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GENERIC STRUCTURE OF E-MAILS FOR MARINE ENGINEERS

Introduction

Most of the communication in the maritime sector occurs between speakers of different mother tongues for whom English is the language of communication. Due to this fact International Maritime Organization (IMO) made English the official language of the sea in 1995. Tenkner (2000, 7) claims that 'the English language which, being used as a device for communication within the international maritime community, contributes to the safety of navigation and the facilitation of the seaborne trade'. Thus, thousands of seafarers have intensive courses in Maritime English before going to sea in order to use English as a lingua franca appropriately. In Maritime e-mails, English is used as a 'contact' language since interlocutors do not have the same first languages. Most of maritime communication occurs via an electronic mail, being a type of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is replacing traditional spoken and written discourse and gradually becoming one of the most widely used medium of communication. According to Huang, Watson and Wei (1998), e-mails can convey 'rich' information since while interpreting an e-mail message, interlocutors apply both their own knowledge of the issue and the relationships involved. Due to being asynchronous, e-mail is widely used (Herring 1996), i. e. e-mail users do not need to be on line simultaneously since e-mail can be written, sent and read at any time that is convenient for both parties (Frehner 2008), in addition, no geographic limitations are imposed.

Despite the growing inclination towards the use of e-mails, systematic studies of e-mail communication motivated by professional communicative purposes at sea do not seem to be conducted. Therefore, the present research seeks to determine generic structure of maritime electronic mails in a specialized corpus written by chief engineers to a charterer and a technical manager.

Theoretical background

One of the most important inventions is an electronic mail, having a profound effect on people's lives. The nature of an e-mail in comparison

with spoken and written language is almost impossible to define, as the e-mail tends to fall into the domain of a flexible genre where the language of the e-mail does not belong to either written or spoken discourse (Yates 1996; Crystal 2006; Gimenez 2000; Merchant 2003). However, belonging to an asynchronous mode, the e-mail is similar to written discourse, as the text is written down, and possibilities for editing exist (Herring 2001). Electronic mail exchanges, on the one hand, are faster than written exchanges, but on the other hand, they are much slower than spoken exchanges (Baron 2000; Herring 2001; Crystal 2006). Koester (2010) points out that e-mail users try to imitate spoken conversational style in order to sound friendly, relaxed, and willing to communicate. However, e-mail has been considered not as personal as face-to-face communication since it lacks communication facilitators such as body language, intonation and social presence .

Koester (2010, 34) says that "Over the last decade or so, e-mail has emerged as an important – or perhaps even the most important – means of communication in the workplace". Likewise, Jensen (2009) has proved that despite the common theory that e-mail is an informal transaction medium, e-mail can be employed to obtain interaction goals resulting in long-term business relationships where English is used as a lingua franca.

Recently, many researchers (Baron 2006; Al-Ali and Sahawneh 2008; Cheung 2009; Mehrpour and Mehrzad 2013) have analyzed the generic structure of e-mail messages drawing on Swales' (1990) and Bhatia's (1993) notion of genre. Genre analysis was introduced by Swales (1990, 58) as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purpose". According to Swales, (1990) each genre is comprised of certain functional components or 'moves' – "a discoursal and rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (Swales 2004, 228), and if necessary a move can be subdivided into several 'steps'. Both moves and steps may be optional, embedded in others, repeated, and have constraints on the sequence in which they generally occur (Hyland 2004). According to Hyland (2004, 5), genre proponents declare that when people write something, they do it "to achieve some purpose: writing is a way of getting things done". In other words, people adhere to specific social conventions which provide steps for constructing messages; a certain group of texts share similar features, and these features are dependent on social contexts in which texts are composed (Hyland 2004).

Methods

The data for this case study were collected from one Norwegian maritime company. The obtained data comprise a genre-specific corpus of

the electronic written language of non-native English speaking chief engineers. Specifically, the data consist of maritime e-mails from colleagues on professional topics. There were a total of 127 e-mails, with a sample of 10274 words. The e-mails were collected during a four-month period from 12 October 2014 to 7 January 2015.

The social characteristics of the interlocutors are as follows: age – from 32 to 45; gender – all males; education background – university degree in maritime engineering; English proficiency level – tested by the Marlins English Test, ranged from 73 to 94 percent (intermediate – upper-intermediate). A mixed method approach was used in this study, in particular, qualitative and quantitative, aimed to examine the corpus from both the functional and rhetorical levels.

Results and discussion

In the present research Swales' (1990) concept of genre analysis formed the framework for examining the corpus and the main communicative purpose played the role in the division of this genre into compulsory and optional moves and steps. In order to identify the distribution of moves and steps, Santos (2002) model for business letters of negotiation was applicable to maritime e-mails, with some modifications. Thus, while performing the analysis, if some elements were recognized which were not found in Santos model, these elements were added to the scheme. The choice in favour of Santos model has been made as both the corpus of this study and the one of Santos share similar discourse community and communicative purpose. Therefore, the move analysis of the corpus of maritime e-mails identifies five moves, namely,

- Move 1 – Establishing the negotiation chain;
- Move 2 – Establishing the territory;
- Move 3 – Providing information/ answers;
- Move 4 – Requesting information/ action;
- Move 5 – Ending.

The mentioned five main moves characterize rhetorical and functional features of maritime e-mails that reveal how interlocutors use the language in order to achieve their goals within a text (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen 1998). Table 1 shows the recurrent generic structure of maritime e-mails produced by chief engineers.

Table 1 **The generic structure of maritime e-mails**

Move 1
Establishing the negotiation chain
<u>Steps</u>
    1) Defining participants
      - Sender-line
      - Recipient-line
      - Subject-line
      - Date-line

Move 2
Establishing the territory
<u>Steps</u>
    1) Opening
      - Addressing and greeting the addressee
      - Thanking the addressee
      - Apologizing
    2) Reference to previous mail

Move 3
Providing information/answers
<u>Steps</u>
    Information
      – Introducing and providing information
      – Continuing/adding
      – Agreeing /confirming information
    Advising about message
      – Along with e-mail (attachment)
      – Within e-mail
    Evaluating
      – Giving personal opinion/guidance
      – Making comments
      – Indicating plans/intentions
    Drawing attention to smth
    Applying pressure tactics

Move 4
Requesting information/action
<u>Steps</u>
    – Information
      – Requesting information/ clarifying/ explaining
      – Asking for ideas/opinion/future actions
      – Confirming information
    – Evaluating
      – Giving personal opinion/guidance
      – Making comments
      – Indicating plans/intentions
    – Drawing attention to smth
    – Applying pressure tactics

Move 5 Ending <u>Steps</u>   1. Encouraging further contact

> 2. Note and PS-line
> 3. Closing
>   – Signing –off
>   – Signature-line
>   – Job status in the company
>   – Ship name

For the analysis, the author of the present research decided to concentrate on the identified moves and related steps in detail.

Move 1 – Establishing the negotiation chain

The genre analysis of Move 1 offers one obligatory step: <u>Defining participants.</u> While being assigned the header position in e-mails, Move 1 constitutes the negotiation chain and presents the communication scene (Santos 2002). The step <u>Defining participants</u> incorporates four sub-steps: 1) sender-line (following TO:) to which address the message is sent; it is a mandatory sub-step; 2) recipient-line (following FROM:) from which address the message is sent, it is also mandatory and this line is filled automatically; 3) subject-line (following Subject:) this sub-step is elective and can be inserted manually; 4) date-line (following Date:) at what time and in which date the message is sent, the software performs automatically.

The language of the subject-line plays an important role in the addressor's decision-making over "what priority to assign to it or whether to open it at all" (Crystal 2006, 102). Thus, the subject-line in maritime e-mails is concise, lucid and concrete so the addressee understands the importance of an e-mail and is able to find it without any problem at a later date. Moreover, the sub-step subject-line facilitates the participants to follow the negotiation chain and at the same time it provides the sequence of a message exchange. Consequently, in the analyzed corpus, 127 occurrences of the first move were found.

Move 2 – Establishing the territory

Move 2 consists of two steps: <u>Opening</u> and <u>Reference to previous mail</u>. The step Opening is divided into three sub-steps, i. e. Addressing and greeting the addressee, Thanking the addressee and Apologizing. Step 1 <u>Opening</u> performs the function of greeting and it is considered to be both compulsory and optional. However, according to different studies, the majority of e-mails contain an introductory greeting ranging from most formal (e.g. Dear Mr. Brown) to most informal (e.g. Hi or Hello). In the present research greeting has various realizations such as: Recipient's name – 46%, greeting word only (e. g. good morning, good afternoon and good evening) – 21%,

Dear + name – 9%, greeting word + name (good evening, Mike) – 7%, Dear + name + greeting word (Dear Mike, good evening) – 6%, Hello + name – 5%, no greeting – 4%, Hello – 2%. Thus, maritime engineers in their communication prefer electronic messages only with recipient's name, that could be explained by a 'hybrid' nature of an e-mail, since it has the characteristics of both spoken and written discourse (Yates and Orlikowski 1992; Gimenez 2000; Koester 2010). Moreover, Crystal argues that the e-mail is "identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both" (2006, 47). The sub-step Apologizing contains the speech act of apologizing. The data revealed that most apologies were direct and usually realized by employing the lexical item 'sorry' along with an intensifying adverb. The following examples illustrate this: *Sorry for a slow reply. I am very sorry for proving the wrong data.*

It is noteworthy that the real content of a message is embodied in both Move 3 – Providing information/answers and Move 4 – Requesting information/action, in other words, these moves serve the communicative purpose (i. e., the exchange of information) that constructs the genre.

Move 3 – Providing information/answers

Following the title, this move is responsible for introducing information and answers to the interlocutors; the information and answers could be new or shared by both parties. This move is accomplished through two main steps: Information and Advising about message. The step Information has three important sub-steps: Introducing and providing information, Continuing/adding and Agreeing /confirming information. The following examples illustrate these sub-steps: Introducing and providing information – *We are planning to overhaul manual control valve. Please be noted that we did not receive the ordered spare parts*.; sub-step Continuing/adding – *To speed up the process we have sent a separate request form*.; sub-step Agreeing/confirming information – *OK, we will check mist detector and add oil. I agree it is worth doing.* Step 2 Advising about message has two realizations. In the first one, the attachment is along with the e-mail, for example, *Please find attached photo* (in this case, the picture of a photo is in the attachment). And in the second one, it is in the text of an e-mail, for example, *Could you please supply us with the following: ...* (the list of items is provided within the e-mail).

<u>Move 4 – Requesting information/action</u>

Move 4 is realized through one step: <u>Information</u> which is subdivided into three sub-steps: Requesting information/clarifying/explaining, Asking for ideas/ opinion/future actions and Confirming information.

Requesting information/action is a directive speech act move which is an essential part of the communicative purpose of this genre since the addressor expects the addressee to do something as a response, e. g. the chief engineer may ask a question, make a request, or issue an invitation. Thus, maritime engineers employ this move by asking professional questions, raise an issue or request for an action to be done. Requesting in maritime e-mails is carried out through interrogatives, imperatives or declaratives.

Interrogative sentences are supposed to have an auxiliary verb before a subject; however, the situation is different with maritime e-mails, since for chief engineers English is lingua franca and certain recurrent features which are believed to be mistakes from the point of view of the native speaker occur (Cogo and Dewey 2006; Koester 2010), such as an omission of an auxiliary verb in a question, for example, *How we can provide oil pre-heating?*

Furthermore, interrogative sentences may appear directly or together with modals, such as 'could' or 'would'. Usually the word 'please' appears in these sentences for the purpose of minimizing the impression of a request. For example, *Could you please provide us with the requested spare parts ASAP? Could you contact the maker for more information? When will the spare parts for auxiliary boiler be delivered? Would you please specify the date for the vetting inspection?*

Imperative sentences always contain the word 'please'. By using this word the addressor minimizes the impact of command, for example, *Please insure that correct type of anodes from correct makers are supplied. Please find the attached photo for reference. Please arrange delivery of air condition compressor in Singapore.*

<u>Steps common to both move 3 and move 4</u>

While Move 3 and Move 4 consisted of some steps which are unique to each move, there are three steps which are shared by both Move 3 and Move 4; as a result, they can come with either one of the two moves. These steps are as follows: <u>Evaluating</u>, <u>Drawing attention to something</u> and <u>Applying pressure tactics</u>. In these common steps for Move 3 and Move 4 participants give opinions, make comments, and indicate intentions. These features are realized by using the following lexical verbs such as 'feel', 'hope', 'be afraid' and 'believe', e. g., *I am afraid we are not going to finish by the arranged date. I hope it will be approved in the site office.* Furthermore, an important strategy

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found in these steps is flexibility. Flexibility is usually realized through if-clauses, for example, *If you carefully check performance tests, you will find that historical trend shows significant increase in exhaust gas temperature. If you agree, we will make it in AMOS.*

The step Evaluating reflects the addressor's intentions and opinions on the raised issue. This step was realized through three sub-steps: giving personal opinion/guidance, making comments and indicating plans/intentions. The following examples demonstrate this step: *Based on my previous experience with ABB turbochargers, such cleaning interval can provide good performance of ME TC between overhauls. It seems that valve seat grinding tool can be used for our auxiliary engines.*

Another common step Drawing attention to something is realized through a number of emphatic linguistic expressions, for example, *I DID check all connections, but found no problems. I FULLY agree with this plan. We DO wet cleaning of compressor and dry cleaning of turbine every day when ME is at full speed.*, or paralinguistic features, for example, capitalization (52%), emoticons (4%), three exclamation marks before a sentence (44%).

Finally, the last step Applying pressure tactics is used by chief engineers in order to force a counterpart to make an immediate decision or take an action, for instance, *Please arrange the requested delivery in Singapore, or there is no chance to pass the vetting inspection. This luboil is not for stock, it is for diesel power packs - must be replaced asap.*

Move 5 – Ending

Move 5 Ending is the last move in maritime e-mails and it signals the end of the message. According to Crystal (2006), the ending has two important functions: firstly, it acts as a boundary marker, indicating that further scrolling down is unnecessary, and secondly, it has an extended identity function, in other words, it identifies the sender to the recipient. Thus, in Move 5 the participants sign off, provide individual professional data, such as full name, rank status in the company, ship name. Like other moves, Move 5 is realized through special steps. In the step Encouraging further contact interlocutors encourage further communication by being persuasive, expressing appreciation towards the addressees (Bhatia 1993), for example, *Waiting for your reply. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thanks a lot for your kind assistance. Thank you for your fast reply.* PS-line can perform two functions in an e-mail: it can either act as last-minute information or it can be used to communicate any relevant information that needs special attention. The frequency of a PS-line in maritime e-mails is low, only 7 occurrences. The final step Closing consists of four sub-steps: Signing-off, Signature-line,

Job status in the company and Ship name. This step appeared in all 127 maritime e-mails. Signing-off sub-step is realized through complimentary phrases, such as Best regards – 56%, Brgds (an abbreviation from best regards) – 41%, Appreciated – 3%.

Conclusions

In the present research, maritime e-mail messages written by chief engineers to a charterer and a technical manager were analyzed. The results reveal that the generic structure of maritime e-mails employs a five-move structure to achieve the communicative purpose – 'providing and requesting information'. Move 1 and move 5 both provide necessary information about interlocutors. Move 5 carries out the function of farewell, utilizing standard phrases. Moreover, since moves establishing the negotiation chain and ending are automatically inserted in maritime e-mails, they operate as a frame for other moves. Move 2 performs the function of greeting and specifies the subject which motivated the exchange of e-mails. Furthermore, Moves 3 and 4 introduce new or shared information among interlocutors. The main content of the interaction appears in these two moves. Move providing information/answers and requesting information/action construct the 'core' of communication. In these moves the participants express their ideas, give opinions and ask for future actions.

Thus, the generic structure of the analyzed maritime e-mails discloses a unique genre being characteristic to a specific company that supports what Gimenez (2000) has stated that organizations have tendencies to evolve their own e-mail style, revealing companies' cultural differences.

Finally, the present study has concentrated only on the move schemata and steps realizing each move in maritime e-mails among chief engineers. Further research might explore the linguistic features, appearing in all moves of this specific maritime genre.

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KUĢU MEHĀNIĶU E-PASTU STRUKTŪRA
Kopsavilkums

Elektronisko pastu kā efektīvu un ātru saziņas veidu, kam netraucē ne ģeogrāfiskā atrašanās vieta, ne laika joslas, ļoti plaši izmanto jūrnieki. Kuģu mehāniķiem, kuriem angļu valoda ir starptautiskā saziņas valoda jūrā, nepieciešams uzlabot savas e-pasta prasmes, lai mazinātu pārpratumus sarakstē starp kuģi un krastu un nodrošinātu drošāku kuģošanu. Šī pētījuma mērķis ir veikt žanra analīzi īpašajā elektroniskā pasta korpusā, ko rakstījuši kuģu vecākie mehāniķi. Balstoties uz Sveilza (Swales (1990)), Bhatija (Bhatia (1993)) un Santosa (Santos (2002)) žanru analīzes koncepcijām, apvienojumā ar Gimeneza (Gimenez (2000)) un Jensenas (Jensen (2009)) elektronisko ziņojumu pētījumiem, šis pētījums sniedz a) ieskatu valodas lietojumā e-pasta komunikācijā starp kuģu mehāniķiem un b) piedāvā pagaidu modeli būtiskākajiem posmiem un soļiem jūrniecības e-pasta ziņojumos.