

Vesna Ž. Bogdanović¹
University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Technical Sciences

Alenka J. Tratnik²
University of Maribor
Faculty of Organisational Sciences

Dragana M. Gak³
University of Novi Sad
Faculty of Technical Sciences

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ON STUDENTS' E-MAIL CORRESPONDENCE – A PILOT STUDY

Abstract: E-mail correspondence between teachers and students is common. Online communication provides students with possibilities to write to teachers directly, using a diverse level of knowledge, level of ignorance and personal beliefs. The aim of this paper is to answer whether culture and cultural dimensions (defined by Hofstede's high and low Power Distance dimension) influence the professional correspondence between teachers and students. The small-scale corpus consists of 100 e-mails, 50 written by Slovene students in English or Slovene, and 50 by Serbian students in Serbian or English. The research investigates the choice of e-mail template, the choice of language (native tongue or language of instructions), and the norms related to politeness and power distance, with the focus on salutations, formality, polite expressions, and directness. Usage of lexical modifiers, such as downtoners, upstaters and hedges will also be investigated. The results will demonstrate that e-mails by Slovene students follow new cultural standards and have become more indirect and informal, while Serbian students write

¹ vesna241@uns.ac.rs

² alenka.tratnik@iatefl.si

³ dgak@uns.ac.rs

e-mails with formal salutations and direct requests following the inherited hierarchy and still unmodified cultural dimensions.

Key words: *business English correspondence, cultural dimensions, e-mail openings, student e-mails, power distance.*

1. Introduction

E-mails are an accepted means of communication between students and university professors (Alcón 2013; Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011). This online communication provides students with possibilities to write to teachers directly, for several various purposes. These range from reasonable requests, such as postponing deadlines due to illnesses, asking for advice, building relationship, challenging grades, or asking for additional tutorials (Martin, Myers & Mottet 1999), to a number of unreasonable requests, such as reading a students' paper draft or asking to take an exam without applying for it, then providing notes for missed classes, or providing students with further available information (e.g. Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1996). When drafting e-mails, apart from writing a concrete request, students also have to make sociopragmatic choices concerning forms of address, and the level of formality and politeness. Most teachers do not mind answering e-mails in time. When they complain, the complaints (Baron 1984; Cameron 2003) are related to an inappropriate use of e-mails, such as inappropriate salutations, abbreviations, spelling and grammar errors, impolite tone, and above others, inappropriate requests. Reasons for such e-mails are multifold; however, it might also be the case that students are simply uncertain about e-mail etiquette. Since e-mails are usually not explicitly taught, students do not have experience in writing them, and the only feedback are e-mails from fellow students, containing similar mistakes (Chen 2006; Crystal 2001). This study contributes to this line of research, following the research on a pedagogical perspective (e.g. Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Chen 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis 2015) on identifying the learners' weaknesses (based on their cultural background) that have to be taught before writing e-mails.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 E-mails

E-mails are considered to be a “hybrid” form, a digital form of communication containing elements of both written and oral communication used to achieve pragmatic meaning (Bou-Franch 2011). Research on e-mails has taken several directions. Studies about e-mails have examined authentic e-mails between speakers of different social ranks writing in different situations (Alcón 2013; Biesenbach-Lucas 2007) and specific tasks provided to learners to write e-mails (Ford 2006). Many studies are concerned with a certain sociopragmatic choice, such as opening and closing statements (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011), level of formality, level of politeness (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2016; Kim & Lee 2017), as well as speech act performance (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006). Researchers were also interested in age difference in e-mail writing, observing that age is a factor affecting the writers, linguistic choices, and productions (Alcón 2013; Barón & Ortega 2018).

A prolific number of researchers in e-mail writing have been concerned with openings and closings of e-mails written in an academic context. A study has revealed that openings and closings are not usually avoided in e-mails (Gains 1999), and that direct and formal options are more common than the informal ones (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Félix-Brasdefer 2012), where the formal style is used throughout the entire e-mail (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006; Chen 2006). These studies have also proven that requests in e-mails are more direct when the level of imposition is considered to be low by participants (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Félix-Brasdefer 2012).

Literature suggests that selecting the form of address and complimentary form are important since the correspondents utilise these elements to perceive their relationships (Bjørge 2007). Selecting the adequate level of formality may be influenced by how well one knows the recipient, whether they established a relationship, whether the recipient dislikes e-mails without greetings and sign-off or finds them unnecessary, and finally, by personal style and preferences of the sender and the receiver (Bjørge 2007). The student-professor relationship is no exception.

2.2 Cultural dimensions

Emailing is influenced by culture and cultural dimensions. Culture may be defined in a number of ways; one of the definitions is the following:

“Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the “meaning” of other people’s behaviour. (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 3).”

E-mails are written by students belonging to a certain group, having certain beliefs, and acting in a certain manner to other people who interpret not only the words in front of them, but also the behaviour and “meaning” behind the words in relation to their own beliefs and behaviour.

The analysis of cultural aspects in the e-mails in this study will be established on Hofstede’s research (1980, 2001). Hofstede (2001: 9) defines culture as a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category from another. The “mind” stands for head, heart, and hands, that is, for thinking, feeling, and acting, with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills.

Hofstede classifies culture into cultural dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and long versus short-term orientation), and this study will rely on Power Distance. Power Distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede 2001: 98). In high Power Distance societies, hierarchy is related to inequality, power holders are entitled to privileges, subordinates accept and acknowledge their inferior position, and older people are respected and feared. These differences are visible and marked in behaviour. Power Distance rankings are based on averages; the maximum score for a country can be 104, and low Power Distance cultures have their index score 40 or below.

In an educational system, according to Hofstede’s research (2001: 100-102, 107) a high Power Distance educational situation comprises teacher– student inequality: teachers are treated with respect, the educational process is teacher-centred, teachers do not expect to be contradicted or criticised, teaching is fact-oriented, and students are not encouraged to speak up in classes. This is in contrast with low Power Distance educational situations, which are based on teacher– student equality: teaching is student-centred, critical discussion is expected, and teachers have to be prepared to be challenged in class.

Hofstede’s research on Power Distance has been utilised for a number of researches, in the business world as much as in education. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2000) included Power Distance in research on politeness, and compared Britain and China as high and low Power Distance societies (Spencer-Oatey 1997), while Børge

(2007) discussed Power Distance in e-mail communication using e-mails written by 110 students of 34 nationalities. All four Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been updated over time, presenting the changes in cultures and nationalities (Podrug et al. 2006; Rajh et al. 2016). Furthermore, even Hofstede revisited and updated the model, supplementing it with two additional dimensions (Hofstede 2011).

The Power Distance index from 1991, for Yugoslavia, and projected for Serbia and Slovenia, was 73 for Slovenia and 86 for Serbia (Hofstede 2001: 45-46, 501). It clearly states that both Serbia and Slovenia used to be high Power Distance societies, where hierarchy and inequality were accepted and addressed as such. The hierarchy was also present in educational institutions. Podrug et al. (2006) used the revised Hofstede's questionnaire to observe the timely differences in the cultural dimensions. Their results depict the Power Distance index to be 34.08 for Croatia, 31.95 for Slovenia, and 38.66 for Bosnia and Herzegovina. As for Serbia, Nedeljković (2011) calculated the Power Distance index to be approximately 56, which is still lower than two decades before, while Podrug et al. (2014) calculated it to be 51.91. The authors clearly demonstrated that all these countries moved from high to low(er) power distance societies, with more people refusing to accept social inequalities and demonstrating a growing demand for individual social independence. This shift undoubtedly affected every aspect of human lives, including educational institutions, and consequently, emailing etiquette.

Considering the modifications in society, technology and education, the following research questions have guided this study:

Question 1: How do cultural aspects, i.e. the alterations in the Power Distance dimension, influence the professional correspondence between teachers and students?

Question 2: Do students still write formal e-mails, or has their selection of e-mail templates, and their vocabulary related to formality, politeness, and directness, made a transition to an informal style?

3. Methodology

The e-mail corpus was collected for the project "Statistical Analysis of Business Correspondence from the Aspect of Students' Country of Origin". It is related to a pilot research prior to the main two-year long corpus collection. E-mails were written by students of engineering and management from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia and the University of Maribor, Slovenia, enrolled in undergraduate

and graduate academic studies. In this pilot study, e-mails were written to three professors teaching courses in General English, Business English, and English for Specific Purposes. There were no separate instructions related to the language or templates for writing, except for some exercises in formal and informal writing styles. The language of instructions was English in all courses, with the mother tongue used only as a last resort.

After collecting the corpus, two professors coded all instances of culture-determined language, while the third one went through the corpus as a controller. All differences in coding were solved and agreed upon together.

3.1 Corpus and language

The corpus consists of 100 e-mails. Since the project is ongoing, the study will use this pilot corpus gathered to determine which modifications can be observed, and what the possible project research directions might be. As previously mentioned, 50 e-mails were written by Slovene students in English or Slovene, and 50 by Serbian students in Serbian or English.

Table 1. Language used in e-mails

Slovene students				Serbian students			
E-mails in English		E-mails in Slovene		E-mails in English		E-mails in Serbian	
32	64%	18	36%	7	14%	43	86%

As can be observed from Table 1, more students wrote in English than in Slovene to their English teacher; however, only a few students decided to write in English at the University of Novi Sad. Since the language of instructions was English, students in Slovenia used the opportunity to practice the language more and wrote in English as well. The other option was that they assumed that the language in a classroom should also be the language in e-mails. On the other hand, only 14% of e-mails were written in English by students in Serbia. Even though the language of instructions was English, they probably did not feel comfortable enough to write in English as well.

One can only suspect the reasons for (not) selecting English, and they definitely have to be investigated more. Perhaps, it has something to do with Slovenia being in the EU and students having more opportunities to converse in English outside

the classroom. It may be that students in Serbia have not had many opportunities to practice their English and thus feel more confident with their mother tongue. In their classrooms, Serbian students often state that they did not visit any English-speaking country, do not have a native English friend, nor did they have opportunities to talk or write in English. It is a potential problem that has to be investigated more thoroughly.

4. Discussion

4.1 Formal vs. informal e-mail templates

The dichotomy of formal vs. informal refers to the appropriateness of language forms with respect to the social situation. In informal e-mails, students use a conversational style, with reduced and simplified word forms, symbols in the form of emoticons, and usually with a number of grammar and spelling mistakes (Baron 2002), e.g. *Tnx, Br, Hi*. Informal e-mails tend to be like journal entries (Chen 2006), direct and without adjectives and stylistic improvements. They may even enclose small talk prior to the request. On the other hand, formal e-mails are usually in the epistolary style, without reduced or simplified forms, no symbolism, and the minimum of mistakes (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006). In formal e-mails, there will be a number of stylistic improvements, such as adverbs and adjectives, hedges, relative clauses, and more formal vocabulary.

Even though one would expect formal e-mails to be written by students to their professors, this is not the case. The study will demonstrate that students are familiar with formal etiquette; however, a number of them will use more conversational opening or closing, or they will address the professor by their first name, and hence their e-mails become less formal. One of the reasons for altering these templates lies in the fact that in e-mails, students present their personal belief in their own value and equality, as well as their social entitlements to be treated equally and with respect.

Also, differences in templates are related to the alterations in high and low Power Distance dimensions. The educational system would like to be regarded as a high Power Distance system, where e-mails should be formal, and distance should be observed between students and teachers. This is the element of a cultural stylistic aspect that a number of professors are holding to. On the other hand, in classes, more and more professors are striving towards a low Power Distance, partly because it is the prevailing social norm and partly because they would like to communicate with students at the same level. Likewise, students today belong to “digital natives”,

(Prensky 2001), i.e. native speakers of the digital language in the digital world, which demands simplicity and directness rather than politeness and appropriate social norms. Following this situation, it would then be expected for students not to write formal e-mails. And then, one should not be upset if they receive e-mails without the expected etiquette. This issue will be regarded in more detail in the following sections.

4.2 E-mail openings and closings

As the most prominent elements of e-mail templates, openings and closings can also be differentiated as formal and informal. Barón and Ortega (2018) classified openings and closings according to the level of formality and familiarity in an English-speaking context into three categories: 1) familiar, which includes openings such as *'hi'* or *'hello'*; 2) formal, when the participants opened the e-mail with the formula *'Dear'* followed by the teacher's first name or surname; and 3) extremely formal, in cases that included openings such as *'Dear Sir'* or *'Dr'* plus the last name of the professor.

Regarding the link between high Power Distance cultures and the choice of a formal approach, one would expect e-mails with a preference for greetings like *Dear + Title/Honorific + Surname*, i.e. along the lines of formal business correspondence. Low Power Distance cultures, however, would probably feel freer to use informal greetings like *Hi + First Name*.

Observing this corpus, when Slovene students write in English, they prefer informal greetings, like *Hello* (8 instances) and *Hi* (11 instances), followed by *(title)+ first name*. It seems that low Power Distance from classes transfers to e-mails. There are only 28% of *Dear* greetings. When these students write in Slovene, they always begin with *Pozdravljeni* (Engl. *Greetings*, 16 examples) and no names and titles, which is a standard formal greeting in Slovene. The cultural difference is that Slovene does not emphasise the importance of listing a name at the beginning of an e-mail. The difference between formal greeting in Slovene and informal one in English may be attributed to the standard of writing e-mails in Slovene, without including personal beliefs in their own values in the former case and presenting one's beliefs and values with low Power Distance classroom situation in the latter.

In Serbian, 76% of students use some form of *Poštovani* (Engl. *Dear/Respectful*) for greetings. 12% uses *Dobar dan* (Engl. *Good afternoon*) or *Dobro večer* (Engl. *Good evening*) as a completely inappropriate form. Surprisingly, only 6% of e-mails opened using a first name, and no last names or titles in greetings were present

in e-mails in Serbian. There were only 2 instances of *Draga* (Engl. *Dear*). Hence, we can conclude that in writing, Serbian students do want to demonstrate their respect, though some of them use it wrong (*Poštovanje*, Engl. *Respect*). When writing in English, opposite from Slovene students, Serbian students begin with *Dear professor*, followed by a name or a surname, meaning that they tend to be formal or extremely formal. The reason may lie in their insecurity when writing in L2 to a higher rank person; also, living in a still high Power Distance society, they do feel appropriate to write formal e-mails and follow the template completely, which is different from Slovene students.

Similar to opening greetings, when ending e-mails in English, Slovene students use a variety of informal forms, some appropriate (*Kind regards*, *Best regards*, *Best wishes*) and some not appropriate and rather informal (*Have a fun weekend*, *Thanks*). There are only 4 examples of *Sincerely* as an extremely formal closing. Low Power Distance in English-speaking classes, together with their rapport, contributed to their belief that they are equal with their professors and that they can write to them same as they write to their peers. When students write in Slovene, most of them again finish with a formal expression *Lepo pozdravljeni* (Engl. *Good greetings*, 12 instances), though there are inappropriate informal examples like *Lp* (Engl. *Br*, 2 examples) or no closing at all (3 instances). The remaining closing is *Prijazen pozdrav* (Engl. *Nice greeting*), which is again formal. Even though the Power Distance index in Slovenia has fallen over the years, students still feel that a formal closing is the appropriate one in Slovene.

In closings in Serbian, students prefer *Srdačno/Srdačan pozdrav* (Engl. *Respectfully/With respect*, 12 instances), which is again formal (as in high Power Distance situations), or *S poštovanjem* (Engl. *With respect*, 10 instances). This demonstrates the similarity between Serbian and Slovene students when they write in their mother tongue, disregarding the Power Distance element present in their societies, and following the inherited hierarchy and expressions. There are several instances of using *Pozdrav* (Engl. *Greetings*), which is an informal option. And, surprisingly, the students just thank the professor without the appropriate closing (*Hvala unapred*, Engl. *Thanks in advance* – 7 instances), which has to be explained as the lack of knowledge on e-mail etiquette.

In e-mails by Serbian students in English, there were 5 examples of *Best regards* and one example of *Sincerely* (and one e-mail closing with *Best regards sincerely*). Again, their closing is formal, and not extremely formal, following the formal template together with the formal opening.

The findings related to e-mails in mother tongue coincide with those by a number of research studies (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011; Félix-Brasdefer 2012), suggesting that direct and formal options are more common than the informal ones. This is also the case for Serbian students when they write in English, believing that their professors are higher in rank and thus entitled to be treated with respect. However, following the low Power Distance ranking in the classroom and the familiarity with the teacher and the language, Slovene students do not pursue the same pattern and prefer informal salutations.

4.3 Expressions of politeness and directness in e-mails

Although much has been said about the (lack of) politeness in electronic communication (Biesenbach-Lucas 2006; Blum-Kulka 1987; Brown & Levinson 1987; Chen 2006), the data demonstrate the importance of the social and interpersonal level of communication, as well as students' facework in addressing their teacher. A lack of politeness may be associated with the use of direct strategies such as imperatives, with the presence of intensifiers (e.g. *asap*, *right now*), or with aggravating moves like criticism or emphasis on urgency (Blum-Kulka 1987). Conversely, the use of indirect strategies is related to politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987), as well as a number of syntactic and lexical modifiers that soften the impact of requests. However, when the students use hints as an indirect strategy, it can be considered as impolite due to the fact it lacks pragmatic clarity (Blum-Kulka 1987: 144).

In students' requests present in this corpus, it can be generally observed that a number of students do not write very polite e-mails, though they are probably not aware of the fact. In other words, students, both from Slovenia and from Serbia, tend to use direct requests (e.g. *I will not be able to attend classes*, *Zanima me koliko sem pisala izpit* (Engl. *I am interested how I did the exam*), *Da li mora lično da se dolazi na upis ocene* (Engl. *Does one have to personally come for grade entry*)), without lexical items to soften their requests. They believe that the use of *please* and *hvala* (Engl. *Thank you*) is enough for expressing politeness, so they use the former with direct requests and the latter instead of or just before closing. They also believe that honesty is equal to being polite in e-mails to professors (e.g. *Unfortunately, i was in a bit of hurry yesterday*, *Ali iskreno skroz sam zaboravila na prezentaciju* (Engl. *But honestly I completely forgot about the presentation*)).

These informal and direct requests are in contrast with formal salutations that students write in their e-mails. Students are probably not aware of the difference in tone. On the other hand, professors tend to read this as students' impoliteness

(Economidou-Kogetsidis 2016). Nonetheless, living in a low(er) Power Distance society in a digital world, these digital natives write the only language they are accustomed to and this cannot be held against them. The educational system should recognise the alteration present and reduce the expectation level regarding the formality and politeness in e-mails. The informality present in e-mails in English written by Slovene students is the future and should be accepted as such.

Politeness in e-mails in this corpus is expressed through modal verbs (e.g. *Can you please send me*, *Da li možete da mi izadete u susret* (Engl. *Can you help me out*), *I would appreciate*), and with polite phrases (e.g. *Looking forward to receiving your feedback*, *Lepo bi vas prosila* (Engl. *I would kindly like to ask you*), *Izvinjavam se na uznemiravanju, najprej bi se vam rada zahvalila* (Engl. *I am sorry for disturbing you, firstly I would like to thank you*)), though these are not so often to be found. Therefore, this can lead to the conclusion that students, both Serbian and Slovene, highly value themselves, and thus do not utilise many linguistic presentations of politeness; they believe they are entitled to the information asked, and again they are less polite and more direct in demanding it. They also treat teachers as equals, so they ask the question explicitly and directly. This is directly related to lower Power Distance society rules they are living in, not so evident in openings, yet present in their requests.

4.4 Lexical modifiers in e-mails

As already mentioned, one of the possibilities to analyse politeness devices is the analysis of lexical modifiers used in e-mails. This study will focus on the use of downtoners, upstaters and hedges as the most common lexical items (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

Downtoners are degree adverbs, such as *slightly*, *somewhat*, *less*, *rather*, *quite*, *almost*, *nearly*, *a kind of*, *possibly*, *perhaps*, *maybe*, that decrease the effect of a modified item. Their use should be attributed to the indirectness in students' requests. However, students are not aware of the possibilities of using downtoners. There were 12 instances of downtoners in the corpus. It includes the use of *some* several times (*I have some problems*), *maybe* (*Do you maybe have answers*), *malce* (*Imela sem malce nesreče*, Engl. *tiny – I had a tiny accident*), *sitan* (*Imam jedan sitan problem*, Engl. *slight – I have a slight problem*). The lack of downtoners coincides with the results by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007); apart from the indirectness in students' requests, the lack of willingness for modification can also be attributed to students' rapport, i.e. their belief that they do not have to soften their requests.

The number of upstaters is even smaller. Upstaters are words that emphasise another word or phrase, such as *very, really, for sure*. There was not a single upstater in e-mails written by Serbian students, and only 3 instances in e-mails by Slovene students (*ki sem jo sestavila po svojih najboljših močeh* (Engl. *which I put together to the best of my ability*), *For sure i will include more explanation in my next writings*). The reason for not using upstaters may be the directness of e-mails, which they believe to be clear enough, without additional intensification. The reason may also be in the management of sociality rights and obligations, i.e. in students' beliefs that they are entitled to send the request and receive the answer, so there is no need for intensifying it.

The situation is the same with hedging. Hedging implies the use of less direct language to make one's views more measured, cautious, and tentative. The authors can use them to make an argument rather than simply present facts, with the aim of avoiding claims that appear too strong. Although hedging is quite common in academic writing, students do not use it. As already stated, students are accustomed to directness, and they do not feel the need to be cautious about their words. The only hedging used in e-mails is *maybe/možnost/možda*, which can be found in only 4 e-mails, and only one of these written by Serbian students (*Da li Vas možda mogu naći pre četvrtka na fakultetu*, Engl. *Can I maybe find you before Thursday at the faculty*). Slovene students used the sentences such as *Do you maybe have answers* or *Zanima me je možnost pridet kaj prej ali kateri drugi dan* (Engl. *I am interested if maybe I can come sooner or some other day*). And again, rapport management can explain students' own beliefs and entitlements which are expressed directly and without any hesitation, while the lower Power Distance index could explain the feeling of equality that students have and that does not require any form of softening one's words.

Finally, in e-mails written by Slovene students, there is an evident presence of the word *please*. This lexical item is very often used by non-native speakers to support their polite claims and requests (Biesenbach-Lucas 2004, Sabater et al. 2008), though Slovene students used it recurrently in this corpus. Hence, the following statements are common in e-mails by Slovene students: *Can you please send me, Would you please inform me, Lepo bih vas prosila* (Engl. *I would kindly ask you*), *Prosim vas za potrpljenje in razumevanje* (Engl. *I would like to ask you for patience and understanding*). In e-mails by Serbian students, interestingly, *please* is not immensely popular, with just a few instances; rather, Serbian students prefer to use the verb *moći* (e.g. *da li možete da mi izadete u susret, da li bi vas mogao zamoliti* – Engl. *can, can you help me out, can I ask you*) to express politeness. This concurs with other research on the topic

(Biesenbach-Lucas 2007; Blum-Kulka & Levenston 1987; Lam 2014). Since this is a common feature of non-native speakers, one should not focus on this lexical item when explaining e-mail etiquette in classes. Nonetheless, e-mail templates should be modified and adopted to digital natives, their directness strategies, and their rapport.

5. Conclusion

E-mail has established itself as a dominant channel of student-professor interaction. Despite its importance as a communication tool with prescribed formal templates, its discursive practice has to be revisited and the templates modified. Changes in communication are interwoven with social and linguistic changes, and some of these are not (yet) well accepted by academic staff, thus regarding students' e-mails as impolite or disrespectful. In their defence, students belong to new and different generations, and instead of blaming them for the lack of etiquette, they should be offered new templates and modified linguistic styles, or in-class training sessions to enhance their ability to write effective e-mails to professors.

The present study is an attempt to answer two research questions. The first question was related to cultural dimensions and the alterations in Power Distance index in Serbia and Slovenia. Following the transition from high to low Power Distance society, Slovenia has also undergone the transition in the use of language, which is especially evident when Slovene students write in English. English is a common language in their digital world that is highly direct and simplified in expressions used; it is also the language of informal, communicative, and friendly instructions in classrooms. Hence, it seems that e-mail correspondence has embraced these changes and accepted indirectness and informality as new standards. It is evident in students' salutations, as well as in their requests. On the other hand, Serbia now has lower Power Distance index than it was twenty years ago, and the influence of digital world and digital language has altered the way these students write their e-mails as well. These alterations can be observed in students' requests; however, formality is still present in salutations. When addressing their professors, Serbian students still have the feeling of inequality and hierarchy that has to be acknowledged. When writing in their mother tongue, students still follow the inherited hierarchy and address their professors formally in salutation. This style is in discrepancy with their direct requests and the lack of lexical items for softening their demands; yet their cultural dimension is still not modified. One can assume that the future, digital world, and global changes will bring lower Power Distance norms and that, in time, students' e-mails will become more friendly and

conversational, where teachers will be addressed as equals. In this respect, e-mail templates need modification.

The second research question was related to the transition from formal to informal e-mails concerning templates, formality, politeness, and directness. The study has demonstrated that formal openings are still a standard in most e-mails. Students are familiar with formal salutations, they respect their professors and would like to demonstrate that, and they accept the hierarchically determined position they have. However, the formality and politeness are reduced in the body of e-mails, in students' requests. Abbreviations, contracted forms, and emoticons will undoubtedly move from texting and tweeting to emailing, and new generations, those digital natives, will make a transition into informality. In that respect, it would probably be beneficial for both teachers and students to consider and present less formal e-mail templates that students could follow instead of reinventing their own templates.

Perhaps the best example of merger between formality and informality in e-mails can be observed in the following extract from an e-mail written by a Slovene student to the professor: *So I respectfully decline your offer and I hope you won't be mad. PS I think you're one of the best professors I've ever had.* Using formal vocabulary to reject professor's suggestion, using colloquial expression to prevent the professor's disappointment, and using praise with grammatical contractions is the merge of styles already present in students' e-mails. Thus, studies like this one could be utilised to arrange this field of academic writing.

In the end, this pilot study serves as a guideline that has to be researched in a more detailed study with a much larger corpus. The indications of a change in style are present, and a larger corpus would have to prove how common these modifications are, as well as what recommendations should courses on academic writing embrace and what cultural stylistic phrases students have to be taught.

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Vesna Ž. Bogdanović
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu
Fakultet tehničkih nauka

Alenka J. Tratnik
Univerzitet u Mariboru
Fakultet organizacionih nauka

Dragana M. Gak
Univerzitet u Novom Sadu
Fakultet tehničkih nauka

UTICAJ KULTURE I KULTURNIH DIMENZIJA NA STUDENTSKU PREPISKU PUTEM IMEJLOVA – PILOT- ISTRAŽIVANJE

Rezime

U savremenom društvu imejl prepiska između nastavnika i studenata uobičajena je i prilično česta. Onlajn komunikacija pruža studentima mogućnost da direktno pišu svojim profesorima. Neki studenti poštuju pravila pisanja imejllova i formalnog stila, dok drugi pišu i postavljaju pitanja u stilu koji podseća na govorni, a ne na pisani akademski jezik. Čitajući njihove imejllove, nastavnici su redovno iznenađeni nivoom znanja, neznanjem i ličnim uverenjima (tzv. „upravljanje odnosima“, termin koji je uvela Spenser-Outi (Spencer-Oatey 2000)) koje studenti pokazuju dok pišu imejllove svojim nastavnicima. Profesori poslovnog engleskog jezika su još više iznenađeni jer uče svoje studente tipičnim i uobičajenim oblicima profesionalne korespon-

dencije između dve zainteresovane strane. Cilj rada je pokušaj da se odgovori na pitanje utiču li kultura i kulturne dimenzije (definisano Hofstedovom (Hofstede 2001) dimenzijom visoke i niske distance moći) na profesionalnu korespondenciju između nastavnika i studenata, kako u pogledu predložaka, tako i jezika (maternjeg ili engleskog). Korpus imejllova sadrži 100 imejllova, 50 koje su slovenački studenti napisali na engleskom ili slovenačkom i 50 imejllova koje su srpski studenti napisali na srpskom ili engleskom jeziku. Istraživanje pokazuje njihov izbor imejl predložka, izbor jezika (maternji jezik ili jezik instrukcija) i izbor normi koje se odnose na učtivost i distancu moći, sa fokusom na pozdrave, formalnost, učtive izraze i direktnost. Rezultati će ponuditi poređenje struktura imejllova studenata i nastavnika na različitim jezicima – videće se da slovenački studenti prate nove kulturološke standarde i pišu neformalne imejllove uz indirektno obraćanje, dok srpski studenti nastavljaju da koriste formalne oblike obraćanja u imejllovima uz i dalje nemodifikovane kulturne dimenzije.

► **Ključne reči:** poslovna prepiska na engleskom jeziku, kulturne dimenzije, imejl uvodi, studentski imejllovi, distanca moći.

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