

Emirati University Students' Use of the Request Speech Act in Arabic in Email Communication with Faculty

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Abstract: Students' academic performance is greatly affected by their communication skills, a significant one of which is email writing. Due to technological advances and the distance education imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a great deal of communication between students and professors is in the form of email communication. Students' inattention to the rules of this particular genre may result in face-threatening situations. Prompted by the lack of research on university students' utilization of the request speech act in Arabic emails, this study investigated 96 Emirati first-year students' request behaviors in Arabic in communication with university professors. Data were collected using a discourse-completion task and an evaluation form filled in by two judges. Results showed that the students mostly produced a direct request speech act. However, a significant number of them failed to follow the expected discourse structure often omitting the subject line, not thanking or writing their names at the end. The judges thought the emails were generally respectful. However, they felt they were not appropriate, which was mainly caused by the frequent mistakes with spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. There were also instances of informal language use and grammatical errors. Based on these results, recommendations are provided focusing on awareness-raising and practice activities.

Keywords: Arabic, communication skills, email writing, request, speech act

1. Introduction

One of the communication methods used most commonly between faculty and students is emails due to its practical and educational advantages (Kim et al., 2016). So much so that email communication, to a large extent, appears to have replaced faculty-student face-to-face meetings (Biesenbach & Weasenforth, 2002) with students writing emails to their instructors for a variety of reasons such as to build rapport, to make excuses for absence and late submissions, and request help with assignments (Bloch, 2002).

Since the start of the COVID-19 upheaval, the amount of email communication, in addition to other forms of communication such as phone, digital chat tools, google meets, and blackboard messages, has increased exponentially; students often send emails to their instructors requesting further information (Alawamleh, Al-Twait & Al-Saht, 2020), checking understanding, and reporting technical problems signing in the virtual classroom. However, caution should be taken when composing an email to faculty

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members since “students’ inappropriate email etiquette may adversely affect their learning as well as faculty members’ perception of them” (Kim et al., 2016, p. 1), reducing its potential to enhance feedback and improve relationships between the two parties (Hassani, 2006). Students’ skills in writing effective emails, therefore, should not be taken for granted.

Writing appropriate and effective emails may be particularly challenging for new university entrants, which was the case in previous research in different contexts (e.g., Oakley et al., 2013, Kim et al., 2016). Anecdotal evidence indicates that new university students in the UAE context, where the current study was conducted, tend to have difficulties composing such emails, which has negative impacts on their communication skills with faculty. One possible reason for this is their lack of email writing experience prior to university education. It is also possible that their email communication experience in Arabic affects their communication skills in English. It is, therefore, important to identify how they perform the request speech act in an email addressed to a professor. Added to this is the increasing emphasis placed upon the effective use of UAE citizens’ native language in daily life as well as in the academic sphere.

Considering its frequent use in email communication with faculty, below we first provide a brief explanation of the request speech act in general and in email communication in particular. This is followed by a section on the notion of politeness and the request speech act in Arabic. Next, we explain the rationale for the current study and list the research questions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The request speech act

As an illocutionary speech act, a request is a directive used to have the hearer do something (Searle, 1975) in favor of the requester. Due to its potential for generating a rejection, a request can be a face-threatening act for the requester; similarly, a rejection may threaten the face of the person performing declining the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To save face or reduce the impact of the face-threatening acts, therefore, the requestor may opt for a variety of strategies, which are often impacted by the context and the power relationship between the two parties. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) proposed a category of requests based on directedness. The first one is the most direct, or explicit, requests utilized using imperatives, performatives, and hedged performatives. The second one is conventionally indirect requests, which include procedures realizing the speech act by reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance. The last one is nonconventional indirect requests made using hints.

Other kinds of politeness strategies can be utilized by the requester for save-enhancing purposes. Among these are internal and external modification devices (Sifianou, 1999). Internal modification devices are linguistic elements that are used in the same act. For instance, the adverb ‘possibly’ in “Could you possibly read my paper?” mitigates the force of the request. On the other hand, external modification devices are those used in support of the request speech act, which normally follows the request. Here is an example: “Could you *possibly* open the door for me? *I’m carrying so many bags that I cannot do it.*” A detailed description of internal and external modification devices is given in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Internal modification devices*

Type	Definition	Example
Openers	Elements by means of which the S seeks to involve the H and bids for his/her cooperation	<i>Would you mind</i> having a look at my paper?
Understaters	Diminutives or minimizers that serve in softening the imposition	Would you mind giving me <i>quick</i> feedback?

Downtoners	Modifiers used for the modulation of the impact of the requestive act on the H	Could you spare <i>a little</i> of your time and give me your thoughts?
Please	Used to reduce the imposition inherent in the requestive act	Can you <i>please</i> help me with my paper?
Intensifiers	Used to aggravate the impact of the request	Would you mind <i>terribly</i> if I sent you my paper for feedback?
Hesitators	Type of fillers used when the S is uncertain of the impact of his request	<i>So...maybe...I thought...</i> you could have a look at my paper before I submit it.
Attention-getters	Used to alert the requestee before directing the request	<i>Hey Kim, excuse me; hello</i>

*Adapted from Dendenne (2014, p. 34)

Table 2. External modification devices*

Type	Definition	Example
Preparators	Used to prepare the addressee for the issuing of the request	Can you do me a favor?
Grounders	The requester gives reasons, explanations, or justifications for the request	Your thoughts would help me a lot.
Disarmers	Signal awareness of the potential offense and aims at the removal of objection	I should not say that
Promise of reward	Offering the H something in return for the potential fulfillment of the request	I'll work harder next time.
Imposition minimizers	Used for reducing the imposition placed on the H that is inherently associated with the request	I will not bother you again.
Sweeteners	Compliments, flattery, or exaggerated appreciation of the H's abilities	Sir, you are the best professor.
Apology	The S apologizes for minimizing the cost to H	I am terribly sorry to disturb your busy schedule.
Closing	<i>Appreciators</i> : employed at the end to reinforce the request <i>Considerators</i> : show consideration to the H's situation <i>Thanking expressions</i>	I would appreciate your feedback. I understand you have a busy schedule. Thank you so much.
Small talk	Used at the beginning to create a positive atmosphere	I hope you are having a good day.

*Adapted from Dendenne (2014, p. 34)

2.2. The request speech act in email communication

With the increased place of technology and the Internet in our lives, email communication has gained great momentum. It is quite common for people to send request emails, both formally and informally. Guffey (2010) warns a specific discourse structure is expected in the case of the former: an informative subject line, an opening, a body, and an appropriate closing. Zhu (2012) also observes a similar structure: openings that address the recipient, closings which include thanking and the addressor's name, head acts that include the request, and supporters embedding moves such as small talk, an apology, or a promise to support the communication aim. Although the order of certain moves can shift places, there is a general pattern. Previous research, for example, showed that professors tend to expect a reason before students make a request (Li & Chen, 2016).

Because academic environments are defined by formality (Thatcher et al., 2007), a student's request email to a professor is expected to follow the formal structure. The formality prompted with the higher status of a professor over the lower status of a student may challenge some students (Baugh, 2011) causing difficulty in choosing appropriate politeness strategies. The situation may become more intricate if a student perceives requests as less face-threatening when not engaged in face-to-face communication with a professor, resulting in inadequate use of politeness strategies (Deveci & Hmida, 2017). Unaware of the impact of this on the success of their communication with professors (Najeeb, Maros & Nor, 2012), university students may suffer undesirable consequences. Although professors

often exhibit tolerance towards nonstandard forms in email writing, they still expect students to aim for formality when making a request (Li & Chen, 2016).

2.3. Politeness and the request speech act in Arabic

The roots of the notion of politeness in Arabic lie in the cultural background of Arabs, which is based on religious and social aspects (Abdullah, 2015). The former requires individuals to show humility while the latter requires them to display dignity. Individuals must maintain a balance between the two. Abdullah (2015) observes a variety of situations that require people to be polite in Arabic. These include expressing sociability, gratitude, guilt, request, hospitality, and generosity. He further notes that in the Arabic culture the naming of God serves to amplify the expression of politeness. This is because their religious faith has a central part in their communication with others.

The term 'face' is frequently used in Arabic in referring to the notion of politeness. Boubendir (2012) notes that word 'face' is used metaphorically in relation to notions like respect, shame, honor, and dignity. Boubendir (2012, p. 55) also observes that "Face in the Arab culture functions as a deterrent, making people abide by the institutionalized and sanctioned code of politeness."

In a study investigating the request strategies in Egyptian Arabic, El-Shazly (1993) found that conventional indirectness in the form of interrogatives was quite common. Modifiers in the form of down-grades were frequently used, too. These often included religious expressions. In another study on Saudi speakers' use of the request speech act, it was found that social distance and power had a significant effect on directness (Al-Ammar 2000). Yet in another study, Alqahtani (2015) found that Saudi speakers of Arabic performed the request speech act in direct and conventionally indirect ways. The researcher concluded that the participants' strategy use was influenced by the degree of imposition and social power.

3. The Rationale for the Study and the Research Questions

As mentioned earlier, new university entrants in particular face challenges writing effective emails to their instructors. What is often proposed as a solution to help these students is internet-based guidance materials produced by universities' writing centers, communication centers, and various bloggers. This is done based on the assumption that tailor-made materials with sample emails would attract students' attention and increase their awareness. Albeit the positive motivation behind this, there is yet no evidence from research supporting the effectiveness of this approach. However, research has been conducted on the effects of email writing instruction in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes. Such instruction has shown some success in improving students' pragmatic competence in composing request emails to faculty (Ford, 2005; Flor, 2012; Chen, 2015; Deveci & Hmida, 2017).

Just as it is important to investigate how EFL learners perform the request speech act in emails to faculty, so is their realization of the same act in emails in their native languages (L1s). After all, EFL learners are likely to transfer linguistic tendencies in their native languages to the target language, which might easily cause deviations (Li, 2018). While there is much literature on the request speech act by native speakers of English and EFL students with different L1s, there is a dearth of studies on its realization in Arabic, especially in the context of the UAE, where there is now more emphasis on enhancing locals' effective use of their L1, i.e. Arabic. This is partly prompted by the UAE leaders' observation that "[Arabic] will remain the language of the future, as well as of science and innovation, thanks to its flexibility and its historic role in different cultures" (Salama, 2017, para. 2). Recent

research has also revealed that many Emiratis feel that Arabic should be used as a medium of instruction along with English at universities (Kennetz & Carroll, 2018). There is also the worry that "with the dominance of English [within the region] the role of Arabic as the national language and its place as the language of Arab culture, tradition, and religions is being sidelined and national identity being threatened" (logicaljack, 2013, para. 3); accordingly, the UEA government has issued policies and undertaken initiatives to prevent the marginalization of Arabic. These include compulsory Arabic classes in all educational institutions.

If we can understand how students perform the request speech act in Arabic together with the inadequacies in their email, we may be in a better position to help them improve their communication competence in their L1, which also has effects on their use of foreign languages. Toward this end, this research sought answers to the following questions:

- 1- What is the discourse structure of the request speech act in emails in Arabic produced by Emirati first-year students?
- 2- What are the internal and external modification devices used in these emails?
- 3- a) How respectful are the emails?
b) How appropriate are the emails?
- 4- What are the factors (if any) that reduce the effectiveness of the emails?

4. Method

4.1. Context and Participants

This study was conducted at Khalifa University which offers degrees in a variety of engineering disciplines such as Mechanical Engineering, Aerospace Engineering, and Petroleum Engineering. Although the majority of the students are local Emirati citizens (approximately 90%), there are also expatriate students, many of whom are from neighboring countries like Jordan, Palestine, and Syria. However, considering the possible variations in the use of Arabic by different nationalities as well as the focus of the study on the former group of students, we included data from the local Emirati students only. To this end, 96 first-year Emirati students participated in the study. Of this number, 44% were female students and 56% were male students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21, and their mean age was 19.

Also, two judges, both of whom were Arabic native speakers in academia, participated in the study to evaluate the respectfulness and appropriacy of the request emails composed by the students. One of the judges was a male and the other one was a female.

4.2. Data collection and analyses

Data were collected using a discourse-completion task (DCT) asking the students to write an email to their professor with a request for feedback on an assignment before the final submission was due. We acknowledge the fact a DCT does not allow researchers to collect the most naturally occurring data; however, the nature of the task used in this research is not something unfamiliar to the participants, who often engage in email communication with their instructors for a variety of purposes including a request for feedback on assignments. Therefore, that the students' responses would be expected to be as realistic as possible. Also, Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) note that DCTs provide researchers with the opportunity to collect data that are often difficult to negotiate in real-life situations. DCTs have also been noted to allow researchers to gather "a large amount of data quickly to create an initial

classification of semantic formulas and to ascertain the structure of [a speech act set]" (Cohen, 2006, p. 400).

Data collected were analyzed considering the (in)directedness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) as well as the external and internal modification devices as informed by Dendenne's (2014) classification scheme. The analyses were conducted by the first author and the second author of the current paper. The former has the expertise in language teaching and applied linguistics while the latter is a native speaker of Arabic teaching all the Arabic classes at the university where this research was undertaken.

The judges were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought each of the emails was respectful and appropriate. Toward this end, a short calibration session was held to discuss the judges' understanding of the terms and consensus was reached on the working definitions of the terms:

respectful: adequate consideration of the power distance in an email to a professor, with a higher position than a student, and therefore effective use of politeness markers

appropriate: effective structuring of the email and effective use of the Arabic language to convey the intended message

The respectfulness and appropriacy of the emails were evaluated considering a variety of language features including formality, move order, use of standard Arabic, grammar, lexis, and punctuation. To this end, they used a Likert-type scale (1=completely disagree, 5=completely agree). Cohen's kappa coefficient (κ) was used to measure the inter-reliability of the responses given by the two judges. In interpreting the results, Landis and Koch's (1977) guidelines were used; a κ value of greater than .6 was considered substantial agreement.

5. Results

The first research question aimed to identify the discourse structure in the request speech act set in Arabic emails by Emirati students. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Discourse structure

		N=96			
		#		%	
Subject line		69		72	
Opening remarks		92		96	
Request	Direct	73	96	69	100
	Indirect	23		31	
Closing		57		60	
Thanking at the end		43		45	
Name at the end		55		57	
Student number at the end		17		18	

Table 3 shows that a subject line was present in 72% of the emails indicating a significant number of students (30) left the subject line blank. An opening remark was present in 96% of the emails. All of the students utilized the request speech act. Seventy-three of these (69%) were a direct request and 23 were (31%) an indirect request. A closing was present in 60% of the emails. A thank-you note was used by only 43 of the students (45%). Similarly, only 55 of the students (57%) wrote their names at the end. Only 17 students (18%) wrote their student numbers after their names.

The second research question was related to the internal and external modifiers used by the students. A summary of the results is given in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Internal modifiers

	N=96	
	#	%
Please	13	14
Openers	9	9
Downtoners	3	3
Understaters	0	0
Intensifiers	0	0
Hesitators	0	0
Attention-getters	0	0

Table 4 shows that internal modifiers were used rather sparingly by the students. Please was used in 13 (14%) of the emails. It was mostly used with an imperative to mitigate its force.

أرجو منك مراجعة الملف الموجود في الرابط¹.

[Please review the file at the link.]

لوسمحت انظر الى المستندات و زودني بالملاحظات

[Please look at the documents and provide me with notes.]

There were only two instances of the internal modifier please, embedded in a request, one of which was a hidden one²:

فضلا منك ياسيد ... هل لك بأن تقوم بإرسال تقييمك على الواجب الذي قمت بإرفاقه في هذه الرسالة

[(Please), Mr., could you send your evaluation of the assignment that you attached in this letter?]

هل لك بأن تقوم بإرسال تقييمك على الواجب الذي قمت بإرفاقه في هذه الرسالة

[Could you please send your evaluation on the assignment attached to this letter]

There were three instances of a downtoner:

ممكن ترسلي بعض الملاحظات على تقريري قبل التسليم

[Can you send some notes on my report before handover]

¹ The students' sentences are reported verbatim.

² In Arabic, the word 'please' could be hidden.

أردت سؤالك إن كنت تستطيع توفير القليل من وقتك لتلقي نظره عليه و تصحيح بعض الاخطاء العام.

[I wanted to ask you if you could spare *a little* of your time to look at it and correct *some* general mistakes.]

An opener was detected in nine emails, examples of which are given below.

هل بإمكانك ان تعطيني ردة فعلك عن موضوعي من اجل ان أحسن مستواي

[*Can you* give me your reaction on my topic in order to improve my level]

فهل من الممكن أن ترى عملي و تريني تعليقك عليه ؟

[*Is it possible* to see my work and show me your comment on it?]

هل لك بأن تقوم بإرسال تقييمك على الواجب الذي قمت بإرفاقه في هذه الرسالة

[*Could you* please send your evaluation on the assignment attached to this message]

وكنت اتسائل اذا كان بإمكانك ان تعطيني نصائح لتحسينه.

[*I was wondering if* you could give me advice to improve it.]

Table 5. External modifiers

		N=96	
		#	%
Closing	Thanking expressions	43	45
	Considirators	6	6
	Appreciators	6	6
Grounders		25	26
Small talk		11	11
Preparators		3	3
Sweeteners		2	2
Apology		2	2
Promise of reward		0	0
Hasteners		0	0
Disarmers		0	0
Imposition minimizers		0	0

Comparison of the data in Table 4 and Table 5 shows that the students utilized external modifiers more than internal modifiers. The students had a greater tendency to use external modifiers in the closing. Most commonly, these included thanking expressions (#43), examples of which are as follows:

شكرا

[Thank you]

شكراً جزيلاً.

[Thank you so much.]

شكراً على مساعدتك الدائمة لنا.

[Thank you for your continuous help.]

There were also six instances of a considerator. These included the students' recognition of the professor's busy schedule and therefore lack of time. All the responses included conditional language. See the sample responses below:

إذا كان جدولكم يسمح بذلك.

[If your schedule permits.]

إذا كان يتوفر لك الوقت الكافي.

[If you have enough time.]

Six students made use of appreciators in the closing. Here are examples:

سأكون ممتن لك.

[I will be grateful to you.]

سوف أقدر انطبأك على الموضوع.

[I really appreciate your impression on the topic.]

مع كامل الإحترام والتقدير

[With full respect and appreciation.]

Another external modifier used by 25 students was grounders, which included the reasons for the request. See the sample responses below:

لاني حاب اعرف اذا عندي اي ثغورات او اخطاء ممكن

[Because I would like to know if I have any gaps or mistakes.]

لكي نتلاشى الاخطاء الموجودة في الواجب.

[In order to eliminate the errors in the assignment.]

لكي احصل على علامة جيدة

[In order to get a good mark.]

Eleven students employed small talk in preparation for the request they were to make. In doing so, they often used the religious salutation meaning 'Peace be upon you'. Some also paid a compliment to the instructor or wished a good day. Below are examples:

دكتور محمد ،،

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،

[“Peace, mercy and blessing of God.”]

اشحالك عسك بخير ومرتاح السلام عليكم د. عبدالله

[How are you? I hope you are good and happy. Peace be upon you.]

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله و بركاته, اتمنى لك يوماً سعيداً و مثمراً.

[Peace, mercy and blessing of God. I wish you a happy and fruitful day.]

كيف حالك استاذ..؟

[How are you Professor ...?]

Comparatively infrequent as it was, a preparatory was also used by three students to prepare the professor for the upcoming request. These are given below.

كما تعرف ان يجب علينا تسليم الاقتراح لك غداً ف الساعة ال 1

[As you know, we have to hand in the proposal to you tomorrow at 1 o'clock.]

أنا أكتب هذه الرسالة في حاجة الى مساعدتك مع مشروعي للمادة الكوميونيكيشن.

[I am writing this message I need your help with my article on my communication project.]

لقد أتممت كتابه الواجب المقرر تسليمه يوم الخميس القادم، لكن لا ادري لما انا لست مرتاحه و أشعر ان هنالك شيء ناقص

[I have finished my homework due next Thursday, but I don't know why I'm uncomfortable and feel that something is missing.]

A sweetener was employed by two students:

انت كريم...

[You are generous ...]

لقد انتهيت من عمل المقال و أخذت عدة نصائح من عدة اشخاص... و لكن للأسف من أخذت تعليقاتهم لا يملكون الخبرة و العلم الذي انت تملكه.

[I finished the essay and took much advice from many people ... But unfortunately they do not have the experience and knowledge you have.]

Finally, an apology was performed by two students:

و أسفه على الإزعاج

[I am sorry for disturbing]

اعتذر عن الإزعاج

[I apologize for disturbing]

The fourth research question asked how respectful and appropriate the students' request emails were. To this end, two judges evaluated the emails. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Judgements

Statements	Judge 1				Judge 2				κ
	Min	Max	\bar{x}	SD	Min	Max	\bar{x}	SD	
The email is respectful.	1	5	4	1	1	5	4.1	.9	.6743
The email is appropriate.	1	5	3.2	1.2	1	5	3.3	1	.6822

As is seen in the table, the average ratings for respectfulness were 4 and 4.1, both of which indicate agreement with the given statements. However, the judges were less positive about the emails' appropriacy, with average ratings of 3.2 and 3.3. This indicates that the judges were not generally satisfied with the appropriacy level of the emails. The inter-rater reliability test conducted also revealed that judges' responses corresponded to each other ($\kappa=.6743$ & $.6822$).

The second author of the current study analyzed the students' emails closely to identify the mistakes that reduced the appropriacy level. The results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Mistakes reducing the effectiveness of email

N=96

	#	%
Spelling	80	83
Punctuation	78	81
Vocabulary	44	46
Grammar	43	45
Slang/informal language	26	27
Non-standard Arabic	14	15
Order of moves	2	2

The most frequently occurring spelling mistakes were concerning the use of Hamza. Below we categorize these mistakes.

a) Replacements of humazat alqatae همزة القطع with همزة الوصل humazat alwasl : as in words: أنا، رأيك، أتمنى، أطور، أزيد، instead of أنا، رأيك، أتمنى، أطور، أزيد، اشخاص، أكثر، أيضاً، أعلم، ان، اذا، الى، الأخطاء in respective order.

b) A letter omission: The letters (ذ) and (ت) were dropped out of connected names (الذي) and (التي) many times, as in: "الواجب الذي لازم نكتبه" alwajib ally lazmn nktbh "الواجب الذي طلبته" alwajib ally talabath "انا خلصت من القصة الذي مكافه علي" anaa khalast min alqusah ally mukalifah ealay". The correct word in the first and second sentences (الذي) aldhay, and in the third sentence (التي) althy.

c) Replacement of تاء مربوطة taa' marbuta with هاء haa'

In this type of error, a tied (taa) was replaced by (ha) as in these examples:

ملاحظة instead of ملاحظه , قصة instead of قصه , نظره instead of نظرة , الطريقة instead of الطريقه , كيفية instead of كيفية , and ملاحظة instead of ملاحظه

d) Word replacement, as in ياريت instead of يا ليت which means 'I hope'.

The second most commonly seen mistake was related to punctuation. These included negligence of using a colon (:), a period (.), comma (,), question marks (?), and misplacements of punctuation marks.

Vocabulary mistakes were common, too. The categories of vocabulary mistakes are as follows:

a) Errors of misplacement as in the following examples.

"انتهيت" antahiat, Instead of "انهيت" anhiat, which means 'I finished'.

"نتلاشى" natalashaa which means 'fade away' instead of "نتجنب" natajanab, which means 'avoid'.

"استطلاع" aistitlae which means 'survey' instead of "الاطلاع" aitulae which means 'read' or 'looking at'.

b) Usage of English words instead of Arabic words, as in فيد باك (feedback) instead of إفادتي iifadati, which means 'inform me'.

The students' grammar mistakes are categorized as follows:

a) Mismatch of adjective and the subject of the adjective. See the examples below.

"إلى تجدون طيه" (iilaa tajidun tih)، و "مشروع الأول" (syd almuhtarm) "سيد المحترم"

The correct sentences: السيد المحترم alsyd almuhtaram , المشروع الأول , almashrue al'awal الذي تجدون طية aladhi tajidun tiatan.

b) Mismatch of pronouns with its antecedent as in the following examples:

"أود ان يساعديني وسوف نكون مسرورين" qumt bi'iirsal albaht " قمت بإرسال البحث " "أود ان يساعديني وسوف نكون مسرورين" wasawf nakun masrurin " في كيفية كتابة المقالات لاني واجهه مشكله فيه " 'awad 'an yusaeiduni fi kayfih kitabat almaqalat li'aniy awajhh " "هل يجب علي ان ارجع الى بعض النصوص واضيفهم" hal yjb ely 'ana 'arjie 'iilaa bed alnusus wadyfhh"

c) Errors of Idāfah (إضافة). Errors in this category are categorized as follows:

- Addition of unnecessary ال as in

"قبل التسليم النسخة النهائية"، "قبل التسليم البحث النهائي" "wa" qabl atlaslim alnuskhat alnihayiyata", "اتطلع للرأيك"، "wa" aitatalae lilrayik"

- Neglecting what must be proven, إهمال ما يجب إثباته :

- Neglecting the accusative tool (Inna) إهمال أداة النصب (Inna) as in:

"ممكن ترسلي" mumkn tarsali ، و "قبل اسلمه"، "wa" qabl aslumh ، و "احاول اعدلها" wa" ahawl .aedalha"

atamanaa tuetini. أتمنى تعطيني.

- Neglecting huruf aljiri كما في حروف الجر، إهمال حروف الجر،

"وامنتشوق ان اكون معك"، waihsil darajatan ealiata واحصل درجة عالية"، "wa" wamatashuiq 'an 'akun maeak "إهمال الضمير، كما في: wa"mrifiq aldhy 'ursilath yaetibar" و"مرفق الذي أرسلته يعتبر" "maek"

- Neglecting the pronoun

maah tahiaat. مع تحيات" kama taerif 'an yjb ealayna كما تعرف ان يجب علينا"

The most common slang/informal language mistakes are as follows.

a) Beginning of the message as in:

"تجدون طية مشروع الأول" "tajidun tiat mashri al'awl" ، ما عليك أمر" "ma ealayka 'amr" ، مرحبًا دكتور "mrhban ، أود أن تساعديني"، "awadu 'an tusaeidny" ، دكتور تانجو أريد منك" 'aryido minka 'duktur ، أشحالك" 'ashhalk"

b) friend- to -friend language as in:

"fa'iidha ، فإذا استطعت مساعدتنا فقط أرسل لنا"، "atamanaa 'an taetini mulahazat.." "أتمنى أن تعطيني ملاحظات.." "دكتور "urid mink 'an taetini alamat" أريد منك أن تعطيني علامات"، "astataet musaeadatana faqat 'ursil Ina "idha tuqadar 'an tshwf" إذا تقدر أن تشوف..." "duktur ebdallah ahtaj... "عبدالله أحتاج..."

c) Use of command (استعمال لغة الأمر) as in:

"uriduk an tqrah ، " أريدك أن تقرأه "an takun mulahazatik 'akthar tafsyala" أن تكون ملاحظتك أكثر تفصيلاً" ، "ana 'urid mink 'an taktub mulahazatik" أنا أريد منك أن تكتب ملاحظتك"

d) Use of plural pronouns to self-pronouns (استعمال ضمير الجمع للذات المفردة) as in:

، و "وتزودنا بملاحظاتك" fa'idha astataet musaeadatana faqat 'ursil Ina " فإذا استطعت مساعدتنا فقط أرسل لنا" ، watazawaduna bi mulahazatik "تصحيح آخر نسخة من مقالنا" " tusahih akhar nuskha min mqaalna".

e) Use of colloquial words (استعمال اللغة الدارجية) as in:

عملت (eamilat) instead of سويت (swayt)

من أجل (min ajl) instead of عسب (aasab)

من أجل (min ajl) instead of عشان (eashan)

تقرأ (taqra) instead of تشوف (tashuf)

f) Omission of message addressee (إغفال المرسل إليه) .

g) Other: Mixing standard Arabic with colloquial Arabic. Examples are given below.
"أنك تشوف الملف اللي مطرشنه.." "anaka tashuf almilaf ally matarashnuh" ، "واريد بعض النصائح منك عشان اطور بحثي" ، "waryd baad alnasayih minka ashan atawer bahthy" ، "الذي طرشت لك" ، "aldhy tarashat lak" ، "احتاج ملاحظات على البحث عشان اعدله" ، "alqisat 'iilaya mukalifa eali anna tuni mukhalas kitabat" ، "أنا توني مخلص كتابة المقال" ، "aihtaj mulahazat alaa albahth ashan aedlhu" ، "almaqal."

6. Discussion

The analysis of the data related to the discourse structure of the request speech act in the emails revealed that the students did not adhere to the rules of the expected structure fully. Although a request was present in all the emails, other important elements of a request to a professor (a person of higher status than the addressor) were absent. In those emails, the subject line was left blank, and/or closing was often incomplete. Most of the students did not thank the professor or write their names at the end. The students' use of linguistic features in the form of internal modifiers was rather limited, too. When they were used, they included the word 'please' or a limited number of openers. More of the students relied on external modifiers including thanking expressions, grounders, and small talk. Yet, these were still

limited. All these are of importance since a lack of attention to the email format and phrases within the given genre can easily make the addressor seem less knowledgeable (Lahiri as cited in Dizik, 2017) and result in a lack of politeness (Najeeb et al., 2012).

The judges' evaluation of the emails showed that the students were generally respectful. However, the judges felt that the emails were not appropriate enough. The afore-mentioned discourse structure of the emails likely played a role in this. Added to this is the frequency of mistakes in the emails. The students appeared to suffer a great deal from spelling and punctuation mistakes in particular. Note that the former was found to be a common mistake in Arabic emails by Arab university students to university professors (Ellyan, & Al-Mwajeh, 2020) as well as in other types of first-year student writing in English (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). The students in the current study also had frequent grammar and vocabulary mistakes. It is also important to note the frequency of informal language used by some of the students, indicating they failed to consider the social distance between their professor and themselves. These results indicate that the mistakes in the student emails do not give the impression that the students meant to be impolite at all. Overall, the students' emails were evaluated by the judges to be respectful. Respectfulness, then, ought to be considered irrespective of language mistakes. It appears that the use of particular internal and external modifiers helped establish respect. It is also possible that the naming of God in some emails further helped students come across as respectful. As is noted by Abdullah (2015), religious faith plays a key role in Arabs' communication with others and the Arabic culture encourages the naming of God in social interactions. In this way, the students likely attempted to save not only their face but also that of their professor in a situation that is considered face-threatening. Their motivation for this likely stems from the fact that "Face in the Arab culture functions as a deterrent, making people abide by the institutionalized and sanctioned code of politeness" (Boubendir, 2012, p. 55).

It is also important to note that almost three-fourths of the request speech acts in the emails were a direct one, which is a result similar to that of earlier research on Saudi speakers' use of the request speech act in Arabic (Alqahtani, 2015) as well as other Arab students' requests via email in English (Najeeb et al., 2012). Similarly, Mohamed (2019) also found that Moroccan Arabic speakers generally opted for direct request strategies. Taken together, these may point to Arabic speakers' being hearer-orientated when producing the request speech act.

7. Recommendations

A direct link exists between students' communication skills and their academic performance (Sparks et al., 2014). Therefore, mail training for newly-admitted students is essential so that inefficient email writers are not at a disadvantage from the beginning of their tertiary education (Weiss & Hanson-Baldauf, 2008). Among the various ways in which students can be helped is awareness-raising activities. Toward this end, students can be asked to analyze model emails considering their discourse structures and the kind of modifiers used. They can also compare a poorly drafted email against a model email and asked to revise it accordingly. It is also useful to draw students' attention to the impact of social distance between the addressor and the addressee. To this end, a request email to a friend can be redrafted as an email to a professor, or vice-versa. Students can also be helped to identify how the medium affects the way a request is made; an email vs. a WhatsApp message, for instance. In order to help reduce language-related issues, students can be asked to identify spelling and punctuation mistakes, for example, in an email.

Recommendations can be made for future research, too. Students' email writing in English is likely affected by their native language use. Considering the penetration of the English language use in the region, it is also possible that students' writing of emails in Arabic is affected by English. Comparative research should be conducted to identify (reverse) language transfer issues so that appropriate action can be taken to improve students' writing in both languages. It would also be useful to do a longitudinal study investigating how students' skills in email writing develop over time and how their academic performance is affected by their email writing skills or vice-versa.

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