

# ESSENRIAL FEATURES OF PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS EMAILS

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## ABSTRACT

Emails play a significant role in business since all companies and organizations use professional emails as a standard communication channel within and across the organization. Under the assumption that the linguistic characteristics with high frequency can represent the essential features of specific text, this study aims to investigate linguistics characteristics of six types of business email in order to identify the essential features of each type of the email investigated. Six types of professional business emails were focused and 50 emails of each types were collected. A total of 300 business emails in English were analyzed. The online program of text analysis, named WordSift, were applied to identify the linguistic characteristics of business English emails collected. Linguistic characteristics investigated were such as readability, numbers of words, numbers of characters, number of sentences, numbers of paragraphs and numbers of word density. We found that some linguistics characteristics belong to specific types of email whereas some characteristics belong to many types. The implication of writing business emails in English were discussed.

**Keywords:** Business English Emails, Linguistic characteristics, Text analysis

## INTRODUCTION

Since an email is a rich repository of relational communication that allows writers to personalize their messages [1], it becomes an essential communication channel for several kinds of organizations. In business organization, due to its easy accessibility, email has become one of the most important communication channels for companies, especially in business-to-business, business-to-customer, and company-to-employee.

However, emails from different companies tend to have different style of writing since several companies tend to develop their own unique email style, reflecting organizational identity. In fact, there seems to be a variation of styles of emails from different kinds of companies. For example, an insurance company tends to use a semi-formal style, exclude an opening greeting, and include few features of simplified register, comparing to university emails [2].

Moreover, since emails have several purposes, there seems to be a variation of linguistic features in emails with different purposes. In fact, various linguistic features in emails were examined in many previous research such as space, case, punctuation, spelling, grammatical features (e.g. omission of different parts of speech, subject pronoun), and lexical features [3], and abbreviation, use of lowercase in place of uppercase, omission of pronoun, omission of

article, omission of forms of the verb be, omission of essential punctuation, and omission of existential there [4].

Many studies revealed the association of linguistic features with functions or purposes [5,6,7]. For example, longer paragraphs convey a more academic orientation and are frequently used to mark high information density. Since longer sentences tend to have more syntactic complexity, longer sentences are commonly used to mark complex and elaborate structure in written discourse while longer words are likely to convey an academic orientation in a written discourse. Pronouns refer directly to the addressor and addressee and thus are used frequently in highly interactive discourse. The higher values of noun density make it easier for readers to understand. Gerund is a verbal form functioning as noun and it functions in a way similar to nominalizations marking conceptual abstractness. It is expected to show syntactic complexity which is fairly common in written discourse. Lexical density of the text is a measure that counts the number of contentful, lexical items as a percentage of all the words in the text [8]. The higher the lexical density, the more lexical words there are in each clause and therefore the more information is included in the text [9].

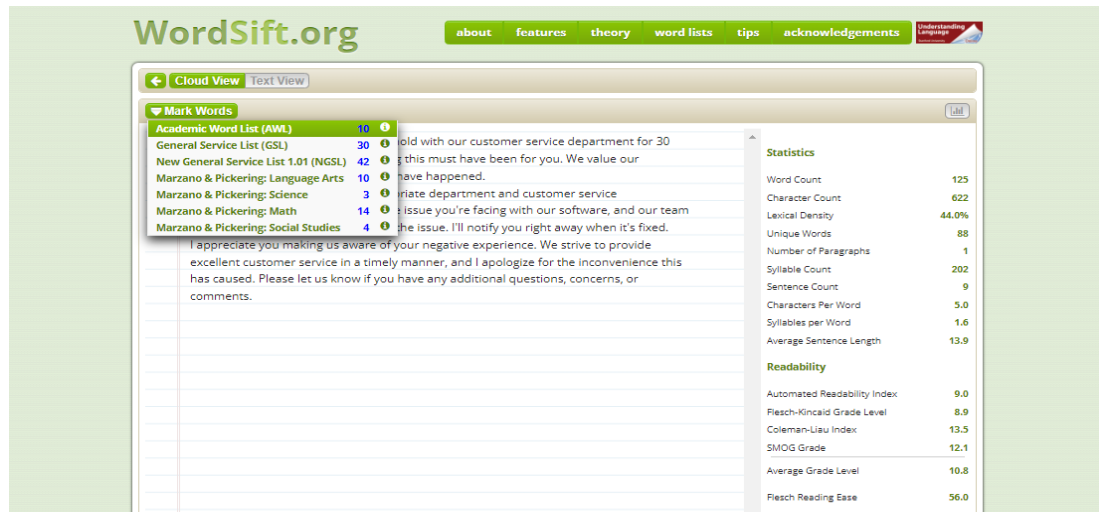
## **OBJECTIVE**

This study aims to investigate the variation of linguistic features in different types of emails with different purposes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The researcher collected six types of Business English emails including complaint email, inquiry email, order email, reply complaint email, reply inquiry email and reply order email. 50 emails for each type were collected, a total of 300 emails were analysed. Linguistic features were analysed automatically by online program called wordsift.org (See Figure 1) in terms of relative frequency, average, and standard deviation. 12 linguistic features investigated include Word Count, Character Count, Syllable Count, Lexical Density, Characters Per Word, Syllables per Word, Academic Word List, General Service List, Flesch Reading Ease, Sentence Count, Average Sentence Length, and Number of Paragraphs.

**Figure 1**  
**Tool for Investigating Features of Business English Emails**



## RESULTS

According to table 1, the results can be summarized as follows.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of word count, character count and syllable count were complaint email and reply order email, respectively. This obviously means that complaint email tends to be longer reply email.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of percentage of lexical density were order email and reply complaint email, respectively. The more different words used, the higher the type/token ratio. A text with a low type-token ratio contains a great deal of lexical repetition, whereas one with a high type-token ratio has a much wider range of vocabulary, suggesting higher lexical density. Reply complaint email tends to have lower type-token ratios or low lexical density. This suggests that reply complaint email tends to have a great deal of lexical repetition to express apology.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of characters per word were reply inquiry email and order email, respectively. Long characters per word are likely to be used to express formality, suggesting that reply inquiry email tends to be formal than order email.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of syllables per word were inquiry email and order email, respectively. Long characters per word are likely to be used to express formality, suggesting that inquiry email tends to be formal than order email.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of Academic Word List (AWL) were complaint email and reply order email, respectively whereas the email types with the highest and lowest average of General Service List (GSL) were complaint email and reply complaint email, respectively. This suggests that complaint email tends to use more academic words which seem to be more difficult and technical to express formality.

**Table 1**  
**Lexical Features of Business English Email**

	Types of Emails		Complaint	Inquiry	Order	Reply Complaint	Reply Inquiry	Reply Order
1	Word Count	$\bar{X}$	177.34	137.56	130.54	161.88	118.78	108.42
		SD	69.78	50.83	42.95	81.35	38.94	32.20
2	Character Count	$\bar{X}$	811.90	648.80	593.66	755.26	556.58	497.44
		SD	322.67	235.72	207.96	400.39	198.91	142.24
3	Syllable Count	$\bar{X}$	254.77	209.26	181.84	243.46	178.94	154.10
		SD	112.18	74.29	67.46	130.29	58.80	45.73
4	Lexical Density	$\bar{X}$	43.21	46.60	49.63	42.44	47.40	46.93
		SD	3.31	5.39	6.05	4.10	4.66	4.71
5	Characters Per Word	$\bar{X}$	4.58	4.75	4.53	4.62	4.78	4.62
		SD	0.21	0.32	0.24	0.26	0.26	0.26
6	Syllables Per Word	$\bar{X}$	1.47	1.54	1.39	1.49	1.51	1.43
		SD	0.07	0.10	0.14	0.09	0.11	0.09
7	Academic Word List	$\bar{X}$	7.30	7.06	4.98	7.06	5.20	4.30
		SD	5.32	3.85	3.48	5.08	4.22	3.34
8	General Service List	$\bar{X}$	44.62	38.92	34.42	43.50	32.16	27.12
		SD	16.51	16.29	12.72	24.09	10.97	9.92

According to Table 2, the results can be summarized as follows.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of Flesch Reading Ease were order email and inquiry email, respectively. Higher Flesch reading ease scores mean texts are easier to read, suggesting that order email is likely to be more straight to the point than inquiry email asking someone to do something.

The email types with the highest and lowest average sentence count were complaint email and reply order email, respectively. This suggests that to complain something, essential information is needed to be given while to reply order can be written in short.

The email types with the highest and lowest average of sentence length were reply complaint email and order email, respectively. This means to reply complaint, a complex sentence is likely to be used to make it more polite whereas a simple sentence is likely to be used in order email.

The email types with the highest and lowest average number of paragraphs were reply inquiry email and reply complaint email, respectively. Since an inquiry email may comprise several point of inquiry, a reply inquiry email need to response to several points while to reply complaint, only a few points are needed to be made.

**Table 2**  
**Discourse Features of Business English Email**

Types of Emails	Flesch Reading Ease		Sentence Count		Average Sentence Length		Number of Paragraphs	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Complaint	66.45	10.80	11.46	3.27	15.29	3.16	2.78	2.20
Inquiry	63.47	8.56	10.18	3.08	13.37	2.39	2.80	2.01
Order	76.98	11.91	10.74	3.54	12.69	3.56	3.40	3.03
Reply Complaint	64.88	8.26	10.50	4.21	15.50	3.39	2.14	1.28
Reply Inquiry	65.71	9.51	9.30	3.22	13.15	3.28	4.64	2.78
Reply Order	71.80	7.88	7.86	2.49	14.21	3.16	3.72	1.91

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The results of the study highlight the differences of the usage of linguistic features among different emails. This study clearly shows that there is a different usage of linguistic features for different purposes. This study investigates two levels of features: lexical and discourse features. On the level of lexical features, eight features were analyzed: word count, character count, syllable count, lexical density, characters per word, syllables per word, academic word list, and general service list. The analyses of these features can help indicate the differences between emails with different purposes. Overall, it seems that emails with complaint purpose have the highest average in almost all of the features investigated. This suggests that most of the features investigated are likely to be used to investigate the formality of emails. However, it seems that these features can well express the differences in other norms such as formality, politeness and spoken-written language. To be able to identify other differences, more other features need to be investigated such as the relative proportion of nouns, verbs as well as adjectives which can all help indicate closer relationship between the spoken norm of language and language of emails [9].

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