

# Teaching Business Emails for a Specific Audience

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to investigate the overall use of the English language in the business world. It was founded to seek an answer, and see how Mascara Mobilis Agency uses English and reaches effective communication. The aim of this work is to tackle the point of error making and to explore its effects on business communication. To investigate and gather information, a case study was conducted, and the data were drawn from a corpus of only 15 e-mail messages for confidentiality. A detailed analysis of the corpus (15 e-mail messages) revealed that Mascara Mobilis Agency e-mails contain errors which vary from grammatical, spelling errors to confusing statements and a lack of punctuation. These errors have a great impact in breaking down the communication. Hence, some recommendations are provided to improve the writing of Business e-mail messages.*

**Keywords:** Business, communication, error analysis, e-mail writing, corpus analysis

## 1. Introduction to Business Writing

In the late 1960's, it was felt that the difference between business English and general English became broader. "Business English" also called the "English of business" is an inseparable part of English for business and Economics. Pickett in (Dudley -Evans and St John,1998) suggests that there are two particular aspects to business communication: Communication with the public, and Communication with (intra) a company or between companies.

## 2. Types of Business writing

In business writings and even in other types of writing, one should plan what will be written since professional people will read business writing and proof-reading is probably even more important than it is in other writings. As business writing is the action of writing to someone related to business, it should be direct, brief, clear and purposeful. According to Galko (2002: p159), there are many types of business writing as shown below.

### 2.1. Business letters

This type of business writing is usually sent to people outside the company. They are also sometimes used within a company for more formal situations to convey crucial information, or to communicate between the different departments within the same company. In order to draft a business letter, one should respect its different parts.

### 2.2. Business Memos

Like any other kind, memos can be used for different communicative situations at work. A memo can be written to people inside the company. It may vary in length from a couple of sentences to many pages long. Memos are initiated by the sender and are informal.

Generally speaking, there is more than one approach to writing memos. A common approach is to drive right in-giving the most important information first. Then, state other details and many people believe it is the most effective approach. Another approach is to lead up the most important information and to grab the reader's attention first.

## 2.3. Business Reports

Generally, reports are used to give the progress of a project, to talk about an employee's performance over the last year, to propose making a change in a procedure or launching a new product. Galko (2002: 179) listed various kinds of reports, such as, meeting reports, status reports, travel reports, expense reports, and accident reports. Each of these has its function and purpose.

## 2.4. Business E-mail Messages

As other forms of writing, one of the main reasons of writing e-mail messages should be to make the reader's task as easy as possible. E-mail writing is a vital form of communication in today's fast, global work environment. It is important to treat e-mails like any other business means of communication. However, according to Galko (2002: p177), one should take into consideration some questions and tips in order to better write a business e-mail message.

## 2.5. Error analysis in Business Writing

An error analysis process cannot be discussed without knowing the meaning of an error. The word "error" has different meanings and usages relative to how it is conceptually applied. Errors are very crucial to be studied since their analysis can reveal why most people are unable to avoid making them while drafting any piece of writing. The identification of errors is necessary, in the sense that it leads to identification in evaluating one's performance. George (1989) gave a general definition to an error as "an unwanted form which is not part of the TL rules/ systems". This fosters the fact that an error does not belong to TL rules and is just a deviation from the language systems.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 1. Objectives

- Examine the overall use of the business English language at Mascara Mobilis Agency.
- Find out how non-effective business email writing affect business communication.

### 2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present investigation attempts to find answers to the following questions

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- 1) What is the impact of non-effective business email writing on business communication?
- 2) What could be done to improve the writing of business e-mail messages?

As tentative answers to the above questions, one suggests the following hypotheses:

- 1) One believes that the impact of non-effective e-mails leads to non-effective communication.
- 2) As a remedial action, one suggests some professional ways of editing business e-mail messages.

### **3. Corpus Analysis of Mascara Mobilis Agency**

To know more about this situation, a case study has been undertaken in order to collect data from this agency. It consisted of three month training and a collection of a corpus of 15 e-mail messages. These messages will be analyzed and treated in order to spot the different types of errors. Then, the researcher will suggest ways to correct those errors.

#### **3.1. Mascara Mobilis Agency and the English Language**

The use of English in Mascara Mobilis Agency reveals several difficulties that may handicap the business communication. These difficulties can be interpreted by the production of errors at Mascara Mobilis Agency. These errors constitute a continuous phenomenon that needs an urgent solution. In the same line of thought, Harmer claims that: "Errors are mistakes which they can't correct themselves and which, therefore, need explanation" (Harmer, 2007: p96).

The analysis of such a situation underpins the fact of providing the different causes of making errors. According to Harmer (2007), there are many reasons why students might make errors: firstly, they have not grasped the new information so they continue to make errors. Secondly, they still make a slip; produce deeply ingrained errors because the way English expresses an idea or uses grammatical construction is either very different or tantalizingly similar to how it is done in their first language. Thirdly, false friends (words that sound the same but have different meanings) can also cause troubles.

The fact that English is written in Mascara Mobilis agency and not spoken emphasizes the continuity of making more errors. Accordingly, Bouchard and Spaventa maintain that:

In written exchange, the physical absence of the receiver and the consequent loss of the paralinguistic (and supra segmental) features inherent in spoken communication require the procedure to do two things: First, to be constantly aware that the receiver is psych-ologically present and ready to speak, and second, since the receiver provides no feedback to build into a message a large number of features to ensure that the receiver recovers most of the message (Bouchard and Spaventa, 1980: p23).

When speaking, one can express emotions, communicate, react to someone or something, influence others, request through either the physical presence or through paralinguistic features in order to communicate effectively.

However, this is not the case when writing since the reader will grasp the meaning only through written words.

It is important to mention that, this case study concerns the staff in a workplace that ought to work and operate together. In this vein, Arnold states that:

The relationship in and between the people in the group, the degree of security felt by individuals the sensitivity of the trainer (...) the quality of listening and acceptance, the possibility for non- judgmental interaction, the way the needs for self- esteem are met(...) it also includes the issue of power (Arnold, 2000: p130).

Arnold wanted to focus on the relationship between staff members in a workplace. It is important to emphasize the need for listening to one another and accept the others' opinions and ways of thoughts. In addition to that, it is important to go deeper into the security felt by individuals, i. e, one individual should feel at ease in order to achieve the issue of power.

#### **3.2. Languages used at Mascara Mobilis Agency**

The staff of Mascara Mobilis Agency deals with clients using either the French or the Arabic language. Communication between the employer and his employees is achieved in both languages. As far as the English language is concerned, it is used by the director only in the written form since he receives e-mail messages from other associates ( Algerian and foreigner i.e.; Turkish ones). The English language is then used to discuss issues or to mention some new things that happen urgently. Besides, the director doesn't use English to address his staff since they are not familiar with this language. In order to go deeper in our case study, several tools have been used.

#### **3.3. The Corpus**

In fact, a great importance is given to the corpus in any research, in the sense that it helps researchers to get a view about not only the quantity of the findings but their importance in learning a language as well. Biber, Cornard and Rappen (1998) show clearly that by stating that the goal of corpus-based approach investigations is not simply to report quantitative findings, but to explore the importance of these findings for learning about the patterns of language use(Biber, Conrad and Rappen(1998) in Belkhenchir (2006:117). Referring to Biber, Conrad and Rappen (1998), this research was undertaken using a corpus-based approach since about 15 e-mail messages have been selected from Mascara Mobilis Agency.

### **4. Identification of Errors**

After reading the 15 e-mail messages in hands, one can notice that these pieces of writing contain misspelled words; words used wrongly, grammar and punctuation errors, vague or confusing and illogical statements. Even though the e-mail messages are brief and seem to the writer polished, professional and perfect, they do really still cause problems and could be misinterpreted.

Writing effective e-mail messages is a challenge faced by many internet users. Therefore, poorly written messages create confusion or fail to achieve their intended purpose. Moreover, people do not respond to the e-mails in the ways the writer wants and looks for. The fact that once something is sent in a written form, and cannot be taken back, strengthens the importance of making less room for errors and even less room for mistakes.

Coming back to Mascara Mobilis Agency, we are going to list some of the errors found in the 15 e-mails messages available, and which may hinder the reader's understanding and cause failure in communication. These errors vary from misspelling, grammatical, confusing statements due to the lack of punctuation. All these together may push readers inside and outside the company to raise unanswered questions and ambiguous meanings.

## 5. Types of Errors

The 15 e-mail messages contain different types of errors. They vary from spelling to grammatical errors. They do include confusing statements as well. Punctuation and the use of abbreviations are two points raised in those pieces of writing. We will shed light on every type with more details and examples.

### 5.1. Grammatical Errors

When we say "grammar", for many people, it recalls the most boring and difficult classes they can remember from childhood. So, using correct and perfect grammar is still one of the most important features for any business writer. Using poor grammar reflects a bad image concerning the writer since he/she seems careless and sometimes unprofessional. The fact of sending out messages with grammatical errors emphasizes the informality and the bad reputation of both the writer and the company as well. People may assume that, whatever our strong point, we will not fit well in business, professional, and social situations where the proper use of the language is taken for granted. Even more seriously, they may be unable even to understand important things we are trying to say because the written language is inadequately serving its most basic purpose, i.e., to convey what is pondering on the mind.

It is important to mention that, a command of English provides a kind of invisible passport into the company of people who, because they respect the language, almost automatically respect others who use it correctly. Like our acceptance and respect of most rules in the conduct of our lives, correct use of language becomes a habit, and it is with the cultivation of this habit that the language will progress and flourish.

Broadly speaking, poor grammar shows an indifference to the topic. In order to underpin what has been said about grammatical errors, we will list some errors that may lead to failure in communication and we will suggest a corrected version.

**Table 1:** Absence of the subject

Errors	A proposed Corrected version
As usual need your help (absence of the subject)	As usual, we need your help
Hope that you are fine	I hope that you are fine

**Table 2:** No concord between the subject and the verb

Errors	A Proposed Corrected version
Two sites poses.....	Two sites pose.....
A person come back from Mostaganem	A person comes back from Mostaganem

**Table 3:** Problems with tenses

Errors	A Proposed corrected version
The change request is not executed yet	The change request has not been executed yet
Yesterday by chance I get a new problem	Yesterday, by chance, I got a new problem

**Table 4:** The Misuse of Modals

Errors	A proposed corrected version
We should be change the type.....	We should change the type.....
The fair building will finished on the 14 <sup>th</sup> of December	The fair building will be finished on the 14 <sup>th</sup> of December
We will prepare reports if a cross detected	We will prepare reports if a cross is detected

### 5.2. Spelling Errors

Spelling errors are due to either the lack of contact with the English language or the absence of checking what was written. The fact of not taking time to edit the e-mail and just skimming through, results in making spelling errors. May be the most important reason which leads to similar errors is that writers don't read every word or go over it two or three times to check if there is a problem. These are some of the spelling errors encountered in Mascara Mobilis e-mails with a corrected version.

Errors	Corrected version
Prédication	prediction
Continous	continuous
To assure.....	To ensure.....
Beaces	beaches
Pérmanent solution	Permanent solution
Costumer	customer
Réflexion	reflexion
Implémentation	implementation
Favorize	favour
Machanical	mechanical

### 5.3. Confusing Statements

An e-mail is not the same as talking to someone face to face or over the phone. When talking face-to-face, we pick up meaning from facial expressions, specific gestures and, of course, tone of voice. However, email messages lose these paralinguistic features of conveying meanings as there is an exchange of messages, this is why, writers need to take care when writing emails. It depends on how we write and to whom. In order to reach effectiveness, an e-mail must be short and to the point. This doesn't mean to write short messages that the receiver doesn't understand. He/she

should be provided with enough information, so that he/she understands both the context and the details of the language.

From another perspective, many people are using writing in communication. Even so, there are times when writing emails is the best way to communicate, and often the only way to get your message across. This is the reason why emails must be carefully written, so that they do not create an atmosphere of misunderstanding and ambiguity through the confusing statements. The statements taken down must appear easy to understand, and clear to be dealt with.

While writing e-mails, one may bear in mind that the reader is going to be really interested in the writer's statements if he/she writes a good start, nice body and an appropriate ending. Therefore, the language used and the way it is laid out is very important while writing.

As far as this work is concerned, the researcher thinks that confusing statements can really affect communication and lead to failure since the reader will not feel at ease and can be bothered by confused words and cannot achieve the writer's goal and intention. More importantly, confusing statements can be the main and the direct reason why failure in communication happens.

#### **5.4. The Use of Abbreviations**

Language is the great gift that distinguishes human being from other creatures. Like most gifts, it can be used thoughtfully and to good advantage, or it can be used carelessly, and quite unsuccessfully. The way in which a person uses the language can tell people a great deal about the personal qualities, the way of thinking, the concern for a useful communication with other people and what also is important is he respect to the English language itself.

The objective of all emails is to communicate. The writer's aim is to make it as easy as possible for the recipient to understand the message. While it may be acceptable to send an e-mail to a friend, or receive and abbreviated email, it won't be the case when addressing a professional person. Even though, it seems like time saving and each of the correspondents understands each other, the communication won't be successful. In fact, abbreviations can be a time saver when they are clear and their meanings are universally understood, however, they can cause problems and misunderstanding. In the case of Mascara Mobilis Agency, they can really break communication since not all the workers have an idea about these abbreviations and get confused while using them.

#### **6. The Effect of those Errors on Communication**

After listing the different types of errors encountered in the e-mail messages, it is important to mention that they do really hamper communication since grammatical errors can cause misunderstanding between the correspondences, such as, when not using a concord between the subject and the verb or missing the "s" of the plural form. The fact of not giving the plural form will surely lead to a problem of counting when one wants a particular brand.

Spelling errors can effect communication and lead to a failure or questions after receiving the e-mail message; the fact of not editing a word correctly can cause problems, for instance, in our corpus, it was mentioned that Mascara Mobilis Agency used the verb to assure instead of to ensure, and that has a great deal in confused and embarrassed situations.

Confusing statements constitutes a disquieting problem at Mascara Mobilis Agency since sending non-sense statements with random punctuation do not fit business situations and thus handicap communication. A statement in business world must be interpreted correctly.

The lack of punctuation is another reason leading to failure in communication. The fact of neglecting the comma or the full stop can awfully reflect a bad image and break business relationship. Referring to our corpus, it was taken down that a long statement was exchanged between two Mobilis Agencies without respecting the punctuation of the English Language.

### **7. Implications and Conclusion**

Writing is one of the four skills in language learning process; it gives many people give attention. In the writing process, the need for grammatical and spelling understanding is necessary to make a composition well understood. At Mascara Mobilis Agency, the need of becoming aware about errors and their impact on communication is becoming urgent. The idea of employing persons who master the English language should be realized. In addition, the use of many authentic materials in the workplace should be encouraged and brought to light.

#### **7.1. The Respect of the Context of Writing**

As in the oral communication, the written one happens in context which must be appropriate to the setting. While writing a business e-mail, the writer (professional one) must respect the situation, consider the audience, the purpose of the e-mail, and the response designed to be reached. According to Frenco (2005:84), a business writer should pay attention at the following elements:

#### **7.2. Audience**

The readers of the piece of writing may be experts, or persons from other cultures. It is important to consider the audience, and its level, i.e.; if it is proficient at the English language.

#### **7.3. Purpose**

Professional persons often use fast, short, and direct e-mail messages since they are no longer writing a paper for schools, or an academic article, but they are simply trying to give information to someone, or get it from someone. It is important to mention that the major reason of writing Business e-mails is to convey information to others.

#### 7.4. Response

The writer should always consider the desired response. He/she should be clear, and goes directly to the point to get the intended purpose and response.

### 8. Using Authentic Materials in the Workplace

Using the case study enables us to look at a particular point as far as Mascara Mobilis agency writing is concerned. The written contacts are very important in the development of any company. The correspondents are always seeking to set relations built on understanding and avoiding ambiguities. In a similar vein, Evan Frenedo said that written contacts are agreements which aim to lessen misunderstanding and provide a formal record for reference (Frenedo, 2005:90).

Since workers represent their companies, they are often asked to write business documents either intra the company, or externally. These writings are either for sales, or to communicate information. In the context of business English, authentic materials play a prominent role, in the sense that they are produced to fit situations, and complete a business task.

As far as e-mail messages are concerned, it is vital necessary to have a typical e-mail message in agencies in general, and in Mascara Mobilis Agency in particular. Ideally, the typical e-mail can be very useful, and serve better the situations. Moreover, it can save time for not thinking about what should be written.

The fact of writing a fast e-mail and send it with errors, focuses the need of holding and adapting a peculiar manner of editing an e-mail message. Sometimes, employees are bothered, confused and do not feel confident to write or reply to an-email, this is why, having one typical e-mail message is the best way to handle such situations.

### 9. Teaching Business English Contexts

It is obvious that when speaking about teaching, one can remember many institutional education environments, such as, schools and universities. However, teaching can also be excused in several companies using the English language in their writings. The reason why such teaching is preferable is to improve business writings, and to know how to deal with business communication.

In order to get close contact with Business English teachers must be hired in order to help workers to operate in effective manners. Therefore, the teachers who spends long times inside the company, will surely depict gaps to be fulfilled. Frenedo(2005: p3) affirmed that teachers who work full-time in a company will get to know the company's needs very well .

In the case of Mascara Mobilis Agency, it is up to that Agency to be in contact with English specialist to get rid of the non-effective business writings, especially e-mail messages. Moreover, the fact of teaching English inside the company will surely increase awareness about the use of grammatical rules.

The fact of using teachers in Mobilis agencies will oblige workers to adapt the situation and be willing to learn. Besides, those teachings must have special, comfortable rooms in order to facilitate the task of learning the language and acquiring the knowledge.

Since teachers are expected to use written materials in the world of business, they are asked to use appropriate, valuable means of teaching those business people. The task of the teacher is not only to show them ways of using terms, but ways of avoiding grammatical, and lexical errors too. This may mean working toward correct and improved version of editing business writings.

In the world of business, a teacher may be called a trainer, a coach or a consultant and this is because his/ her role is prominent and put for granted. Frenedo (2005: 05) said that within the field of business English, many teachers call themselves trainers, coaches, or even consultants ( Frenedo ,2005: p05).

The responsibility of the teacher in a company differs from that of schools or universities. His/ her work involves helping people to get into direct contact with the English language. Moreover, the teaching of adult such language depends on motivation as well. There for the use of audio – visual aids is necessary to attract the workers attention and operate in a correct manner.

### 10. The Use of Audio-visual Aids while Teaching Business English

Learning is a complex process. It can however be defined as a change in disposition; a relatively permanent change in behavior overtime and this is brought about by experience. It can occur as a result of newly acquires skill, knowledge, perception, facts, principles and new information at hand. Hence, it can be reinforced with learning aids of different variety because they stimulate, motivate as well as arrest the worker's attention for a while during the learning process.

Learning aids are materials and devices through which the actions of teaching/ learning are done. It is interesting to note that the teachers undergoing professional courses can teach with some of the audio-visual aid for the sole reason of reducing their talk and chalk method.

Visual aids can be enhanced by teachers during the learning process because pictorial representations and symbols clarify verbal explanations and provide additional items to the memory. They are often used to illustrate, reinforce lectures, stimulate discussions, and encourage worker to learn the English language.

### 11. Glossary of Specific Terms Related to the Profession

Since Mascara Mobilis Agency is concerned with writing business e-mails to communicate information and treat situations, it is up to create and set a glossary of specific terms related to the profession.

The creation of a glossary will surely help workers while editing an e-mail, in the sense that, they will rely on it as far as specific terms are concerned. The use of such glossary can prevent workers to do rooms of errors even rooms of mistakes.

The fact that the writings of Mascara Mobilis Agency are designed to a specific audience underpins the need of being aware about specific terms and their significations. For instance, the term Drive Test is always used as a file to mean something. Therefore, knowing its meaning is becoming a priority.

A term is a word having a specific meaning in a specific field. Having definitions and explanations of terms can be very useful in the development of Mascara Mobilis Agency communication. The demand of a glossary has been drawn mainly from those errors and to whom a conscious awareness of the language use is a hard task.

It can be concluded that professionals have to be aware of ways of writing e-mails. More importantly, it is up to agencies in general and Mascara Mobilis Agency in particular to hire special teachers of ESP to give workers instructions and methods of writing appropriate and useful e-mails. Those teachers have to use modern methods of teaching and enhancing modern audio-visual aids. The fact of using audio-visual aids will surely help both teachers, and learners (professionals) to develop competencies. They will make the teacher's task easier and perfectly achieved. Thus, English lessons will be successfully presented and grasped.

It is by the use of modern methods and new strategies inside companies that workers will get trained to reach efficient communication, so that, tomorrow professionals will be self confident to go beyond challenges.

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