⁷ can be best viewed in the following excerpt from Virginia Shea's famous book "Netiquette"⁸ :

- **Rule 1: Remember the Human**

⁴ Available <http://www.wikipedia.com>

⁵ Available <http://www.stanton.dtcc.edu/stanton/cs/rfc1855.html>

⁶ "Netiquette 101 for new netizens" available <http://www.microsoft.com>

⁷ Available <http://www.albion.com>

⁸ ."Netiquette" is a book authored by V.Shea & published by Albion Books . The WWW version is available <http://www.Crazycolour.com> & <http://www.albion.com>

- Rule 2: Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life
- Rule 3: Know where you are in cyberspace
- Rule 4: Respect other people's time and bandwidth
- Rule 5: Make yourself look good online
- Rule 6: Share expert knowledge
- Rule 7: Help keep flame wars under control
- Rule 8: Respect other people's privacy
- Rule 9: Don't abuse your power
- Rule 10: Be forgiving of other people's mistakes

Conclusion :

Due to the pressing demands of the internet , part of which is the email as the most familiar computer-mediated medium of communication , the language of email has revealed a lot of manifestations . Generally , these are recognized as speech-like features maintaining the written conventions but deviate sometimes so as to cope with the new electronic media . In fact , email language is mostly hybrid of both spoken and written forms with some characteristics that are unique to email ; this hybridisation is now being systemized as all the linguistic manifestations (whether in format , words , phrases , abbreviations , structures or even emoticons and semilyls ...etc) have come to be understandable and agreed-upon , and have already been grouped in alphabetical glossaries and dictionaries ; this , in itself , is a step on the way of standardization and a case that supports emailers to reinforce this specificity through their daily use and most probably "impose" more standards for the language of the email within the course of time .

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APPENDIX 1⁹**Emoticons**

Emoticons are facial expressions made by a certain series of keystrokes. Most often producing an image of a face sideways.

!-(	Black eye	::-P	Sticking out tongue
!-)	Proud of black eye	::-p	Sticking tongue out
#:-o	Shocked	::-p~	Heavy smoker
\$-)	Won the lottery, or money on the brain	::-Q	Tongue hanging out in disgust, or a smoker
%(|:-)	Propeller-head	::-Q~	Smoking
%+{	Got beat up	::-r	Sticking tongue out
%-(	Confused	::-s	What?!
%-)	Dazed or silly	::-t	Unsmiley
%-6	Brain-dead	::-V	Shouting
%-\	Hung over	::-X	My lips are sealed; or a kiss
%-{	Ironic	::-x	Kiss, or My lips are sealed
%-|	Worked all night	::-Y	Aside comment
%-}	Humorous or ironic	::-[	Unsmiling blockhead; also criticism
%\	Hangover	::-\|	Sniffles
>>:-<<<	Furious	::-]	Smiling blockhead; also sarcasm
>-	Female	::-{})	Smile with moustache
>->	Winking devil	::-{} }	Smile with moustache and beard
>-<	Furious	::-{} }	Blowing a kiss
>-)	Devilish wink	::-|	Indifferent, bored or disgusted
>:)	Little devil	::-||	Very angry
>:->	Very mischievous devil	::-}	Mischievous smile
>:-<	Angry	::-~)	A cold
>:-<	Mad	::-~|	A cold
>:-(	Annoyed	::-(	Crying
>:-)	Mischievous devil	::/)	Not funny
<:>	Devilish expression	::/i	No smoking
<:->	Devilish expression	::>	What?
<:-(	Dunce	::@	What?
<:-)	Innocently asking dumb question	::C	Astonished
<:-|	Dunce	::e	Disappointed
<:|	Dunce	::P	Sticking out tongue
(8(I)	Homer	::X	Hear no evil
(<> ..	alienated	::x	Kiss

⁹ Source : High-Tech Dictionary Emoticons . Available : <http://www.computeruser.com.htm>

<>)	:\'	Crying
(()):** Hugs and kisses	:\'(	Crying
((()) Lots of hugging (initials or a name can be put in the middle of the one being hugged)	:\'-(	Crying
() Hugging	:\'-	Tears of happiness
(-: Left-handed smile, or smiley from the southern hemisphere	:^D	Happy, approving
(:& Angry	:`-(	Shedding a tear
(:- Unsmiley	:{	Having a hard time
(:-& Angry	:~)	A cold
(:-(- Unsmiley	:~-(	Crying
(:-) Smiley variation	:~/	Confused
(:-* Kiss	;)	Wink
(:-\ Very sad	; P	Wink with a raspberry
(: ()::) Bandaid, meaning comfort	;(	Crying
(:| Egghead	;-(-	Angry, or got a black eye
* Kiss	;-)	Winkey
*< :-) Santa Claus, or a clown	;-D	Winking and laughing
*-) Shot to death	= O	Surprised
+<:-) Religious leader	= X	My lips are sealed
+<:-| Monk or nun	=:-)	Punk, or hosehead
+< -) Knight	=====:}	Snake
+:-) Priest	=^*	Kisses
+O:-) The Pope	=^D	Big grin
-) Tongue in cheek	?(	Black eye
-= Snuffed candle to end a flame message	?-(	Black eye
-=#:-) Wizard	@>---->---	A long-stemmed rose
/\ /\ \ \ Laughter	@==	Atomic bomb
O:-) Angel	@}->---	Rose
12x@>-- A dozen roses	B:-)	Sunglasses on head
->----	d :-o	Hats off to you!
2B|^2B To be or not to be	IOHO	In Our Humble Opinion
8 Infinity	M-)	See no evil
8 :-) Wizard	M-), :X, :-M	See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil
8) Wide-eyed, or wearing glasses	M:-)	A salute
8-# Death	O 8-)	Starry-eyed angel
8-) Wide-eyed, or wearing glasses	O :-)	Angel
8-o Shocked	O+	Female
8-O Astonished	O->	Male
8-[Frayed nerves; overwrought	O8-)	Starry-eyed angel
8-] Wow!	O:-)	Angel
8-| Wide-eyed surprise	Q:-)	College graduate
: (Sad	X-(	Just died
:) Smile	[: -)	Wearing a Walkman
: [Bored, sad	[: -]	Square head
: | Bored, sad	[:]	Robot
: () Loudmouth, talks all the time; or shouting	[:|]	Robot
:* Kiss	[[]]	Hug Insert a name in the brackets of the one who is being hugged, as: [[Marcia]]
:*) Clowning	[]	Hug
:**: Returning kiss	\')	Winky
:+(Got punched in the nose	\'-)	Winky
:(Crying	_/	Empty glass
	\~/	Full glass
	] :->	Devil

:-	Male	]:-)	Happy devil
:-#	My lips are sealed; or someone wearing braces	] [	Back to back
:-&	Tongue-tied	^ ^ ^	Giggles
:->	Smile of happiness or sarcasm	^5	High five
:-<	Very sad	`:-)	Raised eyebrow
:-(	Frown	{ { }	Hug; the one whose name is in the brackets is being hugged Example: { { MJ } }
:-)	Classic smiley	{ }	No comment
:-*	Kiss	| (	Sleepy (on late night email message)
:-,	Smirk	| -<>	Puckered up for a kiss
:-/	Wry face	| - (	Sleepy, struggling to stay awake, or sleeping badly
:-6	Exhausted	| - D	Big laugh
:-9	Licking lips	| - O	Yawn
:-?	Licking lips, or tongue in cheek	| - {	Good grief!
:-@	Screaming	| - |	Asleep
:-C	Astonished	| I	Asleep
:-c	Very unhappy	| ^ o	Snoring
:-D	Laughing	} -)	Wry smile
:-d~	Heavy smoker	} : [	Angry, frustrated
:-e	Disappointed	} {	Face to face
:-f	Sticking out tongue	~ :- (	Steaming mad
:-I	Pondering, or impartial	~ :- (	Flame message
:-i	Wry smile or half-smile	~ :- \	Elvis
:-J	Tongue in cheek	~ : o	Baby
:-j	One-sided smile	~ =	Lit candle, indicating a flame (inflammatory message)
:-k	Puzzlement	~ ==	Begins a flame (inflammatory message)
:-l	One-sided smile	~ ~ :- (	Especially hot flame message
:-M	Speak no evil	~ ~ : [	Net flame
:-O	Open-mouthed, surprised	~ ~ ~ ~ 8 }	Snake
:-o	Surprised look, or yawn	~ ~ ~ ~ ~ 8 }	Snake

APPENDIX 2

COMMON E-MAIL ACRONYMS¹⁰

AFAIK	As Far As I Know
AOL	America Online
BBFN	Bye Bye For Now
BTA	But Then Again
BTW	By The Way
BWG	Big Wide Grin

¹⁰ Source : Excerpted from : <http://www.textfiles.com>

CIS	CompuServe Information Service
CU L8R	See You Later
EOF	End Of File
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FDROTFL	Falling Down Rolling On The Floor Laughing
FOAF	Friend Of A Friend
FOTCL	Falling Off The Chair Laughing
FWIW	For What It's Worth
FYEO	For Your Eyes Only
FYI	For Your Information
ICOCBW	I Could, Of Course, Be Wrong
IMO	In My Opinion
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion
IOW	In Other Words
KISS	Keep It Simple Stupid
LOL	Laughing Out Loud
NTYMI	Now That You Mention It
OTOH	On The Other Hand
PITA	Pain In The A__
PMJI	Pardon My Jumping In
ROFL	Rolling On Floor Laughing
ROTM	Right On The Money
RTFM	Read The Manual
SIG	Special Interest Group
TAFN	That's All For Now
TTBOMK	To The Best Of My Knowledge
TTFN	Ta Ta For Now
TTYL	Talk To You Later
<g>	Grin

And here are some more quite common abbreviations¹¹ :

aamof	as a matter of fact
asasp	as soon as possible
b4	before
b4n	by for now
cul8er	see you later
damhik	do not ask me how I know
eta	estimated time of arrival
f2f	face to face

¹¹ Source : quoted from Essberger , Josef . e-English IYKWIM ;-).
Available : <http://englishclub.com/esl-articles/199908.htm>

gf	girl friend
hth	hope this helps
icbw	I could be wrong
jam	just a minute
k	okay
lmk	let me know
mcibty	my computer is better than yours
oic	oh I see
pls	please
plz	please
q	queque
rymf	are you male or female
sil	sister in law
tia	thanks in advance
uok	you okay
wdymbt	What do you mean by that?
y2k	year 2000