Business communication across three European cultures: A contrastive analysis of British, Spanish and Polish email writing

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Abstract

Today the most international written mode of communication within the business world is electronic correspondence. As the introductory section explains, diverse analyses of emails written in different cultures have been carried out revealing interesting differences and similarities in their discourse features and rhetorical strategies. However, a comparative examination of business emails from representative European cultures such as British (Northern Europe), Spanish (Southern Europe) and Polish (Eastern Europe) has not been undertaken so far. With this aim, a corpus of over 100 emails of response to business requests written in English by companies set up in these three cultures has been compiled and analysed. The main research targets are to observe the main parameters of variation across these cultures, the existent variation regarding the prototypical move structure and how register variation fluctuates depending on each culture. The results will indicate that across these cultures the move structure of this genre is more complex than current templates and existing published materials show. The study also demonstrates that, while there is a tendency to standardize email correspondence at a European level, there are certain parameters of variation that may help language learners and users to conform their messages depending on the recipient's culture.

Keywords: intercultural studies, corpus analysis, business communication, email writing, response to requests.

Resumen

Comunicación profesional en tres culturas europeas: un análisis contrastivo de correos electrónicos británicos, españoles y polacos

Actualmente el correo electrónico es el modo más internacional de comunicación escrita en el mundo de los negocios. Como el presente artículo

revisa, se han llevado a cabo diversos análisis de correspondencia electrónica escrita en diferentes culturas revelando interesantes similitudes y diferencias en sus rasgos discursivos y estrategias retóricas. Sin embargo, un examen comparativo de correos electrónicos procedentes de tres culturas europeas tan representativas como la británica (Europa del norte), la española (Europa del sur) y la polaca (Europa del este) no se ha realizado hasta el momento. Con este propósito, se ha analizado un corpus de más de 100 correos electrónicos de respuesta a solicitudes de información escritos en inglés por empresas establecidas en estas tres culturas. Los objetivos son detectar los principales parámetros de variación intercultural en este género, analizar su estructura actual y observar la fluctuación del registro profesional dependiendo de cada cultura. Los resultados reflejan que la estructura de este género empresarial es más compleja de lo que a menudo muestran las plantillas y estudios existentes. La investigación también demuestra que, si bien hay una tendencia a estandarizar la correspondencia electrónica en inglés dentro el ámbito europeo, existen ciertos parámetros de variación que pueden ayudar tanto a estudiantes como a usuarios a adecuar sus mensajes dependiendo de la cultura del destinatario.

Palabras clave: estudios interculturales, análisis de corpus, inglés empresarial, escritura de correos electrónicos, respuesta a solicitudes.

Introduction: International Business Communication (IBC) and Intercultural Business Discourse (IBD)

This study aims to identify the differences among three European business cultures in current business email writing, and more specifically in emails of response to business requests. The main research question formulated asked whether emails written by British, Poles and Spaniards in business contexts showed any variations, both at the level of structure and the register used. The existence of differences, related to the writer's culture, could point to the need to better adapt to the reader's cultural expectations and shed light on possible cultural misunderstandings.

The present study can be placed within the field of Intercultural Business Communication (IBC), a multidisciplinary area of research, nurtured by intercultural communication, business communication, social psychology, and discourse studies (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2007). The notion of culture has for long been a controversial issue in the field. Hofstede (1991: 260) referred to culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one culture

from another"; and, Gudykunst and Kim (1992: 13) defined culture as "'systems of knowledge' shared by a relatively large group of people". These general definitions were criticized for prioritising nationality and equating the concept of culture with country (Louhiala-Salminen, 1997; Jameson, 2007), and were found to be unhelpful in understanding intercultural issues in multinational business organizations. In response to this criticism, it was suggested that the self, identity, organizational roles, individual differences and business contexts should be considered in order to provide a more refined approach to the notion of culture (Poncini, 2002; Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2003). From this perspective, culture was referred to as a construct created through interaction in context (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 2003; Sackman & Phillips, 2004).

Varner's (2000) theory of IBC deals with communication among individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds in a business environment, and places an emphasis on business organization as an essential variable of the theory. The interaction of communication, culture and business in a specific business context creates a "transactional culture" (Bell, 1992: 452), which, for business people from different cultural backgrounds, serves as a communication framework that is acceptable for their cultures, organizations or governments. National culture, specific corporate culture, and the awareness of individual communicative styles are essential elements of IBC. Yan (1997) and Scollon and Scollon (2001) argued that it is individuals and not cultures that communicate with each other, even though a majority from a particular culture tends to share certain cultural characteristics (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). With reference to the European cultures, extreme cultural differences are difficult to find in today's European business world. However, certain degrees of variation among the main European business cultures have been reported to exist (Randlesome & Brierley, 1993; Mole, 2003).

Bargiela-Chiappini (2007) in her theoretical and methodological proposal of studying IBC from the perspective of Intercultural Business Discourse (IBD), points out that a strong language-centered approach to interculturality is necessary (Ehlich & Wagner, 1995; Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997; Gimenez, 2002; Poncini, 2004). In this context, IBD is "culturally-situated – and therefore context-dependent – discourse, where 'discourse' is social action shaping and being shaped by structure" (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2007: 34). The strong notion of discourse that is characteristic of

this approach to IBC allows for culture to be used as an interpretative tool, since it is viewed as practice embedded in verbal and non-verbal interaction. This perspective on discourse eliminates the dualism between language and culture, and language and society, and provides a link between micro and macro analyses.

Research on IBD has looked into intercultural issues in spoken (meetings and negotiations) and written discourse (letters and emails). Studies of verbal and non-verbal behavior in intercultural and intra-cultural face-to-face business meetings have dominated research in the field. The results of contrastive analyses of speakers of British English, Italian and Chinese were reported in Straub (1994), Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), Yeung (2003), Poncini (2002 & 2004), Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003), and Rogerson-Revell (2007). Research on intercultural negotiations has dealt with their strategic nature and the rapport between the participants when they are native and non-native speakers of English (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Vuorela, 2005). With regard to written communication, the genre variation in a cross-cultural study of the rhetorical strategies used in application letters by Flemish and US writers was described in Connor et al. (1997).

Email correspondence is considered as the pioneer of current Internet social networks and, in the past 20 years, it has developed into the most widespread and frequent means of business written communication (Danet, 2001; Yus, 2010), coexisting with other now "more traditional" means as Zhu (this volume) attests for particular cultures. Along with the new information technology innovations, this medium has undergone constant modifications in form and style: from formal and extended texts (Hawisher & Moran, 1993) to instant and short messages, similar to mobile texting formats (Baron, 2000). However, emails have their own discourse peculiarities regarding purpose, structure and writing process (Gains, 1999; Gimenez, 2000 & 2006; Crystal, 2002). Giménez-Moreno (2011a) examined register variation (RV) in British business emails and detected that the senders' conventional and intentional roles influence an email register causing internal oscillations between different registers within the same email.

The use of English as a lingua franca in email communication between writers from different cultural backgrounds has been approached by a few scholars – in this volume, for instance, Carrió-Pastor and Muñiz-Calderón address the variation of English business emails from India and China. Nickerson (2002) analyzed electronic communication in English between

Dutch and British in one division of a Dutch-owned multinational company. The results showed that the use of English email was strongly embedded in the organizational practices of the company, where the majority of managers and employees were Dutch-speaking. The selection of English versus Dutch was related to the communicative purpose of a given transmission: English was used to produce official reports on the organizational practice, even though all participants in the communicative exchanges were Dutch-speaking. A few differences in the discourse features and rhetorical strategies used by British and Dutch writers, such as a more frequent use of upgraders, emphatics and the pronoun "we" in the Dutch emails, and a more frequent use of "if" clauses in the British emails, were interpreted as culturally-motivated variations. Many more similarities were identified in the study, which suggests the existence of a typified corporate discourse regardless of the national culture of the writer.

Gimenez (2002) investigated culturally bound decisions in choosing email or fax between an Argentinean subsidiary and its European head office. The study shows that the communication conflicts in multinational business contexts do not arise from language misunderstandings in using English as the corporate language, but are often caused by the global corporate identity imposed by the head office and the socially constructed identity of the local subsidiary. Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005) studied the use of English as a lingua franca in email exchanges and in meetings between Swedish and Finnish members of a merged Swedish-Finnish company. Many similarities were identified in the use of the same discourse characteristics in spoken and written discourse samples examined. With reference to email communication, the study shows similarities in the use of the message format (salutations), its content and the use of three email genres (dialogue genre, postman genre and notice board genre) between Swedish and Finnish employees. However, the requests written by Finns were more direct, used imperative and interrogative forms more often than those sent by Swedes. In addition, Finnish requests included minimalist politeness expressions, while the Swedish used more deferential strategies.

As can be seen, the research on business email exchanges from the perspective of IBC and IBD still leaves many questions unanswered, specially with reference to the intercultural communication in Europe, which indeed can be considered as multicultural, given its geographical, political and linguistic context. While business email communication is highly standardized in many of its aspects, the fine cultural differences in the

communication between writers from different European cultures may interfere in business practices and the fulfillment of business goals. The present study aims to provide data on culturally motivated RV in email exchanges between members of the British, Polish and Spanish cultures, using English as a lingua franca. No study of corpus-based RV related to these three different European cultures has been conducted to the best of our knowledge. The present research fills the existing gap and furthers the knowledge about RV in intercultural communication.

The genre of response to business requests/inquiries

In the past decades electronic mails have become the most popular means of written communication within the business world, however many specialists are emphasizing the importance of writing correct emails, following adequate etiquette rules to avoid damaging professional image and liability risk (Danet, 2001). The idea of "correction" is a relative concept which in this case will mainly depend on the structural and textual peculiarities of this type of discourse (Baron, 2000) and also on other important functional and contextual parameters such as the adequacy of the communicative register used (Giménez-Moreno, 2006, 2011a & 2011b).

Structural and textual features

Within Genre Analysis, many genres related to business correspondence have been analysed in the last 20 years in order to help both customers and business workers to improve their communicative skills. Thanks to these studies, there are thousands of templates in the market providing support and hints to communicate correctly and effectively in the business world (Sandler & Keefe, 2008). Regarding requests and enquiries, specialists such as Zhu (1997) or Kong (1998) studied the move structure of request letters identifying the following main moves:

- acknowledging the suitability of the receiver's company;
- making the request;
- providing information about the sender's company;
- justifying the request;

- stating conditions;

- indicating/requesting additional information; and

- concluding.

Request emails, as in the case of emails of complaint, have already been fully studied as they tend to concern both general and business customers/consumers and help to facilitate the interaction between both market ends (Giménez-Moreno, 2011). In this study we have preferred to concentrate on their correlating more neglected genres: responses to requests/enquiries. This genre, as it happens with apology emails (Schaefer, 2010), mainly concerns business writers and they are a priority in their training.

Most templates provided by specialists such as Sandler and Keefe (2008) or popular websites specifically designed for business users, such as <office.microsoft.com>, offer a series of indispensable moves and standard language formulas which should be included in conventional emails of response to requests, as outlined in Table 1:

	Essential moves	Language formulas
1	Thanking the customers for their interest	"Thank you for your request for …"
2	Providing requested information	"Enclosed you will find …"
3	Providing additional information	"We would also like to attach the following info …"
4	Close hoping for future business	"We look forward to receiving your order."

Table 1. Key moves in the genre of response to requests.

In the case of electronic correspondence these structural features have to be compatible with the requirements and tendencies imposed by the medium. As previous studies on email writing have already indicated, electronic correspondence has its own discourse peculiarities which affect the text's purpose, structure and writing process (Baron, 2000; Crystal, 2002). Emails operate on a multimodal medium: written, oral and also "pictorial", using emoticons and other visual techniques (Yus, 2010).

Since the main purpose of this medium is to save time and reduce work pressure, the more it fluctuates towards its spontaneous, unplanned and conversational side, the more "informal" features it incorporates:

- unconventional use of punctuation, capitalization and spelling;

- low conceptual density (with cleft-structures and use of existential "there");

- short or fragmented utterances/sentences;

- coordination rather than subordination;

- simple syntactic structures;

- adjacency pairs;

- rhetorical or phatic questions;

- elliptical and contracted forms, both conventional and unconventional abbreviations;

- idiosyncratic and colloquial word selection (such as, "hi folks"); and

- reliance on the immediate context with frequent use of reference propositions and demonstrative modifiers.

As Gains (1999) indicates, in email writing there is also a special awareness of the limits and subtleties of the medium. For example, in the case of response emails, depending on the specific purpose of the message, writers might take more time in replying (might have to wait for other companies' information), vary the length of their message (including diverse types of data), or follow diverse procedures before providing the required proposal or service (request specific details or submission of official forms).

Apart from these parameters of variation, the moves indicated in Table 1 will also have to be adapted to the variation imposed by the structural framework of this medium (that is, message headings, openings/greetings/salutation, closings, attachments, etc). For example, as Gains (1999) observed, the salutation and the close might oscillate from the conventional formula in formal emails ("Dear Mr. or Ms. + recipient's surname" and "(All the) best wishes/regards") to very casual options which include no greeting, just the recipient's name or other unconventional ways of addressing and saying goodbye to the recipient ("Hello" and "Cheers" and "Thank(s) (you)"). These elements of fluctuation will depend on the span of RV of a specific genre and will be to a higher or lesser extent influenced by the cultural parameters of the writers.

Register variation in electronic correspondence

As Pérez Sabater, Turney and Montero Fleta (2008) indicated, the analysis of computer mediated communication clearly reveals the progressive informalisation and heterogeneity of professional discourse. Early studies on email writing also emphasized the importance of what they tended to call "stylistic register" (Gains, 1999; Gimenez, 2000; Waldvogel, 2007). These works did not present a clear definition of register and they expressed this concept mixed with others (mainly with "style"); however, they agreed that there seems to be a regular, consistent and neutral form of communication in the business world characterized by a "semi-formal" co-operative tone of expression which follows linguistic principles, both in grammar and punctuation, "allied to what may be called standard written English" (Gains, 1999: 97). As Giménez-Moreno (2011a) observed, the main features of this professional neutral register are:

1. The predominant function is informative.

2. Tendency to use shorter sentences, bullet points and conventional abbreviations.

3. Open use of direct speech (direct questions) but expressed in formal language.

4. Use of modality, mitigation and hedging.

5. Explanations carefully avoiding colloquialisms or slang.

6. Avoidance of opinions, personal comments and subjective or emotive language.

In daily business life this register is sometimes raised, becoming more formal and detached for certain purposes (for instance, to mark the difference in status or seniority between the interlocutors), and at other times, this register relaxes, becoming more casual and informal (for instance, to persuade the recipient or to encourage him/her to do something). This fluctuation has led some researchers to state that "the search of commonalities of stylistic register proved to be a problematic exercise, due to the extremely wide diversity of registers adopted by the writers" (Gains, 1999: 92).

From our perspective, registers are verbal repertoires which move up and down in our daily lives from their most intimate to their most formal versions mainly depending on two essential parameters: the communicative

context and the participants' roles (Giménez-Moreno, 2006). These roles affect communication depending on professional conventions (for instance, employer-employee relationship) and also on the participants' intentions (for instance, to become friends). It is therefore essential in RV to differentiate between conventional and intentional roles (Giménez-Moreno, 2011b). Context and role fluctuation allows us to distinguish at least two macro-registers in our private life: (1) a family one, used with relatives, and (2) an amicable one, used with friends. In correlation, at least two other macro-registers can be differentiated in our public life: (3) a social one, used with neighbours and other citizens in social open settings, and (4) a professional one, used with colleagues and other professionals in institutional and work settings (Giménez-Moreno, 2006). Each of these four main registers has at least three tones or frequencies: (1) a more relaxed, flexible or informal, (2) a neutral, conventional or standard, and (3) a more distant, rigid or formal. Most studies in RV include lexical and grammatical features which traditionally have been attached to both extremes of professional discourse (Biber, 1995; Halliday, 1980). The ten correlations in Table 2 summarise the most important linguistic features which vary in order to make professional communication more informal/casual (column A) or more formal/ritual (column B).

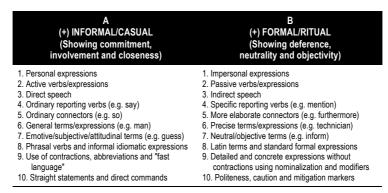| A (+) INFORMAL/CASUAL (Showing commitment, involvement and closeness)	B (+) FORMAL/RITUAL (Showing deference, neutrality and objectivity)
1. Personal expressions	1. Impersonal expressions
2. Active verbs/expressions	2. Passive verbs/expressions
3. Direct speech	3. Indirect speech
4. Ordinary reporting verbs (e.g. say)	4. Specific reporting verbs (e.g. mention)
5. Ordinary connectors (e.g. so)	5. More elaborate connectors (e.g. furthermore)
6. General terms/expressions (e.g. man)	6. Precise terms/expressions (e.g. technician)
7. Emotive/subjective/attitudinal terms (e.g. guess)	7. Neutral/objective terms (e.g. inform)
8. Phrasal verbs and informal idiomatic expressions	8. Latin terms and standard formal expressions
9. Use of contractions, abbreviations and "fast language"	9. Detailed and concrete expressions without contractions using nominalization and modifiers
10. Straight statements and direct commands	10. Politeness, caution and mitigation markers

Table 2. Ten linguistic parameters of RV in professional communication
(adapted from Giménez-Moreno, 2010: 302).

As a guiding principle, the type of register will not be ultimately determined by the type of linguistic features but by their proportion and combination. In this way, we find in current business email features which correspond to the professional formal register (formal and polite openings and endings, dry

purely informative texts, careful use of punctuation and paragraph structure, frequent appearance of modality and conventional lexical formula) together with features which are typical of the professional casual register (informal greetings and endings, conversational and colloquial strategies, relaxed syntax and punctuation, fast language and unconventional shortenings, implicit and explicit complicity strategies, humor and irony, casual terminology, informal phrasal verbs and idioms, etc).

In the process of these combinations one or two of the main registers act as a pole/s of reference for the text/discourse (professional register), but also other subsidiary registers (social register or amicable register) are often included. The social register is noticeable when writers include personal information about themselves and other colleagues, subjective/emotive expressions, social issues related to health, holidays, sports and leisure activities. The amicable register is perceptible when participants imply common previous history or provide compromising information showing spontaneous emotions, complicity and confidentiality, using peculiar terminology and abbreviations. This register works as an strategy to show or gain approval, and also to admit weaknesses, apologise, prepare the ground for rejection and keep face after some fault (Giménez-Moreno, 2011a).

Today's business email writers frequently use RV as a tool to facilitate communication and improve the relationship with their colleagues, adopting diverse professional and personal roles. The extent to which cultural parameters affect how these registers vary and these roles fluctuate is still unknown. In the following section we will propose a method to analyse how these parameters of variation behave depending on three different European cultures.

Methodology and analysis

With the aim of observing the fluctuation of business email writing across European cultures, three cultures of Northern, Eastern and Southern Europe have been chosen: English, Polish and Spanish respectively. The countries were selected from the macro-geographical regions established by the United Nations Statistics Division (revised on 28th November 2012) considering not only geographical but also commercial and cultural differences. The analysis targets are to observe:

(a) what the main parameters of variation across these cultures are;

(b) whether the prototypical move structure proposed by specialists was homogeneously used; and

(c) how RV fluctuated depending on each culture.

In order to compile a research corpus of emails of response to business requests we asked for the help of two native British business professionals who worked as collaborators in strict confidence and anonymously, called in this study Alison Brown and Jane Smith. Each of them played the role of a company's employee and wrote an email requesting a proposal for a business trip to a main European city with the aim of carrying out team bonding activities. Both emails contained the same information and followed this genre's move structure, as already mentioned in the "Structure and textual features" section, but one of them was written in professional casual/informal register and the other one in professional formal register (see main differentiating features in Table 2). These two emails, casual and formal, were sent to the department of enquiries of 150 travel agencies: 50 based in England, 50 based in Poland and 50 based in Spain. Table 3 summarises the number of replies:

Register		Spanish	Polish	British	Total
Casual/informal	No. companies	4	11	17	32
	No. messages	4	22	31	57
Formal	No. companies	7	6	7	20
	No. messages	10	13	21	44

Table 3. Informal and formal messages: number of companies and emails.

Results

As can be observed in Table 4, the number of answers and consecutive answers varies both with regard to the message formality, as well as the nationality. The first distinctive variable concerns the personalised unavailability messages sent by some receivers of our emails, called in this study "absence messages". What draws the attention is the lack of these messages in the Spanish corpus, which, together with the low number of Spanish emails received could indicate that replying to a message, even if a request cannot be fulfilled, is not customary in this culture. Similarly, Spanish

writers in this corpus tend to significantly delay their replies in more than 15 days, in comparison to British and Polish writers who normally reply within 15 days or less. Clear differences can also be observed in the use of the request acknowledgement and the subsequent promise to submit a proposal later. Interestingly, this business writing strategy was more frequent in the informal/casual corpus (see examples 1 and 2), and was especially often used by the British writers, followed by the Poles.

(1) I have some ideas to run by you. I'll get back as soon as possible with some suggestions. (British casual)

(2) See information below. We're working on the hotels now and will contact you soon. (Polish casual)

This strategy was used only once in the Spanish formal and informal corpus and this difference shows that building strong ties with customers tends to start with the first contact for British and Polish writers, but more frequently in informal contexts.

Broad parameters	Informal			Formal		
	British	Polish	Spanish	British	Polish	Spanish
No. of absence messages	3	2	0	4	2	0
No. of wrong email addresses	1	3	7	1	1	10
Time to answer (days)	1-5	1-20	15/+	1-15	1-15	15/+
Acknowledgement of the enquiry and promise to submit proposal later	15	8	1	0	2	0
Requirements to provide a proposal	12	11	4	6	2	7
Average no. of words per message	95.6	65.1	62	130.8	94.3	211.7
Proposal	10	9	0	7	2	5
Average no. of words per proposal	85.8	42	0	271	500	533

Table 4. Broad parameters of the messages in the informal and formal corpus.

Most of the messages in the corpus contained requirements to provide a proposal, however what was required differed for the writers representing the three cultures. While all enquired about destinations, dates and the type of room, the Poles were especially interested in the group members: their age, sex, education, profession and physical condition, and the British required details of the budget available.

Regarding the message length, the formal emails were clearly longer than the informal, with the Spanish emails being the longest (211.7 words on average)

and the Polish, the shortest (94.3 words on average). The informal messages differed in length as well: the British had the greatest extension (95.6 words), while the Polish and Spanish had a similar number of words on average. The proposals were submitted mostly by the British writers both in reply to the formal and informal messages. The proposal length varied too: those sent with the formal messages were significantly longer than the others, sent with the informal emails. The formal proposals varied from 271 words on average for the British writers and around 500 words for the Polish and Spanish writers. Interestingly, both the message and the proposal length seem to be influenced by the level of message formality. The Spanish writers produced the longest formal messages and proposals, while the British wrote the longest informal texts.

The data on the use of the structural moves in replies to requests in the corpora (see Table 5) show that on the whole the writers from the three cultures follow similar patterns of moves, incorporating additional moves to this genre basic structure (see Table 1). However, many slight differences can be observed and interpreted in terms of RV and cultural variation.

Move	Informal (%)			Formal (%)		
	British	Polish	Spanish	British	Polish	Spanish
Salutation	26	100	100	76	100	100
Thanking	60	55	50	53	20	40
Willingness	60	55	50	65	70	40
Requesting info	42	55	100	47	30	70
Requested info/materials	32	45	0	24	20	0
Additional info about request	28	25	0	35	0	50
Close	53	15	50	53	40	70
Ending	85	95	100	76	70	80
Signature	92	45	100	76	80	80
Complete info about co	53	60	75	53	60	70
Additional co/country info and links to other pages	14	15	0	24	20	0
Attachments	0	15	0	6	20	20

Table 5. Structural move variation in informal and formal messages: percentage of messages including structural moves.

The use of the salutation was less frequent for the British writers, both in the informal and formal messages, and was especially rare in the informal emails. The Polish and Spanish writers always started with a salutation in informal and formal contexts, with the former showing the greatest variety of phrases used in the formal messages: "Dear Jane", "Hi Jane", "Dear Madam" and "Dear Sirs". The phrases used for thanking for the enquiry were found in about 50% of the messages in corpus, regardless of the formality level and

the culture, except for the formal Polish messages, where only 20% used thanking expressions. Stating the willingness to help the customer with their enquiry was found in half of the formal and informal messages (examples 3 and 4), except for the Spanish formal emails, of which only 40% assured explicitly that the customer will receive assistance.

(3) We have received your letter enquiring about trip for 8-12 members of the management team. First Option will be glad to organize this event for you. (Polish formal)

(4) Thanks for getting in touch. I can certainly look into the options for you. (British informal)

The move of requesting more information about the enquiry (examples 5, 6 and 7) was used significantly more often in the Spanish emails, both formal (70%) and informal (100%), than in the rest of the British and Polish messages. A similar difference can be observed for the move of providing requested information or materials: none of the Spanish writers used this particular move. By contrast, a greater percentage of the Spanish writers included additional information about the enquiry in the formal corpus; while none of the Polish writers did so in the same formal corpus.

(5) Please kindly provide us with the information required in order for us to provide you with a quotation. (British formal)

(6) To make such an offer I need some more information. (Polish formal)

(7) I would be very grateful if you could give me some more information on the type of activity that you would like us to suggest. (Spanish formal)

The use of the close was similar in all of the messages examined, except for the informal Polish emails, where only 15% included closing phrases. Interestingly, endings and signatures were included slightly less often in the formal emails from the three cultures than in the informal ones. Most of the phrases used were: "Regards", "Kind regards", "Best regards", with a few cases of "Yours" or "Yours sincerely". The majority of the Spanish informal and formal emails included complete information about the company, while around half of the British and Polish emails did so. However, only the British and Polish writers inserted additional information about the company or the country, together with links to other websites.

The last variation can be observed in the use of attachments: some of the formal emails in the three cultures were sent with attached files, unlike the informal ones, which did not include attachments except for the Polish messages. Table 5 includes a number of variations in the use of structural moves, which can be detected between the writers from the three cultures, providing some hints on the level of message formality. Table 6 summarises more clearly how RV fluctuates in our corpus within the professional register, from its casual to its formal tone. This Table 6 indicates the percentage of messages where the distinctive features were identified and serve to draw some groundwork conclusions.

Register	Distinctive features	British %	Polish %	Spanish %
Casual/informal	Personal expressions	75	65	50
	Active verbs/expressions	17	35	---
	Direct speech/Direct questions	35	65	---
	Ordinary reporting verbs ("say")	---	---	---
	Ordinary connectors ("so", "but")	10	15	---
	General terms/expressions ("man")	39	45	25
	Emotive/subjective/attitudinal expressions	10	45	1
	Phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions	28	---	---
	Contractions, abbreviations and "fast language"	14	15	---
	Straight statements and direct commands	17	60	25
Formal	Impersonal expressions/"there is", "there are"	18	20	---
	Passive verbs/expressions	12	---	---
	Indirect speech/Indirect questions	18	30	40
	Specific reporting verbs ("mention")	12	---	---
	Elaborate connectors ("furthermore")	12	10	30
	Precise terms/expressions ("technician")	35	60	40
	Neutral/objective terms ("inform")	24	20	10
	Latin terms and standard formal expressions	47	60	70
	Detailed and concrete nominalization and modifiers, evaluative adjectives	29	30	30
	Politeness, caution and mitigation markers	47	50	60

Table 6. Percentage of messages including professional casual and formal register features.

With reference to the professional casual register, the highest ratio of language features appears in British emails, and the most characteristic features in this particular genre seem to be the use of personal expressions, direct questions, general terms and straight statements. This casual tone is more marked in the case of Polish emails where the presence of these four features increases significantly, together with emotive and subjective expressions (examples 8 and 9). To a lesser extent they are also marked in the Spanish emails.

(8) We have got a lot of nice hotels in Poland in big cities and far away from them. Don't worry we will offer something to suit you. (Polish casual)

(9) With pleasure we can prepare the offer for you. Any preferences regarding cities in Poland? I understand you would require accommodation in singles rather than in twins? (Polish casual)

The British corpus also offers a marked presence of most distinctive language features usually attached to the professional formal register. However, Polish writers tend to reinforce this tone by increasing the use of impersonal expressions, indirect questions and politeness/caution markers. This tone is especially marked by the frequent appearance of precise terms and standard formal formula (example 10). This tendency to adhere strictly to the standards regarding lexical formula, hedging and politeness markers shows its highest exponent in the Spanish emails (example 11).

(10) Since we haven't got typical tour packages, it will be a pleasure to prepare "Taylor suited" offer for you. (Polish formal)

(11) In addition I would be grateful if you could inform me if you want us to include meals and beverages in the total cost. (Spanish formal)

The results confirm the usefulness of these distinctive linguistic features (see Table 2) when analyzing RV in professional contexts, also their proportion illustrates how professional register fluctuates within this genre depending on each culture. In general terms, we see that the British use a lower but wider proportion of features from both ends, formal and informal; however, the Polish and the Spanish tend to use a more limited and hierarchical set of features, with stronger dependence on language formula and standards. This particular feature may be related to the fact that the Polish and Spanish employees use English as a foreign language.

In the three cultures there are instances of fluctuation towards the social and amicable registers as a strategy to approach and persuade the client. This shift is especially noticeable in Polish emails. For example, after making formal requirements such as "please, advise who recommended our company", a Polish company ends with a social sign up like "Have a good day". This fluctuation within the professional register and shift to other registers can also be illustrated through Polish email number 12 which starts with "Hi Alison", then moves to more formal terms ("Thank you for your enquiry") followed by a long list of neutral requirements. After this, the

writer relaxes the tone with subjective/empathic language ("I understand you would require …"), general colloquial terms ("If your boss is not coming …"), even becoming amicable ("So don't be afraid we will find suitable hotels"), raising the tone at the end with a formal ending ("Looking forward to hearing from you").

Conclusions

The present study provides evidence on variations in intercultural business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2007), understood as culturally situated and context-dependent social action. The emails written in English by British, Polish and Spanish company employees show significant variations. Despite a limited number of emails examined, the differences in the use of the register might be attributed to the writers' command of English, which was used as a native and as a foreign language. In case of the Polish and Spanish employees, we can also relate the variations detected to their native languages, and consequently to their culture, and possibly culture-dependent business practices.

In tune with previous studies on business genres (Nickerson, 2002; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005), and despite the variations attested, our research suggests that there exists a typified corporate discourse regardless of the national culture of the individual employee. This shared intercultural business discourse in the case of responses to business requests is clearly noticed in the use of broad parameters such as time to answer, requirements to provide a proposal, and the average number of words per proposal. Moreover, there are overall similarities in the move patterns used within this genre by writers from the three cultures.

Nevertheless, as Gudykunst and Kim (1992) predicted, the notion of national culture has worked as a system of knowledge, structural patterns, lexical formula, syntactical choices and register parameters, shared by groups of business people and which changes depending on their cultural environment. For instance, with reference to the move variation, British emails did not include the salutation as frequently as could be expected. By contrast, acknowledging the request and promising to submit the proposal later was very frequent for the British and Polish writers in comparison with the Spanish. However, in formal emails the latter tended to express the willingness to help the customer more explicitly and requested information

about the enquiry more frequently. Only British and Poles added details about the company or the country with links to other websites. Finally Spanish writers produced the longest formal messages and proposals and the British wrote the longest informal texts. Regarding RV, the British used a wider range of distinctive features in both formal and casual tones, in contrast with the Polish and the Spanish who chose a more limited and hierarchical stock of formulaic and standardised features, which might be related to the use of English as a foreign language. The three target cultures, and in particular the Poles, used the shift to other neighbouring registers, mainly the social and amicable, as a persuasive technique.

The study provides insights into the structural RV in emails written by business practitioners from three European business cultures. Possible misunderstandings resulting from the culturally-based differences might be avoided by raising awareness about how writers from different national and corporate cultures approach business communication tasks in their workplace. Especially, the Polish and Spanish writers who use English as a foreign language in business contexts should be more aware of a broader range of linguistic resources that the British use.

Acknowledgements

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