

EFL email writing: a focus on pragmatic transfer

Patricia Bou-Franch
Universitat de València

1. Introduction

Continuous technological developments have revolutionized the ways in which we communicate – and continue to do so - by providing wider technological and social discursive possibilities. Thus, we resort to different forms of computer-mediated communication (henceforth, CMC) to achieve various ends within personal, professional and academic contexts. Not surprisingly, these developments have also had an impact on the teaching, acquisition and use of a second language, areas in which the new technologies already play a crucial role.

Email interaction in academic contexts has gained popularity over the years. Further, this interaction, as fostered by student mobility programmes, often takes place between students and lecturers of different languages. However, little is known of the pragmatics of foreign language email writing.

This paper specifically addresses this gap in the CMC literature by focusing on the electronic discourse practices of a group of Spanish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, this study investigates how EFL learners' email writing practices are oriented to the sociopragmatic interactional principles of (in)formality and (in)directness (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003). Thus, it seeks to shed light on scholarly debates regarding the general stylistic movement towards informality in computer-mediated communication, and the politeness orientations of speakers of different languages/cultures.

Further, in view of recent empirical research that underlines the different, socio-culturally sensitive preferences of British and Spanish email writing practices regarding these principles (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, in press), a second, related, aim is to problematize discourse choices in EFL email writing in terms of pragmatic transfer, i.e. the interaction of pragmatic knowledge and skills obtained through different languages in the mind of the multicompetent learner (Cook, 1992; Kasper, 1992; Kecskes & Papp, 2000). This study draws from a corpus of

140 email messages sent by undergraduate students to their university lecturers. Results revealed the complex ways in which (in)formality and (in)directness combine to meet pragmatic requirements.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on email writing practices, sociopragmatic principles and pragmatic transfer, while methodological details underlying this research are provided in Section 3. Next, findings from the studies carried out are reported on and discussed in detail in sections 4 and 5, respectively. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the empirical study.

2. Literature review: Email writing and sociopragmatic transfer

With technologies continually emerging, developing and expanding, computer-mediated communication has become an increasingly popular means of interaction within the university context. Recent research underlines the centrality of email interaction between students-lecturer which, in many cases, has even replaced face to face communication (Taylor et al., 2011).

Students write emails to their lecturers in order to make requests for feedback, for a meeting, a letter of recommendation, or a deadline extension, among others (Knupsky & Nagy-Bell, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, in press). Considering the importance of these transactional goals, their appropriate negotiation is seen as a crucial step for a positive outcome. However, students do not receive sufficient instruction on writing (upward-moving) emails. Research so far has focussed on students' ability to assess the imposition, social distance and power relations necessary to adapt email style but more research is needed in order to evaluate the extent of students' stylistic adaptation in a foreign language (Duthler, 2006; Knupsky & Nagy-Bell, 2011).

Of particular importance for the present study is research on (in)formality and (in)directness in email writing. Email communication is often considered as the prime example of the increasing *informalisation* of discourse, a trend that is favoured by the technological features of immediacy, asynchronicity and deindividuation (Baron, 2000, 2003; Crystal, 2001; Maynor, 1994; Yates, 1996; Yus, 2011). The process towards greater informality is well attested today both in English and Spanish; this has resulted in blurring the traditional association between informality and orality, on the one hand, and formality and literacy, on the other (Baron, 2000, 2003; Pérez Sabater et al., 2008; Montero-Fleta et al., 2009). However, recent research has shown that formal and informal styles combine in email writing in different ways for different contexts (Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, in press; Pérez Sabater, 2011; forthcoming; Yus, 2011). Further, choices regarding degree of (in)directness within broad politeness orientations in communication vary across situations and cultures. For example, PS speakers are generally reported to be more informal and direct than BE speakers in different settings (Bou-Franch,

2011; Bou-Franch & Lorenzo-Dus, 2008; Hickey, 1991; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003, in press; Pérez Sabater et al., 2008; Montero-Fleta et al., 2009).

Drawing from previous approaches to politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, Fraser, 1990), Spencer-Oatey & Jiang (2003) suggest a communicative framework which is particularly suitable for the study of (in)formality and (in)directness in cross-cultural email writing. For these authors, individuals in communication seek to strike a balance between a number of socio-pragmatic interactional principles. Fundamental principles include attention to face, rights and obligations and clarity, whereas secondary principles, related to stylistic concerns, include, among others, (in)directness. Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch (in press) suggest a further secondary principle: (in)formality. These principles are “value-linked” (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003: 1635), which means that their expression in a particular situation reflects the norms and preferences of a particular community. In sum, pragmatic principles are subject to cross-cultural variation, and therefore, their expression in a foreign language constitutes an interesting area of research from the point of view of pragmatic transfer.

Although transfer, or the interaction of different languages in learning and communication, was the object of much second language acquisition research, it was not until Hymes' (1971) bridged the gap between language and society, through the formulation of a socially-situated communicative competence, that the study of pragmatic transfer became centre stage. The works of Kasper (1992) and Kecskes & Papp (2000) represent two main approaches to pragmatic transfer in second language acquisition research; the former was developed within interlanguage pragmatics and the latter was inspired by Cook's (1992) work on multi-competence¹.

This paper views EFL students as multi-competent individuals with, at least, two language systems in constant interaction, and a common conceptual base, which allows them to use knowledge and skills obtained through one language when employing (an)other language(s) (Cook, 1992; Kecskes & Papp, 2000). Against this background, pragmatic transfer refers to the interaction between pragmatic knowledge and skills from different languages and cultures (cf. Kasper, 1992). If, as we mentioned above, the expression of (in)formality and (in)directness varies from PS to BE in specific situations, such variation will influence EFL communication in different ways. Thus, this paper seeks to examine the orientations of a group of email users towards the sociopragmatic principles, or stylistic concerns, of (in)formality and (in)directness in EFL, PS and BE, and to throw light on the role of pragmatic transfer therein. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1- How do EFL email writers orient to the socio-pragmatic principles of (in)formality and (in)directness?

¹ See Bou-Franch (in press) for a historical overview of pragmatic transfer studies.

RQ2 - What is the role of pragmatic transfer in the expression of (in)formality and (in)directness in EFL students' emails?

3. Methodology

In order to answer these research questions, two studies were carried out using a corpus of 140 students' emails: the EFL study and the comparative study. For the purposes of the EFL study, an EFL data set was compiled during the winter term of 2011. This corpus comprises 40 emails sent by Spanish undergraduate students of English Language I, at level B1 of the Common European Framework for Languages, in order to fulfil an academic task that instructed them to write an email asking their lecturer for a letter of recommendation to enrol in a university course abroad. Students sent the author of this paper their emails, in her capacity as their lecturer; these were corrected and returned, and permission to use them in this study was later granted. Student demographics on English Language I was characteristic of the degree in Translation Studies they were taking, and included an average 19.08 years of age, and over seven times as many female as male students (88%-12%, respectively). The comparative study draws from two data sets: the EFL corpus described above and the Spanish/English L1 corpus. The latter consists of 100 impromptu emails by undergraduates to their lecturers and was compiled in order to carry out the cross-cultural pragmatic study described in Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch (in press). All emails were written in the native language of the senders, i.e. either Peninsular Spanish (PS, n=50) or British English (BE, n=50). Participants in this study were all between 18-24 years of age. The similarities in participant demographics, and type of activity – academic email request – made the EFL and L1 data sets comparable. The L1 corpus was used as baseline data in the assessment of the role of socio-pragmatic transfer in the EFL corpus.

Consonant with Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch's (in press) analysis of the L1 corpus, the analysis of the EFL corpus draws from prior research on the internal organization of electronic discourse in general, and emails in particular (Baron, 1998; Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Bou-Franch and Lorenzo-Dus, 2008; Crystal, 200; Herring, 1996; Laborda, 2003). The first step in the EFL study was to identify the opening, requesting and closing sequences of EFL emails. The main body of the email - the requesting sequence - was further divided into request strategies and supporting moves, following the methodology developed for the *Cross Cultural Speech Acts Research Project* by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). A number of illocutionary moves was next identified for opening, requesting and closing sequences (cf. Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Bou-Franch and Lorenzo-Dus, 2008). The level of stylistic formality (F) / informality (I) was identified for all moves in the opening and closing sequences, and for supporting moves within the request (see Table 1). The absence or presence of specific lexical and grammatical means was taken as indexes of, respectively, formality and informality. Such means included use of

colloquial and conversational lexis and of contracted or abbreviated forms². Finally, types of request strategies were further identified and classified, vis-à-vis their degree of (in)directness, into direct, conventionally indirect and indirect requests (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) (see Table 2).

| Opening sequence (OPE)³ | |
|---|---|
| Greetings (GR) | ‘Dear lecturer’ (F), ‘Hi Patricia’ (I) |
| Self-identification (SID) | ‘I am <i>Proper Name</i> , one of your english students of the translation degree’ ⁴ (I) |
| Request Sequence: Supporting moves (SUP) | |
| Grounding (GRD) | ‘Next year I would like to study in an American university’ (F) / ‘So, I think that will be something good for me and a huge opportunity’ (I) |
| Preparator (PRE) | ‘I would like to ask you a favour’ (F) |
| Thanking (TH) | ‘I would really appreciate that’ (F) |
| Self-identification (SID) | ‘My name is <i>Proper Name Surname1 Surname2</i> and I’m in your English 1 course at the first year of Translation and Interlinguistic Mediation’ (F) |
| Apologising (AP) | ‘I wouldn’t demand you, but the headmaster required me that epistle’ (F) |
| Request Reinforcement (RR) | ‘I would be very grateful if you could write this letter’ |
| Offering goods (OG) | ‘And I could go to your office and pick it up’ (F) |
| Closing sequence (CLO) | |
| Signature (SG) | <i>Proper Name Surname1</i> (F) / <i>Proper Name</i> (I) |
| Thanking (TH) | ‘Thank you in advance for your time and consideration’ (F) |
| Offer goods (OG) | ‘I would also like to say that I am very grateful for you for the time and the passion you devote to your classes’ (F) |
| Leave-taking (LT) | ‘Kind regards’ (F) / ‘See you on Monday’ (I) |

Table 1. List of opening, supporting and closing moves with examples from the EFL data, coded for formality (F) and informality (I).

Direct strategies

²For the use of lexical and grammatical means vis-à-vis (in)formality, see Baron (1998); Belda-Medina (2003); Collot and Belmore (1996); Crystal (2001); Maynor (1994); Montero-Fleta et al. (2009); Murray (1991); Pérez Sabater (2011) (forthcoming); Pérez Sabater et al. (2008); Posteguillo (2003); Vela Delfa (2002); Yates (1996); Yus (2011).

³The shortened names of category labels are provided as they are used in figures, below.

⁴Please note that all emails were anonymized through deletion of proper names and surnames. Further, spelling (or other) mistakes in the original were not corrected for this study.

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Mood derivable</i> (MD) strategies – in which verbal mood signals the request | ‘Think about that please’ |
| <i>Hedged performative</i> (HP) strategies – include the mitigated naming of the illocutionary force | ‘I would like to ask you to write the letter’ |
| <i>Want statement</i> (WS) strategies – or the expression of a speaker’s wish that a hearer does the requested act | ‘I need that you write a letter of recommendation’ |
| Conventionally indirect strategies | |
| <i>Query preparatory</i> (QP) strategies – refer to the preparatory conditions of requests (ability, willingness) via conventionalised means | ‘I wonder if you could write a recommendation letter to me’ |
| Indirect strategies | |
| <i>Hint</i> (H) strategies – do not refer directly to a request and are interpreted as such because of the context of utterance | ‘...and so I have thought that a letter of recommendation by my university lecture could help my application for the course’ |

Table 2. List of request strategies with examples from the EFL data, coded for level of directness (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

Subsequent to the identification of students’ orientations towards (in)formality and (in)directness in the EFL data set, the comparative study of the EFL and L1 data sets followed; this would permit an assessment of the role of socio-pragmatic transfer in EFL email writing.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The EFL study

All emails in the EFL data contained the three main sequences, namely, opening, requesting and closing. As table 3 shows, the preferred move for the realisation of opening sequences was, by far, the Greeting. In contrast, closing sequences showed more variation with similar preferences for Leave-taking and Signature moves, followed closely by Thanking moves. Self-identifications in the opening and Offer goods in the closing were employed only rarely. As regards request sequences, students overwhelmingly opted for the use of conventionally indirect strategies (QP, n=34), and only resorted to direct strategies in less than half the occasions (n=14). Indirect strategies were the least frequent, with only 2 instances in the whole EFL data. Within supporting moves, the Grounding or justification was employed over ten times more frequently than the other moves. To a much lesser extent, students also employed Preparators, Request reinforcements and Offer goods, whilst the number of Thanking, Self-identification and

Apologising moves was the least frequent in the data. In their Request reinforcements, students' preferences for conventionally indirect and direct strategies were very similar, with 6 and 5 occurrences, respectively. No indirect strategies were used to reinforce the main request.

| OPENING SEQUENCE | | CLOSING SEQUENCE | |
|------------------------------|----|----------------------------|-----|
| Greetings (GR) | 40 | Signature (SG) | 40 |
| Self-identification (SID) | 3 | Thanking (TH) | 35 |
| | | Offer goods (OG) | 2 |
| | | Leave-taking (LT) | 41 |
| REQUESTING SEQUENCE | | | |
| REQUEST STRATEGIES | | SUPPORTING MOVES | |
| DIRECT - MD | - | Grounding (GRD) | 145 |
| DIRECT - HP | 9 | Preparator (PRE) | 11 |
| DIRECT - WS | 5 | Thanking (TH) | 6 |
| CONVENTIONALLY INDIRECT – QP | 34 | Self-identification (SID) | 2 |
| INDIRECT - H | 2 | Apologising (AP) | 1 |
| | | Request Reinforcement (RR) | 11 |
| | | Offering goods (OG) | 10 |

Table 3. Frequency of occurrence of move types within sequences in EFL data

A total number of 336 moves was identified and coded for (in)formality. Of these, 81.55% (n=274) were formal while less than a fourth, 18.45% (n=64), were informal. The distribution of formality and informality across moves is shown, in percentages, in figure 1.

All opening, supporting and closing moves were mainly formal, except the Offer goods move in the closings, which showed an equal distribution of formality and informality. The greatest use of formality was found in the request sequence, with all moves showing over 88% of formality, and three of the six support moves expressed exclusively through formal means. Informality was scarce but when it was used, it featured mostly in opening and closing sequences.

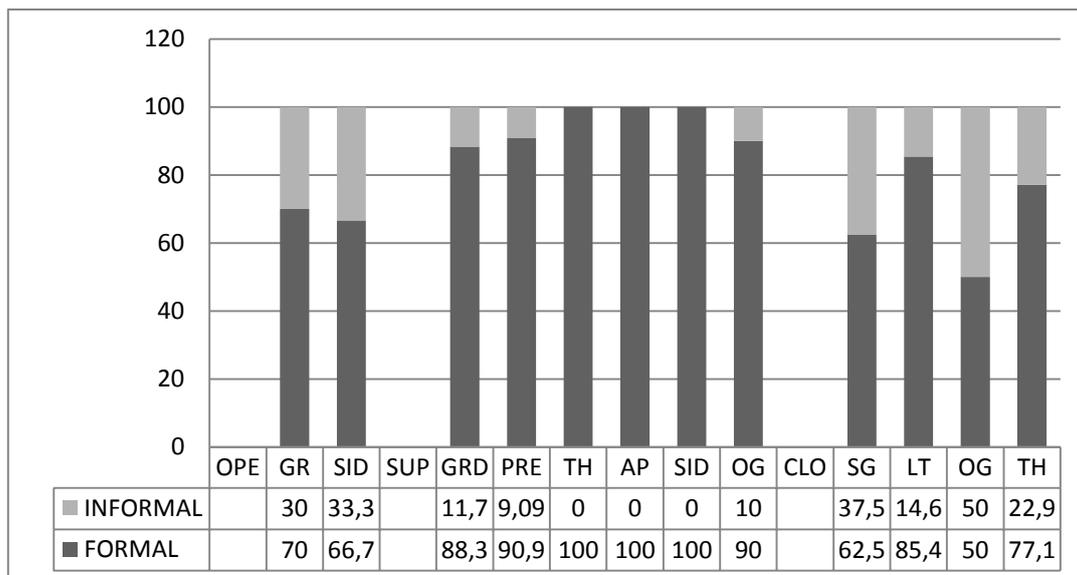


Figure 1. Distribution of formality and informality across moves in EFL data (percentages)

4.2. The comparative study

In order to assess the role of pragmatic transfer, email writers' orientations to (in)formality and (in)directness in the EFL data were compared to such orientations in the L1 data sets.

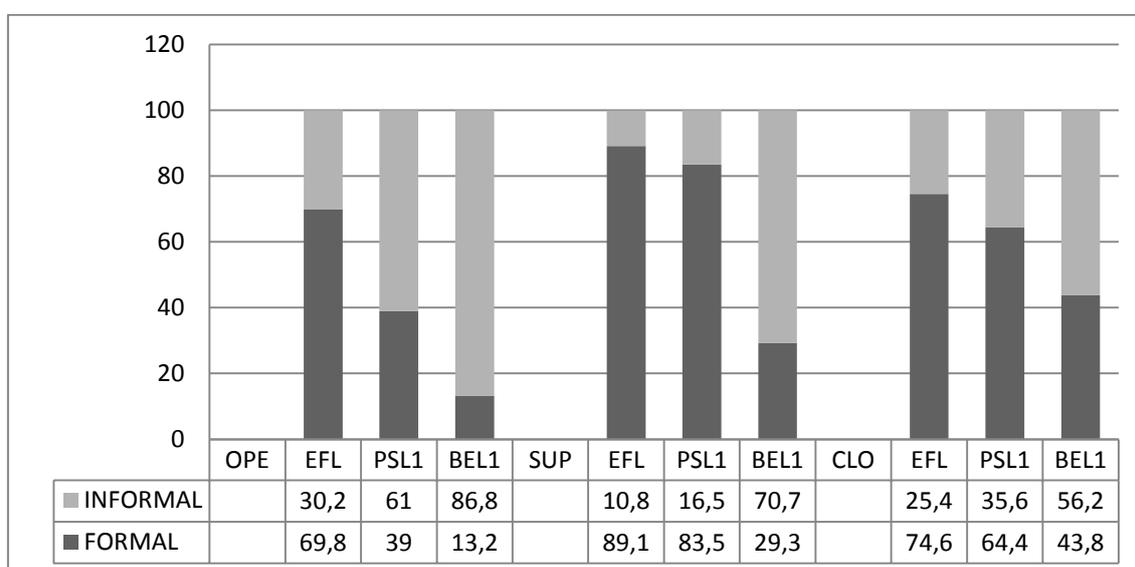


Figure 2. Distribution of formality and informality across sequences in the EFL, PS and BE L1 data sets (percentages)

Figure 2 shows that the distribution of formality and informality in the EFL data is closer to the distribution identified for PS than to the patterns found in BE, in all three sequences under analysis. Regarding opening sequences, the study revealed a marked contrast between EFL mainly formal openings and BE mainly informal ones. A similarly marked contrast held between EFL and BE support moves, with PS showing nearly the same amount of formal and

informal moves as the EFL data. Differences in the distribution of formality and informality were less marked in the closing sequence, with EFL closing moves again proving more similar to the PS than to the BE moves in terms of (in)formality.

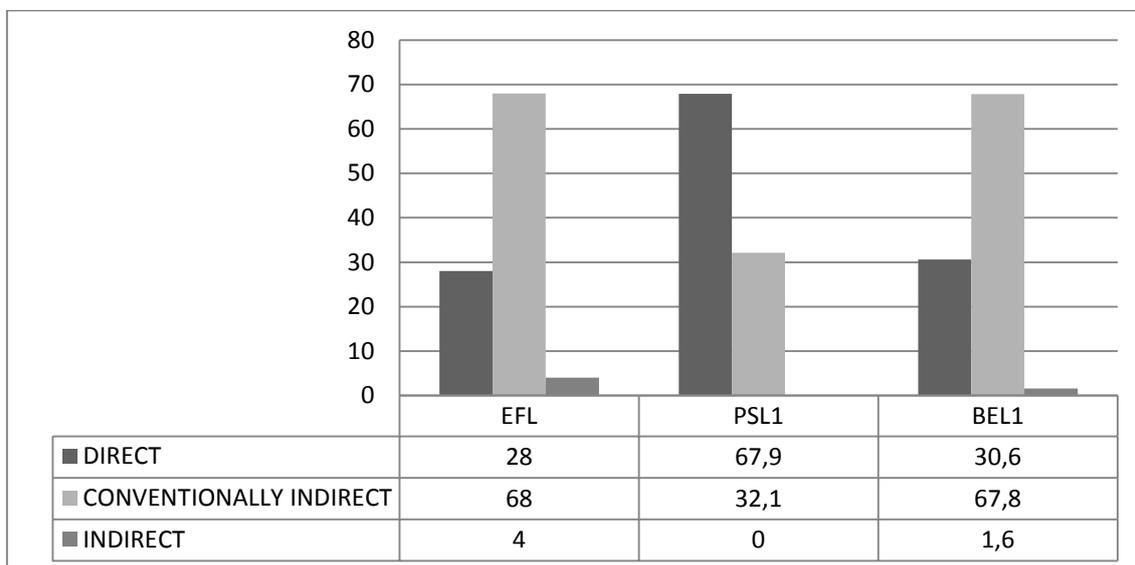


Figure 3. Use of direct, conventionally indirect and indirect request strategies in the EFL, PS and BE data sets (percentages)

The analysis of the degree of indirectness across data sets shows that, unlike in the study of (in)formality, EFL choices of indirectness were very similar to BE patterns. Both EFL and BE students showed a marked preference for conventionally indirect strategies, resorted to direct strategies in less than half the cases and used indirect strategies only scarcely. The pattern of use of conventionally indirect and direct strategies in PS was exactly the opposite: PS students used twice as many direct strategies as conventionally indirect ones, and never resorted to indirect means.

5. Discussion

RQ1- How do EFL email writers orient to the socio-pragmatic principles of (in)formality and (in)directness?

EFL participants in the study showed a clear, overall preference for formality and conventional indirectness when writing their emails. A number of CMC researchers have highlighted the mainly informal nature of the electronic medium, fostered by technological properties such as lack of participants' physical co-presence, asynchronicity and immediacy (Baron, 2000, 2003; Crystal, 2001; Maynor, 1994; Yates, 1996; Yus, 2011). Specifically, the informality of FL learners' emails has been explained in terms of their deficient training in sending/receiving emails to/from higher-status users and students' reliance on past email experience, mainly made

up of informal exchanges with friends, which is used as a template for email correspondence with lecturers (cf. Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). However, emails in the EFL study were mainly formal; therefore, the results confirm findings from another body of research that underlines the use of formality in academic exchanges (Bou-Franch, 2006, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003, in press; Pérez Sabater, 2011; Pérez Sabater et al., 2008). Formality has been argued to be the norm in adolescents' emails as they only resort to this CMC tool to communicate with their lecturers, and prefer to use social media like *Facebook* or mobile texting to communicate with family and friends (Yus, 2011). EFL email writers' orientation to formality could also be attributed to the fact that being informal and playful in a second language requires a higher level of proficiency (cf. Pérez Sabater, 2011). More research is needed to compare EFL email writers' formality at different proficiency levels.

As regards EFL writer's orientation to the (in)directness pragmatic principle, conventional indirectness has been argued to be the most 'strategic' way of formulating a request, since it shows a 'perfect' balance between the need to make a message sufficiently clear and the need to avoid the imposition that requests carry, that is, conventionally indirect strategies are seen as balancing transactional and interpersonal goals, clarity and politeness, in efficient ways (Márquez Reiter et al., 2005).

EFL learners' orientations to formality as well as to conventional indirectness in the request show students' capacity for stylistic adaptation to a situation that requires deference. This finding keeps in line with interlanguage pragmatics research and studies on multicompetence that view learners as having access to pragmatic universals through their multicompetent, conceptual base (Cook, 1992; Kasper, 1992; Kecskes & Papp, 2000). With sufficient knowledge in the new language, learners are aware of contextual factors like familiarity, status, or degree of imposition. The social situation of the EFL emails in this study led learners to orient to great formality and to conventional indirectness in order to balance communicative concerns of face, task efficiency and rights and obligations. Formality and indirectness play an important role in interpersonal communication as they have a respect-building function and are oriented towards deference.

RQ2 – What is the role of pragmatic transfer in the expression of (in)formality and (in)directness in EFL students' emails?

The comparative study of (in)formality and (in)directness in EFL, PS and BE showed, in the first place, that EFL email writers used the most formal style of the three groups and that their expression of (in)formality was closer to PS than to BE in all three email sequences. Given the convergence of the EFL and PS patterns of formality, and their divergence from the BE data, it can be assumed that pragmatic transfer existed in EFL email communication and that it fostered use of formal means of expression. In the second place, regarding email writers' orientation to

(in)directness, the comparative study showed that EFL and BE emails had nearly identical patterns, in terms of a marked preference for conventional indirectness. Convergence of indirectness patterns between EFL and BE, alongside their divergence from PS, attests to the absence of pragmatic transfer in EFL users' orientation to this pragmatic principle. From the data, we can conclude that students combined (in)formality and (in)direction in different ways when writing emails to their lecturers. BE students were the most informal group although they compensated for such informality by using conventional indirectness. In contrast, PS students were very direct in their requests, and found an interactional balance between face and task needs by resorting to formality. In fact, Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch (in press) found so many direct strategies in the PS data that they suggest that in some contexts, the so-called 'perfect balance' between illocutionary transparency and politeness accomplished by conventional indirectness in some languages (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Márquez Reiter et al., 2005), is also achieved through direct strategies in Spanish. For this reason, such strategies were seen as a form of standard or *unmarked* directness. However, EFL learners did not resort to unmarked directness. Instead, they carried out balancing acts through use of conventional indirection alongside a great degree of formality (cf. Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003). It must be noted, however, that other factors may also be at play in EFL email writers' preference for (in)formality and (in)directness. Studies of pragmatic transfer identify other learning and communication processes, like over-generalization, that interact with transfer in language production. Furthermore, a number of factors inhibit and promote transfer in different ways. These include, for instance, level of proficiency in the new language, perceived linguistic and cultural distance, length of stay in the target language community and exposure to the new language⁵. EFL email writers in this study had sufficient language level or multicompetence for stylistic variation, a factor that may have promoted transfer at the level of (in)formality. Besides, use of conventional indirectness may be related to the type of input students receive, and more specifically, to classroom teaching regarding the use of modal verbs to make polite requests. Finally, formality and conventional indirectness are characteristic of communicative situations that require the establishing of relations of deference and respect. EFL email writers may have perceived the academic request as very imposing and, therefore, as creating a situation that demanded deference to a great extent.

6. Conclusion

⁵ See, among others, Barron (2007); Chang (2009); Kellerman & Sharwood-Smith (1986); Maeshiba et al. (1996); Matsumura (2007); Sabaté & Curell (2007); Takahashi & Beebe (1987); Wannaruk (2008).

This paper set out to examine the stylistic concerns of (in)formality and (in)directness in email communication. (In)formality and (in)directness were seen as secondary pragmatic principles subservient to fundamental principles related to face, clarity and rights and obligations (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003).

The increasing centrality of academic email communication, and the important purposes that such interactions serve, suggest the need to appropriately negotiate transactional goals to achieve positive outcomes. Thus, this paper explored, firstly, the orientation of EFL email writers to (in)formality and (in)directness and, secondly, the role of pragmatic transfer therein. The study found EFL emails to be characterized by high levels of formality and a preference for conventional indirectness. It further unveiled EFL email writer's capacity for stylistic adaptation. A comparative study with L1 data revealed that EFL and PS students converged in their orientation towards formality while EFL and BE email writers converged in their choice of conventional indirectness in requesting. Therefore, pragmatic transfer was argued to play a facilitating role in the expression of formality.

This study contributes to the scant literature noted for email interaction in a foreign language (Murray, 2000). Further, it has contributed to advance research on pragmatic transfer in two respects; firstly, it moves research from use of conversational and traditional written data to examination of a computer-mediated corpus and, secondly, in using emails as data, the focus of enquiry goes beyond the limits of the turn and of speech acts theory often found in this field (cf. Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010).

However, this study must be taken with the caveat that it draws from relatively small data samples, and that while the L1 data was spontaneous, EFL emails were the result of a student writing assignment. Future research will benefit from examining larger population groups and from designing specific studies to deal with pragmatic transfer in academic and non-academic settings vis-à-vis factors like proficiency level, type of input or length of stay abroad.

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Abstract

Current research underlines the centrality of email interaction between students and lecturers in the university context (Taylor et al. 2011). This interaction often takes place between speakers of different languages. However, little is known of the pragmatics of foreign language email writing. This paper addresses this issue by focusing on the email writing practices of a group of Spanish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it investigates EFL learners' orientation to (in)formality and (in)directness in their emails. Secondly, it investigates the role of pragmatic transfer therein (Cook 1992; Kasper 1992; Kecskes & Papp 2000). The study draws from a corpus of 140 email messages sent by undergraduate students to their university lecturers. Results revealed the complex ways in which (in)formality and (in)directness combine to meet pragmatic requirements.

Key words: computer-mediated communication, emails, EFL writing, pragmatic transfer, (in)formality, (in)directness.

Resum

La recerca actual subratlla la importància de la interacció de correu electrònic entre estudiants i professors al context universitari. Aquesta interacció sovint té lloc entre parlants de llengües diferents. Tanmateix, poc es sap de la pragmàtica d'escriptura de correu electrònic en llengua estrangera. Aquest treball adreça aquest assumpte i analitza les pràctiques d'escriptura de correu electrònic d'un grup d'estudiants espanyols d'anglès com a llengua estrangera. L'objectiu d'aquest treball és doble. En primer lloc, investiga l'orientació dels aprenents a la (in)formalitat i la (in)direcció en els seus correus. En segon lloc, investiga la funció de transferència pragmàtica. Aquest estudi utilitza un corpus de 140 missatges de correu electrònic enviats per estudiants universitaris als seus professors. Els resultats van posar de relleu la complexitat amb que (in)formalitat i (in)direcció es combinen per a complir aquests requisits pragmàtics.

Paraules claus: comunicació per ordinador, correus electrònics, escriptura en anglès com a llengua estrangera, transferència pragmàtica, (in)formalitat, (in)direcció.