



Textography: A Multi- Dimensional Applied Genre Analysis of Business Writing in an Educational Institute

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Abstract

Using a multi-dimensional methodology, this study examined language use in an educational institute as a professional practice. It examined the genre of business letters, memorandums, faxes, emails, documents, noticeboard notes and face-to-face and telephone conversations in their institutional context. It strived to find how these genres are constructed and why they are constructed in that way. After examining the institutional practices, on the one hand, and the 'genre system' used in the Institute, on the other, it was found that the institutional practice in the Institute influenced the language used. It was also found that email genre invaded and overlapped with the communicative intentions of all other genres and practices. The email messages invaded the generic integrity of other genres, which was reflected in the framing structure, the purposes of the communication, and language use.

Keywords: Textography; Genre analysis; Language use; Professional practice; Business communication

INTRODUCTION

Examining the text in context is increasingly becoming a trend in genre analysis. It is an approach of not only examining how the texts are written, but also why they are written in the way they are. Throughout the years, researches provided several methodologies to investigate genre. In this study, using Swales's (1998) textography and Biber's (1995) multi-dimensional framework to investigate register variation, the genre of business writing in a private higher educational Institute in Kuala Lumpur is examined.

Textography, according to Paltridge (2008), is a genre analysis method that combines elements of linguistic and ethnographic analysis. It is more than traditional discourse analysis, but lesser than the full blown ethnographic analysis. It is, as such, investigating the genre as a professional practice (Bhatia, 2010a). It is a text-in-context approach, as it provides a thicker description of not only the practices, but also the rationale after using these practices in a given context. Using textography, this study examines business writing in a private higher educational Institute in Kuala Lumpur. It examines the genre of business letters, memorandums, emails (AlAfnan, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c),

faxes, documents, noticeboard notes and face-to-face and telephone conversation genres.

In conducting the textographic analysis, this study examines the influences of the institutional practices of the place discourse community (Swales, 1998) on the nature and the construction of genre. Using ethnographic (Miller, 1994) and linguistic analysis (Biber, 1988), it explores the critical site of engagement and moments of interactions and the mode of genre construction and communication in an educational Institute in Kuala Lumpur. In investigating the critical site of engagements and moments of interaction, the researcher made use of the New Rhetoricians' (Bazerman, 1994; Devitt, 1991; Miller, 1994) ethnographic methods including participant observation, participating in the daily practices, activities and professional life of the community and formal and informal interviews to examine the 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' interactions of the discourse community. 'Front-stage' interactions examine the interactions between the discourse community and the outsiders regarding work-related issues; 'back-stage' interactions, however, examines the interactions between the members of the place discourse community (Bhatia, 2010; Swales, 1998). In examining the mode of genre construction and communication, the "genre system" (Bhatia, 2004, p. 55) used by the main informants and the employees of the educational institute was linguistically analyzed to identify the register (Biber, 1988; Swales, 1998). This intends to provide initial insights into language use as an institutional practice in the Institute and examine how the construction of genre emerges from other professional genres used in the institute (Bhatia, 2004).

THE SCENE, NED

NED, a pseudonym, is a privately owned higher educational Institute located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The Institute runs ten local and international programs in collaboration with a number of Malaysian and international bodies and institutions. The Institute is owned by a prominent public figure in Malaysia, who has served in a number of public and private positions for the last three decades. The Institute was established in 1992 and ran five Malaysian and international programs. In 2005, and because of licensing problems, a change in the management was made. The new management moved the institute to a new campus and added a number of programs, which had a positive impact as it brought in a relatively big number of local and international students. Currently, the Institute has around 3000 students from a number of Middle Eastern, Asian, European and African countries.

The Institute has a president, who is also the CEO (chief executive officer) and the chairman. Given that the chairman holds a number of positions in a number of companies, he does not attend the Institute on daily basis. His senior manager in the college, the executive director, is the actual head of the hierarchy. The executive director is responsible for the daily work and a copy of all letters, memorandums, faxes, and emails should be forwarded to him. The executive director manages the Institute through three main people, who are the assistant academic director and two heads of department that are the department of studies and the department of professional

studies. The professional studies department manages undergraduate degrees and the studies department manages postgraduate degrees. There is a separate department called the students' counselling unit that deals closely and directly with students' related issues, including obtaining visas and registration for international students. The students' counselling unit reports directly to the executive director.

NED employs fifty-eight employees, who are twenty-nine full-time directors (two), managers (three), heads of program (three), lecturers (eleven), administrative staff (eight), a security guard and a cleaner, and twenty-nine part-time lecturers. All full-time (except the cleaner and the security guard) and part-time staff members are tertiary educated middle-class Malaysians and a Jordanian. The employees belong to the three major Malaysian ethnic backgrounds that are Malays, Chinese Malaysians, and Indian Malaysians. Sixty-two percent of full-time staff and lecturers are Malays, twenty-eight percent Indian Malaysians, seven percent Chinese Malaysians, and three percent Jordanian; whereas sixty-seven percent of the part-time lecturers are Indian Malaysians, fourteen percent are Malays and ten percent Chinese Malaysians.

To draw the study sample, the researcher used the snowball sampling technique. Seven main informants were identified through two "information-rich" informants (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographic analysis and years of experience of the main informants

Main Informants	Organizational position	Qualification	Age group	Gender	Years of experience in the institute
VK (Indian)	Academic director	Masters	Thirties	Male	Ten years
BP (Indian)	Head of studies	Bachelor	Forties	Female	Fifteen years
ZA (Malay)	Head of students' counselling unit	Bachelor	Twenties	Female	Eight years
DS (Chinese)	Lecturer	Masters	Fifties	Male	Six years
Mohd (ME)	Lecturer	Master	Thirties	Male	six years
MA (Malay)	Personal assistant	Diploma	Twenties	Female	Three years
IFF (Malay)	Administrative assistance	Diploma	Twenties	Female	Three years

Mr. VK, the academic director, has around ten years of experience at the Institute as a lecturer, head of a program and an assistant academic director. Mr. VK, who is in his thirties, is a master's degree holder in business administration. He represents the owners and the directors in the college; therefore, any correspondence must be 'CC'd' (forwarded) to him. Even though he holds a high position in the college, he maintains a friendly and 'open' relationship with the majority of the employees. Mr. VK is an Indian Malaysian. From the early stages of the research, Mr. VK showed a great enthusiasm.

Ms. BP, the head of studies, is a bachelor degree holder in hospitality management. Ms. BP, who is in her forties, has long experience in managing and administering academic programs in Malaysia. In the workplace, Ms. BP is active in writing emails to all the staff; she calls herself an "email junky". She has the widest contact list as she communicates

with both full-time staff and part-time lecturers. Ms. BP is also the main contact person with the British institute that collaborates with NED. In addition to her organizational position, level of expertise, and education, Ms. BP, who is also an Indian, is active not only in writing workplace emails, but in almost all types of computer-mediated communication. She is a prominent member of a number of political, religious, and social blogs and networks, which exposes her to a number of different electronic genres and styles.

Mr. DS, a full-time information technology (IT) lecturer, is a master's degree holder in information technology. He is also partially in charge of collaborating with external partners regarding IT programs. Mr. DS, who is in his fifties, has long experience in teaching IT at several colleges in Kuala Lumpur. In the workplace, Mr. DS is an obedient type of person, who does not like any conflict with others. He respects his work and always meets deadlines, but at the same time, he is proud of his experience, contacts "with VIP people in KL", and his education. Mr. DS, who is Chinese, has worked at the college for six years.

Ms. ZA, head of students' counselling unit, is a bachelor degree holder in information technology. Ms. ZA, who is in her twenties, has worked in the college for about eight years. As the head of students' counselling unit, Ms. ZA works closely with local and international students. She is responsible for arranging medical check-ups, insurance, and creating a database for all international students. Ms. ZA, who is Malay, is also responsible for arranging the timetable of part-time lecturers, especially those who teach in a number of programs in the institution. As part of her duties, she has direct contact with all departments, the assistant academic director and the top management regarding students-related issues.

Ms. MA, who is Malay, is the personal assistant of the academic director. She is a diploma holder and has been working in the college for three years. As part of her organizational duties, she arranges meetings and is a mediator between the academic director and other staff members. As part of her duties as well, she writes emails to all staff members, lecturers and the British partners.

Ms. IFF, who is also a Malay respondent, works as an administrative staff in the department of academic studies. She is one of the institution's graduates and knows all the administrative and management staff and lecturers well. She is the personal assistant of the head of studies, and her main duties include being a mediator between the students, external contacts and her superior, Ms. BP. Ms. IFF has worked in the college for three years.

The seventh informant is the researcher. I am Jordanian. I have worked in the institute for six years as a full-time lecturer. I am involved in teaching language and communication modules in almost all the programs offered by the institute from certificate to master's levels. As such, I have frequent verbal, written and electronic communication with the three heads of program and administrative staff regarding

academic issues. I also write to (and receive emails from) my students. I enjoy a friendly relationship with almost all full-time employees and part-time lecturers.

The main informants, as such, work in different organizational positions ranging from the assistant academic director to personal assistant. They are three males and four females, their level of education varies from diploma to Masters, their age group varies from twenties to fifties, they have been working in the institute from three to fifteen years, and they belong to the four different ethnic backgrounds in the institution. The seven main informants sent 378 email messages in 45 day-in-day-out email communications.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

According to Biber, et al. (1998), language is distinguished by structure and use. In language as a structure, the focus is on the units and classes of a language such as the morphemes, words, phrases and clausal. Matthiessen and Halliday (1997) referred to this view of language as “language as a set of rules” (p. 2). The second view of language, according to Biber et al. (1998), is language use or “language as a resource” (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997). Language as a resource reviews how communicators “exploit resources of their language” (Biber et al., 1998, p.1). Language, in this sense, is a “resource for making meaning” (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997). As such, given that the “text is the basic unit; the sentence is studied in its discourse context” (p. 2). To investigate language as a resource, Biber (1988) presented a multi-dimensional framework. Biber’s main intention was investigating register variations from a functional perspective. According to Conrad and Biber (2001), register is recognized through “core lexical and grammatical features” that are used in almost all texts. However, what makes a text distinct from another is the type of register features used. According to Conrad and Biber (2001), some registers can only be distinguished by the frequent or infrequent use of certain features.

Biber’s (1988, 1995) framework includes seven basic dimensions, in which every dimension has positive and negative features. The categorization of register depends upon the occurrence of the linguistic features. The first dimension is “involved vs. informational production”. “Involved production” is reflected in the use of first and second person pronouns, hedges, private verbs, simple present tense, ‘wh’ questions, possibility modals and a number of other features, whereas “information production” is reflected in the use of agentless passive voice, place adverbials, nouns, word length and a number of other linguistic features (Biber, 1988, 1995). The second dimension is the “narrative vs. non-narrative discourse”. “Narrative discourse” is reflected in the use of past tense, present perfect tense, public verbs, present participle clauses and a number of other linguistic features, whereas the “non-narrative discourse” is reflected in the use of attributed adjectives and present tense (Biber, 1988, 1995). The third dimension is the “situational-dependent reference vs. elaborated reference”. “Situational-dependent reference” is reflected in the use of place adverbials, time adverbials and adverbs whereas the “elaborated reference” is reflected in the use of nominalization, ‘wh’ relative clauses on object and subject positions, and phrasal co-ordination (Biber, 1988,

1995). The fourth dimension is the “overtly expression of argumentation”. “Overtly argumentative” is reflected in the use of predicative, necessity and possibility modals, infinitives, suasive verbs, and conditional subordination (Biber, 1988, 1995). The fifth dimension is the “abstract vs. non-abstract style”. The “abstract style” is reflected in the use of agentless passive, ‘by’ passive, conjuncts and past participle adverbial and post nominal clauses, whereas there are no positive features for the “non-abstract style” (Biber, 1988, 1995). The sixth dimension is “on-line vs. non-online information”. “On-line informational” is reflected in the use of demonstrative pronouns, demonstratives, that clauses, and ‘wh’ relative clauses, whereas the “edited not on-line informational” is reflected in the use of phrasal coordination (Biber, 1988, 1995). The seventh dimension is the “tentative interpretation academic hedges”, which is reflected in the use of adverbs, seem and appear hedges, attributive adjectives, downtoners, and concessive adverbial subordination (Biber, 1988, 1995).

The dimensions of register variation have both “linguistic and functional content” (Conrad & Biber, 2001, p. 6). The linguistic content refers to identifying the frequently used linguistic features in the register. This may include the use of tenses, modal verbs, private verbs, pronouns, and voice. The functional content, however, refers to interpreting the use of these features “in terms of [the] situational, social, and cognitive functions” (Conrad & Biber, 2001, p. 6) they serve in the text. That is, Conrad and Biber (2001) suggested conducting microscopic and macroscopic analysis on the functions of the linguistic features. The microscopic analysis, according to Biber (1988), is concerned with the communicative functions of the frequently occurred lexicogrammatical features, whereas the macroscopic analysis examines the dimensions in which these features belong.

On the microscopic level, Biber signified that the use of the first and second person pronouns indicates personal involvement and expressing personal feelings, the use of third person pronouns, however, indicates reference to other participants in the context. The use of the present tense indicates immediate occurrence of the event, whereas the use of the past and perfect tenses indicate referring to past events. The use of passive voice “promotes an inanimate referent or demotes the animate referent” (Biber, 1995, p.164). The use of ‘wh’ questions indicates that a specific addressee is involved. The use of private verbs and present tenses reflects active and verbal style of language. The use of modal verbs could be distinguished from deontic and epistemic. Deontic modals refer to obligation, whereas epistemic modality refers to logical status or knowledge (Biber, 1988, 1995; Crystal, 2003). The use of hedges reflects probability or uncertainty (p. 241). After identifying the functional use of the features, Biber (1988, 1995) grouped these features into the seven basic dimensions to identify the register of the corpus.

This current study is concerned with this view of language that does not merely count what linguistic features are used in the emails, but also why these features are used in their institutional context.

CRITICAL SITE OF ENGAGEMENT AND MOMENTS OF INTERACTION

The working day at NED starts at 9 AM Monday-Friday and at 9:30 on Saturdays and Sundays. The security guard opens the doors and sits behind his small desk, greeting the arriving employees. The first employee to arrive usually is Mr. DS, the full-time IT lecturer. He makes his coffee, switches on his computer and starts reading *'The Sun'*, a free newspaper that he collects from the security guard. I do not pick a paper in my way to my office as I know that Mr. DS, who shares the office with me, would pick one for me as well. If I do not find a newspaper on my office, I would know that Mr. DS is on leave. He always arrives before me to work.

By thirty minutes after nine all full-time lecturers and staff members would have been arrived to the Institute. They will be setting behind their desks reading the morning newspapers or having morning *'chitchat'*. Around this time of the day, the students start coming to attend their classes or to discuss, enquire or deliver documents to the administrative staff. The classes in NED are arranged in two sessions that are the morning and the afternoon sessions. The morning session classes are conducted from 10-1 pm, the afternoon session classes are conducted from 2-5 pm. This is the practice throughout the five working days. The Institute also runs classes on the weekends. The weekend classes are the Bachelor and Master's degree classes as the majority of the students in these degrees are working individuals.

If I have a class that morning, I would walk into Ms. ZA's office to collect the students' attendance booklet. The attendance booklets are placed in Ms. ZA's office as part of her responsibilities is keying in the attendance of the students to the electronic system used by the Institute. Ms. ZA has a small office that is placed right behind the main door of the Institute. It is always packed with international students who want to collect their attendance report for visa renewal purposes. According to Ms. ZA, face-to-face and telephone conversations are the main methods of communication with international students, especially the diploma and certificate programs students. "We send emails to remind the students that their visas going to expire soon, but so many of them don't reply", Ms. ZA explains. For me, I write emails to my certificate and diploma students to inform them about due dates and deliver the lecture notes and lecture hand-outs. I prefer sending the hand-outs and the lecture notes as an attachment as I feel it is a waste to print 20 or sometimes 30 copies of these hand-outs, especially that all students have access to the Internet. At the beginning of every single intake, I give my email account to the students and ask them to send me emails stating their names and the name of the module they are registered in. I create email loops to send the lecture notes, hand-outs and assignments, or to inform the students in case of class cancelation and replacement classes. Back to Ms. ZA's claim, I wonder if some of them do not respond to Ms. ZA's emails to skip a reminder or gain extra time to pay their fees.

I teach modules in the two departments. If my class was for a diploma or a certificate program, I conduct the class in two hours and a half. After class, I give the attendance booklet back to Ms. ZA, who would still be busy discussing issues with the students. Then, I go to the department of professional studies to submit my lesson plan. The

employees of the professional studies department occupy a large office that is divided into cubicle farms. In fact, office layout in the Institute is arranged on the departmental level. That is, all administrative and management staff members, including the head of department, occupy a relatively big office that is divided into cubicle farms or partitioned rows of spaces, at which every employee has a computer and a telephone extension. Every employee occupies a cubicle.

Mr. MJ heads the department of professional studies. He has three administrative staff who are Ms. MA, who is also the personal assistant of the assistant academic director, Ms. DA, who is responsible for lecturers-related issues and Ms. YA, who is responsible for students-related issues. As Ms. ZA's office, the department of professional studies is always packed with students, and sometimes lecturers, especially from 12:45-1 pm and 4:45-5 pm (after classes). Ms. MA explains that "it is always busy here *lah*, sometimes we go for lunch at 3 pm". Ms. YA also seems busy with the students. I overheard her having discussions regarding academic issues. She patiently responds to the students. If they have requests, she gives them a form to fill or direct them Ms. MJ for further clarifications. Ms. DA, however, seems a little bit more relaxed. The lecturers usually drop their lesson plans on her desk, have a short '*chitchat*' and go back to their offices or leave the Institute. She prefers email communication with the lecturers. I used to receive several emails from her regarding my teaching hours and assignment submission. She told me that this is the standard practice with all lecturers.

As the administrative staff members deal with daily arising issues regarding students and lecturers, Mr. MJ usually handles the more complicated issues. In case the administrative staff could not give a final decision regarding an issue, they usually seek the opinion of Mr. MJ, or ask students to communicate with him directly. He is a very busy person as he needs to handle issues regarding students in the Institute, collaborate with external partners regarding the externally run programs and communicate with the governmental authorities, MOHE and MQA, regarding the offered programs. I also used to receive several emails from him. The emails that he sends are usually regarding academic and administrative issues. He would send me, and other lecturers, emails calling for a meeting, discussing issues regarding the modules that we teach or informing us about the latest developments and changes regarding the programs in relationship to MQA and external partners' requirements.

As I walked out of the department of professional studies, a big red dark-printed word that reads 'URGENT' on the noticeboard struck my attention. It was a note that is directed to the international students whose visas will expire in two months. The note included the list of students and the required action. They were requested to pay their fees in full and submit the bank draft to Ms. YA, the administrative staff in the department, to pursue the applications. The noticeboard also included five more notes that were directed to the students. Three of these notes were signed by the head of the department and were regarding the timetable of the new intake, the dates and the venues of the internal exams and the date and the venue of the global exams. The other two notes were signed by '*the management*' and included a reminder for the students to

pay the fees for the external exam and another note that requested the students to attend their classes on time and reminded them that if they enter the class after 15 minutes, they will be marked late. All these notes were short and direct. All of them were intended to attract the attention of the students using dark-printed capitalized words such as 'URGENT', 'ATTENTION' and 'TO ABE/ NCC STUDENTS'.

The department of studies, however, is located in another part of the building, close to the offices of the CEO, the executive director, the special officer of the chairman, and assistant academic director. This part of the building is relatively quiet during the week as the overwhelming majority of the classes in the department of studies are conducted on weekends; my class is on Friday. However, sometimes a number of students walk around that part of the building waiting their turn to meet the assistant academic director. As the department of professional studies, the department of studies also occupies a relatively big office that is divided into cubicle farms. Ms. BP, the head of the department, has a big office that is located opposite the door. The cubicles of Ms. IFF and Ms. VM, the administrative staff in the department of studies are located in the two sides of the office. If I need to submit a document, I usually submit it to Ms. IFF, who always helps me photocopy my exam papers. Even though this is the responsibility of Ms. VM, who is in her sixties, I feel reluctant to ask her. I enjoy going to this department as I have a close relationship with Ms. BP, Ms. VM and Ms. IFF, who was one of my students before joining the institution.

Unlike the students in the department of professional studies who are fresh high school leavers and young international students, the overwhelming majority of the students in the department of studies are working individuals. They work in government office and banks. They joined the institute as they have a desire to pursue their education. Communication with the students in this department is usually carried out using email. "We use email for all communications in our department", Ms. BP explained. I know this as I receive several emails from Ms. BP and Ms. IFF throughout the week. The email exchanges between us sometimes create chains as we discuss an issue regarding a program or a module. Even though I frequently go to the department, I have observed that Ms. BP prefers email communication to carry the professional and institutional duties. Ms. IFF obviously shares the same approach as I may have a conversation with her, and ten minutes later I receive an email regarding an issue that we may have had discussed verbally.

The noticeboard of the department of studies included seven notes and a newspaper article. The newspaper article was cut from a daily English newspaper that was regarding the market needs for MBA graduates in Malaysia. Given that the department offers an MBA degree, this article seems relevant for the students. The seven notes were all signed by Ms. BP, the head of the department. One of the notes read "Dr. SXXX's clinic!!!" that stated the consultation hours of the nominated part-time lecturer. Two of the notes included the examination timetable and the due dates to submit the assignments of BABA (Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration) program, another two notes included the examination timetable and the due dates to submit the

assignments of MBA program, one note included a message from the management regarding assignment extension, and the last note appeared to be an old note that reminded the students to pay their fees.

The office of Mr. VK, the assistant academic director, is located right beside the department of studies. He usually meets the new students to sign their offer letters. He works closely with Ms. MAA, the registrar regarding approvals. He also conducts several visits to the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) regarding accreditation and approvals. Sometimes, Mr. VK also goes with Mr. HS to the Immigration department to explain the case of a student to grant him/her a visa. As such, Mr. VK does not communicate with the lecturers and staff members on daily basis. He asks Ms. MA, his personal assistant, to contact the lecturers. In fact, email is the best method of communicating with Mr. VK.

Back in my office, if Mr. DS and I do not have a class, we usually work on our lesson preparation. We set our office hours (consultation hours) at a time when the other lecturer has a class to minimize disturbance. However, the students sometimes walk into the office out of the consultation hours to request, discuss or deliver an assignment. We usually welcome the students and respond to their queries. If there is an issue regarding a program in which we are both involved, we discuss the issue. Otherwise, we would be working separately on our studies; Mr. DS is also a DBA student.

In addition to face-to-face and telephone conversations, the main informants and the employees of NED use several planned face-to-face encounters (i.e., meetings, seminars, workshops, training sessions), written (i.e., letters, memorandums, faxes) and computer-mediated (i.e., email) methods of communication to interact with staff members, governmental authorities (i.e., MOHE, MQA), external partners (i.e., ABE, NCC, the university in collaboration with NED) and students. The CEO, the assistant academic director and the heads of department usually write memorandums to inform the lecturers and staff members about general interest issues. These memorandums touch on general interest issues like a change in the rules and regulations, meeting invitation, a visit by MOHE, MQA or external partners. The CEO, the assistant academic director or the heads of department always sign these memorandums. The heads of department and administrative staff may send a fax to a part-time lecturer to deliver an outline or course description. However, the use of memos and faxes is not a common practice in the institution. It is observed that the majority of the correspondences regarding notifications and delivery of documents are carried out using email communication. The assistant academic director and the heads of department also send letters to the governmental authorities, MOHE and MQA. Additionally, the assistant academic director and the heads of department conduct regular meetings with the full-time and part-time lecturers and administrative staff.

The meetings that are organized by the heads of department usually discuss issues related to timetables, granting exemptions, preparing a marking scheme, setting due dates to submit the module outlines, examination papers, assignments and policies regarding class cancellation and replacement classes. These meetings usually take place

before and after the intakes. On the institutional level, the assistant academic director usually conducts meetings with heads of department and/or the lecturers to discuss the latest preparations for the new intakes and the outcome of previous intakes. These meetings also touch on the conformity to the rules and regulations set by the institution, MOHE and MQA, and external partners. The meetings with the assistant academic director also discuss the preparations for annual visits of MOHE, MQA and external partners. These preparations include the filling out of several documents that reflect the work progress throughout the academic year.

In addition to these methods and channels of communication, the informants and the employees of NED use email to communicate to fellow staff members, governmental authorities, external partners, and students. The use of email for internal communication was enforced initially by the CEO back in 2007. Soon after my arrival to the institution, an incident occurred in which two employees were involved in an argument over confusion arising from some critical important information that had been relayed verbally and not acted upon. Shortly after the incident, all full-time employees were instructed, through a written memorandum signed by the chairman, to use the official email account provided by the institute for all internal work-related communications as the sender, the recipient and the institution, through the server, may keep a record. Since then the overwhelming majority of internal work-related communications are either carried out through (or confirmed by) email. My officemate and I follow this practice. We discuss several work-related issues. After reaching an agreement, we send an email to the head of department and a 'CC' to each other. We even sometimes send an email regarding an issue and verbally ask "I sent you an email; did you receive it?" I usually do this because I feel it is a better way than speaking about the issue because the chances of forgetting are high, so I do not want to risk it. I believe my officemate's intention is same. Other employees who share the physical context also share this practice.

It appears that intra-departmental communication in the institute takes place in three directions that are: the emails that were exchanged between the heads of department and administrative staff, the emails that were exchanged between heads of department and lecturers and emails that were exchanged between lecturers and administrative staff. It appears that the emails exchanged between the heads of department and administrative staff mainly intended to requests files or actions, clarify certain tasks and delivering files. The emails that were sent by the administrative staff to the heads of department, however, mainly intend to deliver assignments, exam papers, and exam marks sent by the lecturers, clarifications about carrying out certain tasks, reminders to carry out a certain task or activity or to attend a meeting. Even though some of these tasks could have been easily accomplished using face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, or hand-delivering the files and the documents, especially that the addresser and the addressee physically share the context (the big office room), the employees chose to accomplish these tasks using email.

In this regard, Ms. BP explained “I forget. I don’t want to forget important dates or tasks. That’s why I always write emails to IFF. I also told her to write emails to me”. However, Mr. VK was a bit more precise as he declared “in email you may keep a record of what has been said, also I don’t want to forget things”. This practice, then, could be explained as both the heads of department and the administrative staff used email to keep a record of the correspondence. This, in fact, is also my personal intention when writing emails to fellow colleagues in the institution.

Email exchanges between the heads of department and the lecturers, however, seems to carry the same tasks but with different intentions. It is apparent that these emails mainly intend to deliver files or documents including examination marks, examination papers, assignments, marksheets, marking schemes, discuss academic issues such as the preparation of the exam paper and assignments and request information or actions. The main intention of carrying out these tasks using email is the importance of obtaining a softcopy of all the attached files, on the one hand, and reaching out to all full-time and part-time lecturers, who may not have a fax machine to receive the sent files, on the other. Given that most lecturers are part-times (29 lecturers) who attend to the college to conduct the classes only, the use of email is a convenient and efficient way to discuss issues and request information and actions, according to Ms. BP.

The email exchanges between the lecturers and the administrative staff, however, are mainly regarding timetables, class cancelation, replacement classes, delivering exam paper or assignment, requesting actions such as photo copying lecture hand-outs and lecture notes. These emails are mainly sent by the lecturers to the administrative staff. The small number of emails that were sent by the administrative staff to the lecturers, however, were mainly regarding timetables and requesting files. Even though a full-time lecturer could have walked into the department to provide information about the issue, and part-time lecturers could have called the administrative staff, the use of email in these cases seems to be an intention to keep a record of the communication, on the one hand, and, e-filing, on the other. As the lecturer informs the administrative staff about class cancelation or replacement classes, the department needs to sanction the task officially by sending an email to the students and/or placing note on the notice board to inform the students about this issue. Similarly, as part-time lecturers are paid per class, this email is usually saved or placed in the lecturer’s file for payment purposes.

Inter-departmental email communications, however, are usually sent by the assistant academic director to all lecturers and staff members, or exchanged between a head of department and another. These emails are used mainly to request information or action, deliver a document or inform about a general interest issue. The emails that are sent by the assistant academic director, Mr. VK, are mainly to alert staff members and/or lecturers (full-timers and part-timers) about general interest issues. The emails exchanged between the heads of department were mainly discussions, requests or delivering documents that touch on institutional or academic issues. This practice explains the uncommon use of memorandums and faxes in the institution; it also

explains the relatively high exchange of intra-departmental emails. It appears that the assistant academic director and the head of studies use email to carry out one-to-one and one-to-many communicative intentions. This is the case because they want to save time and effort. Additionally, sending these correspondences through email also creates an electronic record that states the day and the time of carrying out the communicative event.

Similarly, some tasks in the institute need to be carried on the institutional level. One of these is the filling of MQA-01 and MQA-02 documents that need to be submitted to MQA for accreditation purposes. These huge documents include nine separate sections. The first section requests general information about the institution. This includes information about the programs offered, the number of full-time and part-time lecturers in all departments, their highest qualifications, and the number of students in all departments, their nationalities and level of study. The assistant academic director and the special officer usually fill this section to the chairman. The second section requires information about the specific program of interest. Filling this section entails the outlines of all the modules, their objectives, learning outcomes, mapping the objectives against the learning outcomes, credit hours and the name of lecturers. The filling of this section is usually a collaborative work of all the lecturers involved in teaching the program. The third section is regarding the assessment methods, which are usually filled in by the lecturers and the head of the program. The fourth section is regarding students selection and support services; this part is usually filled by the register and support staff (librarians and ICT technicians). The following sections regard the facilities, administrative and governance, and quality improvement, which are filled by administrative and academic employees in all departments. To fill out this huge document, the head of the respective department calls for a meeting on the institutional level that is attended by the top management, lecturers and administrative staff. In the meeting, the head of department usually requests the employees of the different departments to fill in the different parts of the document in relation to their organizational positions and duties. After the meeting, the employees fill in their parts of the document. The filling in and submission of this document creates several inter-departmental emails that discuss several issues related to the document, requests for information or documents, information about due dates and deadlines, and, finally, the delivery of the document to the head of department. As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of using email in carrying out these tasks seems to be the desire to keep a record, the need to have a softcopy that could be edited or proofread, and e-filing as the email discussions are usually saved for future reference.

The informants also send emails to the students. According Ms. IFF, the institute sends emails to the students to officially inform them about issues such as class cancelations, replacement class, timetables, due dates, examination venues, institute closure as part of a holiday and other academic issues. "The lecturers are expected to inform the students about these issues in class", Ms. BP stressed, "but we also need to inform them officially by email". The students sometimes send an enquiry or want to discuss an issue through email. According to Ms. IFF, "they send so many enquires about due dates and

always ask for extensions to submit assignments". In these cases, the student should present official documents to support their requests. "The problem is they sometimes want to have extension without a reason", according to Ms. IFF. This leads to long email discussions. According to Ms. BP, "at the beginning of every semester we give the students the dates of exams and assignments. I know some of them work. That's why we give so early. But still they want extension". The use of email is a common practice with Bachelor and Master Degree students; diploma and certificate students, however, prefer telephone conversations. In this regard, Ms. ZA stated,

We call diploma students and email graduate students, because diploma students don't respond to emails. We also update our notice board all the time. If the issue is internal, we can discuss *lah*, but if the issue is regarding ABE or NCC, we ask the students to write a letter or email. Sometimes we also ask students to write a letter if they want to go to overseas. We put this letter in their files.

This, in fact, explains the relatively high exchange of emails between the students and the department of studies; the exchange of emails between the department of professional studies and students, however, was not a common practice. According to Mr. VK, email is the official channel of communication between the institute and the students, "I know diploma students sometimes don't respond. BABA and MBA students always respond". Once they join the institution, according to Mr. VK, the students are required to provide an official email account to communicate with the institution. It is the responsibility of the students to check their email accounts regularly. The institution, according to the assistant academic director, sends emails to students to notify them about certain deadlines, class and exam timetables, exam results, class cancelation, replacement classes and special events, visits, seminars, or workshops organized by the institution.

Email is also the official channel of communication with external partners. The interactions with the external partners usually handle management issues, registration, certification, and examination matters. These daily communications, these days, are carried out using email. According to Ms. ZA, external partners prefer email communication as it is faster and cheaper. In this regard, the institute needs to officially assign one or more contact persons to carry out communications on behalf of the institution. These external partners, according to Ms. ZA, do not tolerate any communications with other employees or students from the institution. According to Ms. BP, who has worked in the institute since 1996, email is the preferred method of communication with the external partners. Before email, according to Ms. BP, the employees needed to fax or courier documents to the external partners and wait for around two months to receive a reply. These days, communication can simply go through email and the response may come in an instant. Email, according to Ms. BP, saved a lot of effort, time and money and, in regard to communications with the external partners, it took over all other traditional methods of communication such as letters, faxes, and telephone calls. This latter point was also emphasized by Mr. VK the assistant academic director, Ms. MA, his personal assistant, and Mr. DS, who is also in charge of

collaborating with NCC regarding assignments and test issues. Even though the regional office of NCC is located in Kuala Lumpur, they, according to Mr. DS, do not accept phone calls. They usually ask him to write an email, so they may keep a record of the communication and forward it the headquarters in the UK for record keeping purposes.

Email is also used to communicate with MOHE and MQA. Email communication, however, is not the first contact point between the institute and governmental authorities. Firstly, the institute sends a letter regarding an issue such as establishing a new program, changing the structure of an established program, replacing one module with another, changing the rules and regulations, changing the entry requirements or changing the level of the study of an external programs. The MQA, in response, assigns an officer, who replies to the institution. Only at this point the assistant academic director or the head of department establish an email communication with the assigned officer to further discuss, explain or clarify the issue because this process is faster than business letters that takes at least five working days to reach MQA and five days to return. I believe that governmental authorities encourage email communication. This is the case as every letter sent by MOHE and MQA officers usually includes an “offering help if needed” move that provides future contact directions. This move always includes the email account of the officer in charge. As I was involved in preparing documents for three new internally run programs in the institution, I received a number of letters that requested feedback regarding certain issues in the document. There were a few points that I did not fully comprehend so I sent an email to the officer in charge; she promptly responded to my email.

As such, the investigation of the critical site of engagement and moments of interaction reveals four major critical moments of interactions in the educational institution. Firstly, the employees communicate with governmental authorities regarding attaining and maintaining accreditation. This professional task is usually carried out by the assistant academic director and the heads of department using letter, fax, email and document genres. Secondly, the employees communicate with external partners regarding collaboration about the externally run programs. This professional task is usually carried out by the assistant academic director, heads of department and assigned contact persons using the email genre. Thirdly, the employees communicate with students and other staff members to handle student-related issues. The management and administrative staff members and lecturers usually carry out this task using face-to-face, telephone and email genres and notice board notes. Fourthly, the employees communicate internally within the institute to manage internal issues. This process is usually carried out using face-to-face, telephone, business meeting, memo and email genres, and fax genre, at times, to deliver a document to part-time lectures. These four moments of interactions represent the main professional practices of the discourse community (Bhatia, 2008). To achieve these professional practices, the employees used a “genre system” that includes verbal, written and computer mediated genres (Bhatia, 2004, p. 55). To examine the influence of the institutional and professional practices on the nature and the construction of genre in the private higher educational institution, the mode of genre construction and communication in the

“genre system” used by the discourse community and the main informants is linguistically analysed.

MODE OF GENRE CONSTRUCTION AND COMMUNICATION IN NED

The investigation of the critical site of engagement and moments of interaction in NED revealed that the main informants and the employees use a “genre system” that included business-meeting genre (Hanford, 2011), letter genre (Wang Ji-yu, 2007), fax genre (Louhiala-Salminen, 1999), memo genre (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), document genre (Seki, 2005) email genre (Alafnan, 2014a, 2014b), and face-to-face and telephone conversations genres (Biber, 1988, 1995; Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999) to carry out their institutional practices. They also used the noticeboard to notify students about special dates and events. In this section, the mode of genre construction and communication of these genres is examined to identify the interplay in the mode of construction and communication across the genres used in the NED.

Letter Genre in NED

The letter genre in NED is an inter-organizational and intra-organizational communicational method. In inter-organizational communication, letters are mainly used in the communications with governmental authorities regarding attaining and maintaining accreditation. These letters are written by the assistant academic director or the heads of program to notify, clarify or enquire about changes that are related to the entry requirements, the level of the study for an external program, the credit hours of a certain module or changing the name of an external program. The letters are also used to reply to certain enquires from MQA or MOHE.

The following letter is a reply letter sent by the assistant academic director to the MQA regarding the Diploma in TESOL program. The institution, in that period, applied for a number of new internally run Diploma and Certificate Programs. Shortly after that, the institute received a confirmation letter from MQA stating that the institute would receive feedback regarding the programs in two-week time. In two-week time, the institute received another letter that included MQA’s feedback and recommendations. In response to the latter letter and feedback, the institute sent this letter.

Mr. VK, the assistant academic director, wrote the letter. It followed the structural patterns of formal business letters as it included the address (was removed), date, salutation, reference, proper opening sentence, body and conclusion, closing move, signature that included the organizational position of the sender and his contact details, and the list of the enclosures. The content of the letter seems highly structured in three paragraphs. The first or the opening paragraph included the purpose of the letter, which was a reply to MQA’s feedback report. The second paragraph included the details regarding the amendments in the document in line with MQA’s feedback. The third paragraph provided future contact direction.

Ex 1: Date: June 20, 2011

Dear Ms. _____

NED/ Diploma in TESOL (MQA/PA xxx)

We would like to thank you for your feedback letter that we received on the 8th of June, 2011 regarding our Diploma in TESOL program. In this regard, we would like to update you regarding the outcome of our academic committee meeting and the amendments made to the document.

As suggested in MQA's report we have amended the entry requirements to include three credits in SPM including English language. We have also mapped the course learning outcomes (CLO) against the program learning outcomes (PLO). In addition, we have changed the credit weight of the TESOL Practicum module from three to four credit hours. This change has also taken effect on the total student learning time. We have also changed the name of some modules in relation to MQA's suggestions. These changes were applied throughout the new document.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

VK

Academic director, NED

Enclosures:

- (1) Detailed feedback report
- (2) Four copies of MQA document

The letter reflects little involvement between the communicators. This is noticed as the use of pronouns is limited to the corporate 'we' and 'us' (Biber, 1988), which reflect informational oriented writing style (Biber, 1988). In regard to the temporality of action, the writer mainly used the present perfect tense to reflect the "current relevance" (Harder, 1996, p. 383) of the content. As the letter is a reply, it was linked to the feedback letter received from MQA, 'your feedback letter', and MQA's feedback report, 'as suggested in MQA's report'. This referential intertextuality (Devitt, 1991) implies that the taken actions align with the initial letter and report that were sent by the MQA. In regard to politeness, the writer used the indirect approach to express his 'wants'. This was carried out in the form of 'would+ infinitive', which shows indirectness and reflects business communication standards (Bovee et al., 2003). Finally, the signature of the writer included the writer's organizational position and contact details, which creates credibility and trustworthiness on the side of recipient. It also presents the point of future contact, if needed. As such, the register of the letter seems "narrative" and "informational" (Biber, 1988, 1995).

The use of letters in intra-organizational communication, however, intends to make a special request from the CEO of the institution. The institute has forms for all reoccurring rhetorical issues (Devitt, 1991). Informing the heads of department should be carried out formally in writing, by filling the right form. However, if an employee has a special request beyond the authorities of the heads of department, he/she needs to write a letter to the CEO and send copies to the assistant academic director and the specific head of department (see example 2 below).

Ex 2: Date: April 20, 2010

Dear YBhg. Datuk____,

Request for extended leave

I would like to request a thirty-two day leave of absence so that I would be able to visit my family. If possible, I would leave on the 25th of May and return on the 26th of June.

In this regard, I will mark my exam scripts and submit them duly. I will also submit the material for the coming intake to the heads of department. This holiday will not affect my duties in NED as it falls after the termination of this intake and before the commencement of the next intake. In this period, I will be contactable by email and phone.

Looking forward to hearing from you

Yours Sincerely,

Full Name of Sender

CC: Mr. VK (Assistant Academic Director)

Ms. BP (Head of Studies)

Ms. NA (head of professional Studies)

In example (2) below, the writer used a formal salutation and closing markers to show deference and demonstrate politeness (Waldvogel, 2007). As the letter is internally sent, the signature move included the name of the sender without stating the position, the name of the organization or the address as in the externally sent letter. As the letter is regarding a personal request, the writer used the first person singular pronoun several times, which reflects personal involvement (Biber, 1988). In the opening sentence of the letter, the writer used '*would+ infinitive*' which is a polite form to present personal '*wants*' and it is common in business communication (Bovee et al., 2003). Examining the temporality of the discursive event shows that the letter mainly used the simple future tense to refer to an upcoming event. The writer also used the present perfect tense to refer to past event with current relevance. The use of '*looking forward to hearing from you*' is a requesting move (Kankaanranta, 2005) that is meant

to stimulate response. To keep all the parties informed, the writer sent a carbon copy of the letter to the heads of department and the assistant academic director.

The two letters seem formal as they included proper salutation and closing markers and written discourse features. However, the direction of the letter has obviously influenced the type of register used. The two letters included narrative discourse; however, the letter that was sent to the governmental authorities included “informational” production, whereas the letter that was sent to the CEO included “involved” production (Biber, 1988, 1995). The use of these two types of register reflects the nature of the content in these two letters. The writer of the letter in example (2) was involved personally in the request, whereas the writer of example (1) mainly intended to give information. In regard to the signature move, the writer of the externally sent letter used a full signature to create credibility, whereas the writer of the internally sent letter used his full name only as it is identifying enough in the given context.

Memo Genre in NED

The memo genre in NED is an intra-organizational communicational method. The memos in NED are usually written or signed by the CEO, the special officer to the chairman, the assistant academic director or the heads of department. They intend to notify the recipients about a general interest issue that relates to a group of employees. The special officer to the chairman sent the following memo to all staff members in the institute regarding a number of administrative work-related issues as it is listed below:

Ex 3: To: all staff

From: Special Officer to the Chairman

Subject: Standard Operating procedures

Date: 28th of August 2008

CC: Executive Chairman

With reference to the above, it has come to my attention that a number of operational procedures were not been complied to. This has led to friction in our daily operations. Please ensure that such things do not happen in the future.

Please strictly ensure the following:

- 1) Maintain a more cordial and harmonious relationship with students.
- 2) Strictly observe the college working hours and any request for flexi-hours must get prior approval from the respective HOD's .
- 3) Telephone calls strictly for office purpose only.
- 4) Maintain proper record for all correspondence with lecturers, students and staff.
- 5) Keep all conversations with students short and strictly on academic matters.
- 6) Front desk telephone must be always attended to for all incoming calls and keep the volume high at all times.

Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

Mr. AK

Special Officer to the Chairman

Unlike the genre of letters, the memo does not have a salutation move. The writer, instead replaced the salutation move with the 'TO' entry in the formatting of the memo. The memo does not also include a proper closing move; the writer, alternatively, used the passive voice construct '*your cooperation is very much appreciated*' to solicit an action from the recipients. The content of the memo targets six issues that came to the attention of the top management. The writer used a number of imperative mode sentences to reflect the direct and the firm stands of the top management regarding the given issues. The use of '*please*' softened the imposition; however, the firmness could be observed in the short and direct points. The direct and imperative approach could also be observed in the use of '*strictly observe*', '*maintain...*', '*telephone must be attended*', which are goal-achieving patterns (Hoey, 2001). The use of '*must*' is a deontic modality, which reflects obligation on the part of the addressee. The use of the present perfect tense is meant to reflect on the current relevance of the issues. In addition, the writer of the memo created what Johnstone (2002, 2008) called "horizontal intertextuality", by referring to the subject of the memo in the first content move, 'with reference to the above'. This move included an elliptical form as the writer omitted a noun that could possibly be 'subject', 'issue' or 'matter'. The signature states the name and the organizational identity of the memo issuer, to create credibility. The features used in this memo reflect "abstract", "narrative" and "informational" style (Biber, 1988, 1995).

Fax Genre in NED

The fax genre in NED is mainly used as a method to deliver documents or information to governmental authorities, external partners or part-time lecturers. This genre is uncommon these days, according to Ms. BP, as the delivery of documents is usually carried out using emails. However, if a contact needs files or documents to be delivered to him/her using fax, there is one fax machine in the institute that is placed in Mr. AK's office. This is the case in the following fax that was sent to a new part-time lecturer.

Ex 4: From: Ms. NA(Head of Professional Studies)
 To: Ms. Chee
 Fax No.: 03xxxx xxxx
 Date: 28th May 2009
 Subject: English Language Course Schedule and Content
 No. of Pages: 5 pages
 Ms. Chee,
 Greetings from NED
 I, herewith, fax the schedule and the content of the courses that you will teach in our institution. The name of the course reflects the level of English language of the students. Our students need to sit for an entry test once they register. Depending on the outcome of the test, they are placed in one of the given courses.
 Regards
 Ms. MJ
 Head of Professional Studies

The fax, in example (4), was sent by Mr. MJ, the head of professional studies to a new part-time lecturer, who had an enquiry about the modules, their schedule and content. The employee obviously used the same framing structure as memos in constructing this fax. This is reflected in the use of 'From', 'To', 'Subject' and 'Date' entries on the top of the fax. This fax functions as a cover letter as it is followed by four more pages that detail the technical information about the modules. As shown in the heading, the fax included five pages that detail the name, content and schedule of the modules the new part-time lecturer is required to teach. The writer used two opening moves that are the salutation, 'Ms. Chee' and an opening move '*greetings from NED*'. Even though the salutation included a title in front of the name, but it does not fully represent the standard of business letters. The writer also closed the fax using '*Regards*', which is a common closing marker in business faxes and emails (Louhiala-Salminen, 1999; Kankaanranta, 2005; Warwick & Betini, 1995). The signature move included the name and the organizational position of the sender to create credibility on the part of the recipient. The use of the simple present and future tenses reflect current and upcoming events. The writer also makes use of agentless passive voice in a single instance '*they are placed*' to present the information, which adds to the formality of the fax (Jieun Yi, 2009). Overall, the register of the fax seems "involved" and "informational" (Biber, 1988, 1995). The framing structure, however, seems flexible as it did not fully meet the standard of business letters in the institution.

Document Genre in NED

The document genre in NED was used mainly to notify the governmental authorities about the practices and procedures in the institution. As part of attaining and maintaining accreditation, the institute is required to submit official documents to MQA regarding every single program that the institute runs. One of these documents is MQA-01 document. This huge document touches on academic, management and administrative issues including the specifications of the program, detailed information about the institution, and the rules and regulations regarding academic and institutional issues. This document, which can be downloaded from MQA's website, comes in the form of questions that need to be answered. The following is a filled excerpt from this document:

This excerpt of the document touches on the policies and procedures related to the maintaining and the disposal of the academic records. In response to the question, Ms. BP stated the policies in the form of points for a clearer presentation. The language used in these points is formal and direct as every point explains the actions taken in a given period of time. To highlight the obligations on the institution, or its departments, passive voice was used in constructing the points (Biber, 1988). The writer used the 'by' passive strategy, '*which are held by the central registry office*', to reflect on the role of the agent in the policy, and agentless passives, '*program will thereafter be transferred into a store in the centre*', to state the information with little involvement. That is, the focus in these points was mainly on the presented information or the actions that are taken by the institution. The last point, however, was presented in simple present active voice

sentence to reflect on the factual and immediate relevance of the point (Biber, 1988). The use of the present tense here also reflects a “non-narrative” and “informational” writing (Biber, 1988). That is, the writer in this last point used an active voice simple present sentence to assure MQA that even though the records are disposed of on the departmental level, the institute keeps a permanent record that is available in the MIS (Management Information System) system. As such, the register of the document seems “abstract” and “informational” (Biber, 1988, 1995).

Ex 5: 8.4 Academic Records

Information on Benchmarked Standards

8.4.1 State the policies on the secure retention and disposal of student and academic staff records at the departmental level and show its consistency with that of the HEP.

- A hard copy of the academic records is held by the central registry office as long as the student is on the program.
- The records of students who have completed or left the program will thereafter be transferred into a store in the center, for another 3- 5 years.
- Records after this period are disposed off through a security company.
- Information which is keyed into the MIS system is permanent and therefore records of students are always available.

Noticeboard Notes in NED

The two academic departments also use the notice boards to ‘notify the students regarding special events, due dates or general information’. Every department has its own notice boards, where students studying in these departments may find the latest information regarding their programs or general interest issues. The notice board of the professional studies department, for example, included notices regarding the dates of collecting the medical insurance cards, a list of international students whose visas would expire in two-month time, and a note regarding the study break, exam week, mid-semester break and the commencement of the following semester. The note reads as follows:

Ex 6:

ATTENTION TO ALL ABE, TTH AND NCC STUDENTS

Study Break:

26th of May 2010- 30th of May 2010

Exam week:

2nd of June 2010- 6th of June 2010

Mid-year break

9th of June 2010-4th of July 2010

Next semester commences:

7th of July 2010

The detailed timetable of the exams will be released on Monday the 3rd of May 2010.

Ms. ZA

Students' Counselling Unit

The notice is simple, short, and direct. It has a clear heading that states the direct audience of the message. The heading was written in capital blocks, underlined and dark printed in red. The font of the heading was even bigger than the rest of the note. The main intention of these practices is to attract the attention of the students, especially the students of the professional studies department, to the message. The use of the word '*attention*', meant to show urgency and attract the attention of the students. The note included four separate entries. The sub headings of the note were also underlined. The dates mentioned included the day, month and the year to make sure that the students were informed fully about the dates. Towards the end of the note, a passive voice sentence in future tense informs the students about the date of releasing the exams timetable. The use of passive voice here meant to emphasize on the action, which is the release of the timetable, rather than the person or the department that will release the timetable, as it is obvious. The note is signed off by the head of professional studies to reflect credibility of the presented information. The writer of the note left a lot of white space to make the reading of the messages, even from distance, easier.

The notice board of the department of studies also included a number of notes. One of which was a note stating the time and the days of the consultation hours for one of the part-time lecturers. This consultation is different than normal consultations that usually discuss academic issues related to the modules taught by the lecturer such as the content of the module or the assignments. This consultation was set to improve student academic achievement. It is more of a counselling than an academic consultation (see example 7).

Ex. 7

Are you stressed?

Unable to get the marks you think you deserve?

Dr. Sxxx's

ACADEMIC CLINIC

OPEN FOR CONSULTATION

Saturdays: 11:00 am-1.00 PM

(For Academic Purposes Only ☺)

EXCLUSIVELY FOR DEPARTMENT OF STUDIES STUDENTS

CALL US TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT..!!!

@ 03-xxxx xxxx

The writers of this note used two interrogative 'yes/no' questions to attract the attention of the students, on the one hand, and to set the purpose of the 'academic clinic' on the other. The use of the adjective '*stressed*' also was intended to attract the attention of the students to continue reading the message. Capitalization was intended to emphasize important information such as the intended audience of the note and future contact directions. This message was written in a friendly style to draw a smile on the face of the readers, which is reflected in the unique construction of the name '*Dr. Sxxx's academic clinic*' and the purpose of the session '*for academic purposes Only ☺*', which implies that this clinic intends to deal with stress related to the study, not stress related to personal or social purposes. The friendly and informal style is also reflected in the use of multiple exclamatory marks '!!!' to reflect excitement, symbol '@', which means 'at' and smiley '☺' to express lively facial expressions. Overall, the main intention of this note is to inform the students about the counselling session in a friendly manner.

Face-to-Face and Telephone Conversations Genres in NED

The face-to-face and telephone conversations genres in NED are usually used to discuss an issue or request information and action. The employees may establish a face-to-face conversation with other employees with whom they share the office or walk into the offices of other employees to have a discussion regarding an issue. They may also '*intercom*' other full-time employees or call part-time lecturers, students, or external partners or governmental authorities.

These two genres usually include "involved" production as the employees usually use first and second person pronouns to represent the '*self*' and the '*other*', hedges such as '*I guess*' and '*I think*' to reflect on the degree of certainty and 'wh' questions to enquire about issues or actions. These conversations usually comprise "narrative" discourse as the interlocutors discuss issues with immediate relevance and "non-narrative"

discourse as they refer to past remote or past events with current relevance. These two genres are used for inter-organizational and intra-organizational communication. However, as the investigation on the critical moments of interactions revealed, the employees prefer email communication because they may keep a record of the discussion for future reference.

Email Genre in NED

The email genre in the institute is used for inter-organizational and intra-organizational communications. As the main informants stated, the use of email genre overlaps with the use of letter, memo, fax, face-to-face and telephone conversations genres. It also overlaps with the use of the notice board in the institution. The achievement of the professional tasks that were carried previously by the above-mentioned communicative channels is now carried out by email. As the employees need a faster response from governmental authorities and external partners, they use email in the place of business letters. As they usually prefer a softcopy of the files, they prefer sending and receiving documents through email attachments rather than sending faxes. As they need to communicate regarding general interest issues with full-time and part-time employees and students, they prefer sending emails to all the employees and students rather than sending a written memo or placing a notice on the notice board. As they need to keep a record of the discussion or the enquiry, they prefer sending emails to fellow employees, students, and external partners rather than having face-to-face or telephone conversations.

These intentions were reflected in the mode of construction and communication of the email messages. The corpus of emails included email messages that were sent to governmental authorities. Even though the communication between the institute and MOHE and MQA was traditionally carried out using letters, the employees of the educational institution, these days, use email as it is faster and provides the chance to send a softcopy of the documents as in the following email message.

Ex 8: Subject: Diploma in TESOL (NED)

Dear Ms. P.A

We, hereby, attach the softcopy of our Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Program. Kindly note that the softcopy is attached in three separate files. The first file includes the pages from 1 to 22, the second file includes the pages from 23 to 36 whereas the third file includes the pages from 37 to the last page of MQA's document.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind Regards

MD

The email in example (8) seems formal and direct. It intended to deliver officially the softcopy of a document. There is little involvement between the communicators as the

use of pronouns is limited to the corporate, 'we' and 'us'. The formal nature of the email is also noticed in the use of the active voice linguistic construct 'we hereby attach'. The place adverbial 'hereby' is used represent the formal and official nature of the action taken in the email, which also represents informational style (Biber, 1988, 1995). The writer also used the public verb 'attach' to refer to the actions that were physically taken. Obviously, the majority of sentences are written in simple present tense to reflect the immediate relevance (Biber, 1988). Overall, the register of the email seems "informational" (Biber, 1988, 1995). Sending a formal letter could have carried out the communicative intention of this email message. The attached files could be added as enclosures as it is the case in example (1) above or sending a fax as in example (4). However, as the employee intended to save time and deliver a softcopy of the file, he wrote an email instead.

Similarly, the corpus of emails also included instances of clarifying issues and queries that were carried out in chains of out-going and in-coming email messages as in the following email.

Ex 9: Hi ZA,

Is it possible to set the class on Wednesday as agreed? I am ok with Tuesday's schedule. Sorry yea ... becasue I hv arranged for my mother in law to go for her hospital checkups on Thursday becasue we agreed the classes will be on Tuesday & Wednesday.
Sorry again :(
-NG

The email in example (9) is the third email in a five-email message chain discussing the timetable of the part-time lecturer. The occurrence of the first person pronouns reflects involved style in this email message (Biber, 1988). The writer used a number of informal features such as minimizations as in 'fwd-ing' for 'forwarding' and 'hv' for 'have'. The informal and conversational style of the email is also reflected in the use of the dots ellipsis (...), emoticons (:(), and conversational expressions 'sorry yea'. The writer obviously did not edit or proofread the email before sending as it included two spelling mistakes 'because'. It is perceived that the occurrence of these informal and conversational features results from close involvement between the employees. The frequent exchange of email regarding a single issue made the email exchanges seems more of a dialogue than a written correspondence. The part-time lecturer could have used face-to-face or telephone conversations to achieve the communicative intention of this email chain. The use of email, however, reflects a desire to put the discussion on record.

In addition, the corpus of email messages also included emails that were sent to several employees and students simultaneously to communicate a general interest issue. The head of studies sent the email in example (10) below to the employees of the educational institute informing them about participating in an exhibition.

Ex 10: Dear Colleagues

Please be informed that Dato has booked for the Facon Exhibition today which is being held at PWTC on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th from 12 noon to 6pm. The dress code is formal.

We appreciate all help possible

Thanks

full name

The salutation of this email is directed to a number of recipients '*Dear Colleagues*'. The content of the email reflects little involvement and informational production as the writer used the signposting agentless passive construct 'please be informed'. The informational production is also reflected in the use of first person plural pronoun '*we*'. The use of '*we*' intends to give institutional values to the email message. That is, the message is communicated on the corporate level. The pre-closing marker '*we appreciate all help possible*' seems comparable to the closing marker in the memo in example (3). The writer obviously intended to inform the recipients about the event and the dress code of the participating staff members. The communicative intention in this email message could have been communicated using an internal memo. The use of email intended to maintain a record of the correspondence.

The investigation on the mode of construction and communication of the email genre in NED reveals that the genre of email "invaded the generic integrity" of business letters, memos, fax and even face-to-face and telephone conversation genres (Bhatia, 2004). This is the case as the employees of the educational institute "exploit generic conventions to bend genres to create new forms" (Bhatia, 2004, p. 111). This invasion of generic integrity is noticed in the use of the framing moves, on the one hand, and the intention of communication on the other. The framing structure of the emails seems comparable to the framing structure of letters, faxes and memos in the educational institution. Similarly, the use of email chains to clarify or enquire about issues seems comparable to turn taking in verbal communication.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The employees of NED use a "genre system" (Bhatia, 2004, p.55) that includes verbal (i.e., business meeting, face-to-face, telephone discussions and conversations), written (i.e., letters, memorandums, faxes, document), and computer mediated (i.e., email) genres. They also use the noticeboard to notify students about special dates or events. This "genre system" is used for the inter-organizational and intra-organizational intra-departmental and inter-departmental communications to achieve the communicative "tasks" (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992) and "intentions" (Bhatia, 2004) of the discourse community.

Language use as an institutional practice was reflected in the "activation of the disciplinary knowledge" to act effectively in these genres (Bhatia, 2004, p. 55). This

depended on the task of the communication, on the one hand, and the direction of the communication, on the other. The letter genre was used mainly for inter-organizational communications to interact with governmental authorities. It was also used to send special requests to the CEO of the institution. The framing structure of the letters, in general, included the 'date', 'address', 'salutation', 'reference', 'closing', 'signature' and 'enclosures' moves. These moves were formal as the 'salutation' always included a salutation marker and the 'title' of the addressee. Similarly, the closing move was always formal as in '*Yours Sincerely*'. The 'signature' move in the externally sent letters included the full name, organizational position, name of organization, and the contact details of the sender, whereas the 'signature' of the internal letters directed to the CEO merely included the full name of the sender. The content of the letter also varied according to the direction and task. The letters sent to the governmental bodies, MOHE and MQA, mainly included formal features and "abstract" and "informational" styles. The letters sent to the CEO, however, mainly included "involved" style to explain the issue in personal terms.

The fax genre was also used for inter-organizational communications mainly to deliver files and documents. The construction of faxes included a number of framing moves that stated the name of the sender, the name of the recipient, the date, the subject, the number of pages, a salutation, an opening, a closing and a signature moves. The construction of the salutation and closing moves was more flexible than the letters. The content of the faxes was also flexible as it was written in an "involved" style.

The memorandums genre, however, was used as an intra-organizational intra-departmental and inter-departmental communicational channel. The framing structure of memorandums included the 'from', 'to', 'subject', 'date', 'CC', 'closing', and 'signature' moves, which seem comparable to the framing structure of faxes in the institution. The register of the memorandums was mainly "informational" as they targeted a number of recipients at the same time regarding a general interest issue. The employees also used the noticeboard to place notes that are directed to a group of students. These notes mainly included informal and "involved" features to connect with the students regarding the attributed issue.

NED employees also used email genre for external and internal intra-departmental and inter-departmental communications. The use of email genre in the institution is driven by four main intentions that are keeping a record of the communication, delivering a softcopy of the files or documents, saving time in carrying out different tasks and reaching out to a relatively large number of recipients at the same time.

The use of email genre in the institution overlapped with and, in times, overtaken the use of other verbal and written genres and practices. To keep a record of the communication, the main informants preferred email genre to discuss or enquire about an issue with fellow colleagues. Even though these practices could have been carried out using face-to-face and telephone conversations genres (Biber, 1988, 1995), the main informants exchanged intra-departmental emails with employees with whom they share the physical context or the office to maintain a record of the communication. To

obtain a softcopy of the files or documents, the main informants used email genre to deliver the files and documents to internal and external contacts. Obtaining a softcopy of the files is significant as some files need to be circulated to internal contacts, external partners or even governmental bodies. This practice minimized the use of fax in the institution. To save time, the use of email genre overtook the use of letter genre, especially in the communications with governmental bodies. Similarly, the use of email is the preferred channel of communication with external partners, who are basically based in the United Kingdom.

Informing, discussing, requesting, responding to requests and delivering files to the external partners were tasks that were mainly carried out using letters and faxes earlier. In the Institute, all these tasks are carried out using email genre to save time and money. Finally, the use of email genre in the institution overlapped with and, in times, overtook, the use of internal intra-departmental and inter-departmental memorandums and departmental noticeboards to fully inform the intended audience about a general interest issue.

As the use of emails in the institution overlapped with the use of verbal and written communicational genres, their mode of construction and communication invaded the generic integrity of these genres (Bhatia, 2004). This was noticeable in the framing structure of the emails, on the one hand, and the nature of the communication, on the other. In relation to the framing structure, the construction of the emails included the framing moves that are usually used in letter, memo, and fax genres. In relation to the nature of the communication, the tasks that were communicated in a single email message seemed comparable to memo, fax and letter genres. The framing structure of these emails seemed comparable to the written genres and the content seemed formal that did not encourage participation. The tasks that were carried out in chains (threads) of emails, however, seemed comparable to face-to-face, telephone, and business meeting genres. These emails seemed active in relation to involvement and encouraging participation. The exchange of emails in these tasks seemed 'context-dependent' as comprehending the communicative intention of any particular email requires viewing the previously exchanged emails in the chain. Examining any particular email of the chain (embedded email) in isolation would not provide a fuller view about its communicative intention.

To sum up, it is apparent that the employees applied their disciplinary knowledge to construct the genres in the Institute. This included some forms of intertextuality in transferring the past forms into present texts and interdiscursivity in the form constructing a text from diverse texts and genres, which was apparent in the construction of email genre in the educational institute.

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